

MILLENARIAN RELIGION AND RADICAL POLITICS
IN BRITAIN 1815-1835:
A STUDY OF SOUTHCOTTIANS AFTER SOUTHCOTT

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By

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SHORT ABSTRACT

The popular millenarian movement founded by Joanna Southcott (1750-1814) enjoyed a complex relationship with political radicalism in early nineteenth-century Britain.

Southcott opposed radicalism during her lifetime, encouraging her followers to await a messianic agent of the millennium. Within two decades of the prophet's death – as Southcott expected to give birth to this messiah – some surviving Southcottians became political radicals, most notably, John 'Zion' Ward (1781-1837) and James Elishama Smith (1801-57). Ward was a popular preacher during the agitations around the Reform Bill, Smith a radical lecturer, editor of Robert Owen's journal *Crisis*, and ideologue within general trades unionism in 1833-34. The respective influence of each figure drew several hundred Southcottians into engagement with politics.

This thesis presents a new interpretation of why such millenarians engaged with radicalism. Utilising a substantial range of Southcottian and radical sources, many previously unstudied, it challenges the existing explanations of Southcottian radicalism of E.P. Thompson, J.F.C. Harrison, Barbara Taylor and others. Through a close study of the religious experience, ideas and practices of Southcottians in 1815-35, it locates an altered disposition towards social activity through the evolving millennial theologies of Southcottian groups and the personal acquaintanceship of individual believers with radical freethinkers. Under the prophetic leadership of Zion Ward and John Wroe (1782-1863), earlier Southcottian notions of the respective roles of divine and human agency in

the realising of the millennium were changed by 1830. This led Southcottians to a new sense of agency, where their own actions took on a millennial significance when directed towards the achievement of God's perceived intentions for the world. For some, this presented engagement with political radicalism, even freethought radicalism, in a new light: as action apposite to their beliefs.

This argument features an alternative theoretical framework for millenarian beliefs which takes account of the way conceptions of human agency can vary within religious movements centred on modern prophecy. In exposing the inadequacy of existing pre- and postmillennial categories to explain such beliefs, it demonstrates how visionary religion can inspire expectations of both disruptive and evolutionary change, and require both divine and human agency, in the realisation of the millennium.

This is a study in religious history, orientated towards politics. It demonstrates that a sensitivity to how visionary religious ideas influenced individuals involved in political movements, aids an improved understanding of political motivations and ideals.

LONG ABSTRACT

The popular millenarian movement founded by Joanna Southcott (1750-1814) enjoyed a complex relationship with political radicalism in early nineteenth-century Britain. Southcott opposed radicalism during her lifetime, encouraging her followers to await a messianic agent of the millennium. Within two decades of the prophet's death – as Southcott expected to give birth to this messiah – some surviving Southcottians had become political radicals, most notably, John 'Zion' Ward (1781-1837) and James Elishama Smith (1801-57). Ward was a popular preacher during the agitations around the 1831-32 Reform Bill, Smith a radical lecturer, editor of the utopian socialist Robert Owen's journal *Crisis*, and ideologue within general trades unionism in 1833-34. The respective influence of each figure drew several hundred Southcottians into engagement with politics.

This thesis presents a new interpretation of why such millenarians engaged with radicalism within a new history of the Southcottian movement from 1815 to 1835. It is a study in religious history, orientated towards politics. In its particularism, it demonstrates in a distinctive way how religious experience could shape political engagement, and how visionary religion could prompt alliances for realising political visions in early nineteenth-century Britain.

The research study for this thesis utilises a substantial range of original sources, including many which have not been used in any academic work before. The single most

important archive is that held by the Panacea Society of Bedford, a twentieth-century Southcottian society. This substantial private collection of original nineteenth-century manuscript and rare printed material contains new evidence of Southcottianism in the period concerned, while also offering the opportunity to re-interpret manuscript material in other, known collections – such as those in the British Library and University of Texas – cited in existing studies. Additional accounts and data relating to Southcottians are also gleaned from material in the National Archives and local public records. Much of the relationship between Southcottians and politics is further reconstructed from a wide selection of sources typically consulted by historians of radicalism, including Home Office spy reports, radical journals, and the private correspondence of individual radicals – most notably the Richard Carlile Papers at the Huntington Library, California.

The thesis is structured in three chronologically-defined Parts, each of three chapters, covering the periods 1815-20, 1820-30 and 1830-35. Part 1 records the condition, context and political concerns of Southcottianism in first five years after Southcott's death. Chapter 1 presents a new interpretation of the numerical state of Southcottianism in this period, its geographical scope, and the relative size, autonomy and gender ratios of surviving groups. Chapters 2 and 3 then challenge those existing historical arguments which present Southcottian millenarians as potentially sympathetic to radicalism in general. Such millenarians were not overwhelmingly poor, working people naturally predisposed to radicalism yet liable to temporary distraction by a religious solution to their ills, as E.P. Thompson argued. Nor did their occupation of the same social and cultural contexts as political radicals automatically align Southcottians' interests and objectives with radicalism, as Iain McCalman has alleged.

From Chapter 2's detailed social and occupational case-studies of Southcottians in the Pennine region in the 1815-20 period, it is confirmed that many Southcottians were indeed caught up in the dramatic developments of industrialism in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Yet while significant numbers are proven to be textile hand-workers, to the most detailed extent so far, others were also implicated in industrial change itself, investing their own capital in mechanised production or trading successfully in its products. As Chapter 2 further maintains, acceptance or denial of millenarian Southcottian beliefs was not dependent on wealth or poverty; individuals and families were drawn to the movement and remained convinced believers for considerable periods.

In the first five years after Southcott's death, when support for radicalism was especially strong, numbers of committed Southcottians remained relatively high – about 7000-8000, or two-thirds their peak in 1814 (existing estimates of tens of thousands of Southcottians are discounted here). Sources presented in Chapter 3 indicate surviving Southcottians' isolation from politics. Historians have jumped to the same conclusions as contemporaries, including the governing authorities, in mistaking millenarian excitement for radical sympathies. In the 1815-20 period, Chapter 3 further argues, Southcottian millenarians retained a form of millennial expectation similar to that held by their founding prophet: national events were viewed as fulfilments of prophecies of the coming end; believers continued to await an imminent physical messiah to make all things new.

An alternative interpretation of Southcottianism defining its 'radical' nature in broader terms, as expressive of a 'feminine radicalism' by which women challenged contemporary social and sexual hierarchies, is associated with the work of Barbara Taylor and Anna Clark. While this thesis accepts Taylor's interpretation of James

Smith's career after 1834 as a notable, individual link between Southcottianism and utopian socialist feminism, this study queries the evidence taken to suggest the Southcottian movement served as an earlier catalyst for the widening of women's 'moral jurisdiction' through its particular appeal to women, and so constituted an alternative radicalism of its time. As the discussion of gender ratios in Chapter 1 demonstrates, the existing evidential base for the numbers of women attracted to Southcottianism is flawed. When the ratio of men to women believers is re-examined, Southcottianism is shown to have had no greater appeal to women than most forms of orthodox evangelical religion; in many areas, its appeal to women was weaker.

This study as a whole contends that the radical dimension to Southcottian history does not necessitate a broadening of definitions of either what was 'radical' or what was 'political' in early nineteenth-century Britain. It considers 'radicalism' in predominantly its narrower, 'masculine' sense – meaning expressly male-dominated political organisations, radical journals, and the search for solutions to social problems framed, by-and-large, by men's priorities. In exploring an alternative side to the British radical political tradition – the route by which some Southcottians came to engage with such radicalism in the early 1830s – it identifies the ways in which religious ideas and experience could influence individuals to overt political engagement in conventional terms.

In its focus on individuals – especially Zion Ward and James Smith, though also followers that they induced to follow their radical lead – this thesis further engages with existing interpretations of Southcottian radicalism focussed on these figures. Ward's early 1830s radical links have been assumed to originate in an encounter with the

freethought literature of Richard Carlile (1790-1843) in the 1820s. William Oliver suggested these radical ideas were then merged with Ward's millenarian language, allowing this religious 'vocabulary of revolution' to remain a tool of communication of the English radical tradition in the early 1830s. In the case of Smith's work with Robert Owen, Oliver identified a shared 'mentality' of millennialism, as much as language. This consistency of expectation allowed Smith to secularise millennial concepts into socialist theory – Southcottianism became socialism. J.F.C. Harrison's interpretations of Smith's career have been more sensitive to the interaction between his religious ideas and Owenism, yet provide only vague explanations for Smith's choice of actions in the early 1830s, and the source of the new 'social consciousness' which led from millenarianism to secular socialism.

The central argument of this thesis is that the relationship between Southcottians and early 1830s radicalism was shaped not by mentalities, language or social consciousness, but by theological ideas. Changes in the millennial theologies of Southcottian groups led to alternative understandings of the relationship between human and divine agency in the realising of the millennium. A catalyst for the combining of new concepts of human agents of the millennium with political radicalism was provided by interactions between individual Southcottian believers with radical freethinkers, in particular locations, in a specific period, and not before 1830.

During the 1820s – the period covered in Part 2 of this thesis – sections of the increasingly fragmented Southcottian sect arrived at alternative understandings of how they should prepare for the millennium, the nature of the millennium itself, and the process of its realisation. As Chapter 4 narrates, many surviving congregations of

believers, who accepted the prophetic leadership of John Wroe (1782-1863), adopted religious customs with significant social implications. These practices centred on the keeping of the Mosaic Law of the Old Testament and the formation of a sizeable millenarian community in the Lancashire mill town of Ashton-under-Lyne. Both were intended to represent the conditions to be experienced in the millennium. In the late-1820s, a number of Southcottian groups unconnected to Wroe's body accepted the leadership of Zion (previously John) Ward, not as a prophet but as the Shiloh messiah they had expected since Southcott's lifetime. Chapter 5 considers how Ward's explanation of his messianic identity reshaped his followers' previous expectations about what the messiah would achieve, granting a new role to their activity in the arrival of the millennium itself. Chapter 6 traces the shifting pre-1830 millennial beliefs of James Smith, a convert to Wroe's Southcottianism in this period, and the significance of such shifts for his own particular preparations for the millennium.

Part 3 re-examines the radical careers of Southcottians between 1830 and 1835 in the light of these developments in Southcottian theology and practice. Chapter 7 reveals how, between the summers of 1830 and 1831, such developments combined with a series of personal encounters and experiences in specific social contexts to redirect dramatically the attitudes to radicalism – and especially freethought radicalism – of a number of Southcottians. In this period, Zion Ward recognised contemporary radical rhetoric as a convenient means of communication of his message, and came in turn to be recognised by freethought radicals as a figure to encourage. James Smith, while a resident of Ashton and participant in Wroe's gathered community, forged his own personal links with radicalism, corresponding with the freethought associates of the publisher Richard

Carlile, and leaving evidence of his acquaintance with prominent trade-unionists in Ashton. During 1831-32, Ward's own radical notoriety came as a direct result of promotion from Carlile. Yet, as Chapter 8 makes clear, Ward's subsequent directing of his adherents to promote causes associated with radicalism, before and during his imprisonment for blasphemy in 1832-34, reached beyond any shared rhetoric. This direction to his followers reflected a new understanding of how political radicalism itself could serve his messianic cause. This view centred on atheist radicals being essentially unconscious agents of God's redemptive work.

James Smith's own radical career as a London lecturer and Owenite editor in 1832-34 re-formulated Ward's views to include elements of beliefs drawn from his experience following Wroe. This was designed to show how religious millenarians such as Smith could be conscious agents of God's work. Chapter 9 argues that Smith's radical career, when understood in the theological terms within which he himself framed it, reveals a distinctive basis for the convergence of religious conviction and political action. Smith articulated a concept for how human action and divine action could relate in the making of the millennium.

Present within this entire study's argument is an alternative theoretical framework for millenarian beliefs which takes account of the way conceptions of human agency can vary within religious movements centred on modern prophecy. The existing pre- and postmillennial heuristic categories used to differentiate between millennial beliefs are commonly taken to distinguish millenarians' attitudes to agency: *premillennialists* are defined as those looking only to a divine agent to institute the millennium; *postmillennialists* possess a more optimistic view of human agency in the realisation of

the millennium. Yet, these categories negate any distinction between the epistemologies of millennial conviction – the bases of *knowing* that the millennium was approaching – either through interpreting the Bible or through direct revelation to a prophet. They therefore cannot account for the ways modern prophets and their claims to revelations could alter their followers’ conceptions of their own, human, agency, without altering their prospective timeline for the millennium. This they could do through declaring new dispensations, new interpretations of the Bible, and new practices among their followers. These could each redefine how the millennium was understood to commence, and the interrelating of human and divine activity in its realisation.

The alternative system of categorisation takes account of both the nature of the expected change to bring about the millennium, and the nature or basis of knowledge of the change itself. Attention to both these issues produces a double or multiple category definition of millennial belief, better suited to marking shifts between modes of thought and expectation by some millenarians, and the holding of disparate, even apparently contradictory beliefs by others. An individual millenarian’s attitude to human or divine agency could be shaped by any aspect of their beliefs measured in these categories – whether the change was expected to be ‘evolutionary’ or ‘disruptive’, or was known through ‘interpretative’ or ‘revelatory’ knowledge. In the permutations between beliefs, attitudes to agency are found to be apparent. In this way, the prophetic religion of Southcottianism is found to have inspired expectations of both disruptive and evolutionary change, and required both divine and human agency, in the realisation of the millennium. Through this, Southcottian millenarian visions came to play a part in the radical political culture of early 1830s Britain.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

An American historian once predicted a ‘history of the Southcottians would require a thorough exploration of provincial libraries and archives... in Yorkshire and the West Country’.¹ Unlike many prophecies featured in this thesis, it was true: significant aspects of this study were conducted in such locations. Yet, this prophecy also suffered a limitation in its view – never the error in the unfulfilled hopes of nineteenth-century millenarians. The single most important location for this history of Southcottians was southern: Albany Road, Bedford, the home of the Panacea Society. It is the archives of this private religious society, generously made available for academic research, which have shaped significant dimensions of this thesis. The archive was discovered by my supervisor, Dr Jane Shaw, and has been the subject of the Oxford University Prophecy Project, to which I have belonged. It is to the Panacea Society, its Trustees and the convenors of the Prophecy Project – Dr Shaw and Prof. Chris Rowland – that my first thanks must go: to the Society for its hospitality and interest in my research; to the Project for its generous funding of my research, support and encouragement.

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¹ Clarke Garrett, *Respectable Folly: Millenarians and the French Revolution in France and England* (Baltimore, 1975), p. 210.

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My final and deepest thank you goes to the person who has shared my life since before either of us had ever heard of Southcottians – Ruth. Few wives anticipate spending the first years of marriage being sent to sleep by explanations of millenarian theology, or dragged around the villages of long-dead weavers with a weird religion. Ruth did not; and yet her presence by my side has filled these years with joy. Returning home from the archive, leaving the computer, putting down that book, my eyes have turned to her, and seen, every time, ‘the evidence of the grace of God’.

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INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of 1815, Charles Bradley wanted to end his life. A wealthy Birmingham tobacco merchant, Bradley was not yet thirty, and married with two young children. Yet he contemplated suicide on learning of the death and burial of Joanna Southcott, the plebeian Devon woman who claimed to be a prophet of God. For years Bradley had suspected that he was living in the last days of evil, error and misery in the world, and that the millennium – the thousand years of harmony on earth predicted in the Book of Revelation – was close at hand. Since reading the prophecies of Southcott, widely published in England since 1801, Bradley had come to believe, like thousands of his contemporaries, that such suspicions were now confirmed in direct communications from God. The communications of Southcott's 'spiritual voice' consistently declared God's imminent intention to send a second messiah, to vanquish the power of Satan, fulfil the prophecies of the Bible, and institute the millennium. In March 1814, Southcott had published her most notorious revelation: that she herself, aged sixty-four and still a virgin, would give birth to a messiah called Shiloh. Since then, Bradley had awaited the outcome of her perceived pregnancy with growing excitement. In the first days of 1815, he received news of Southcott's death in London and confirmation that no Shiloh had appeared. In this moment, Bradley despaired of life continuing without hope of immediate divine help.

Retiring to his rooms above his shop in Digbeth, central Birmingham, and (he told a friend afterwards) 'afraid of putting an end to his own life', Bradley resolved to pray.¹

¹ Panacea Society (hereafter PS), PN 246/18, 6 Jan. 1815. For an explanation of manuscript archives and collections, see below, pp. 32-3, Chapter 1, p. 41 and Bibliography, p. 332.

Appealing to God, ‘that he loved him and his only desire was to know his will and obey it’, Bradley reached for his Bible. With this ‘in his hand’, he:

begged of the Lord, if there was a God in heaven, that he would give him a sign, and he protested before God that he would abide by it, the sign was that he would open the Bible, and whatever scripture his thumb was upon that should decide his fate.²

Bradley’s Bible fell open on the last page of the Gospel of Luke: ‘his thumb was upon these words, “But tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem until ye be endued with Power from on high”’.³ As Bradley read these words attributed to the resurrected Jesus, he believed them to be an answer from God, the sign he had requested.⁴ From this moment on, for the remaining thirty years of his life, Bradley continued a millenarian, convinced of God’s direct inspiration of prophets and the coming fulfilment of the prophecies of Joanna Southcott.⁵

Close to two decades after this experience, in September 1833, Charles Bradley welcomed an individual of strikingly different convictions into his Digbeth home – the radical publisher, Richard Carlile. Bradley further invited Carlile, the most notorious promoter of materialist freethought of the age, to address a congregation made up largely of fellow surviving Southcottians in their nearby chapel. Carlile spoke twice on ‘the politics of Thomas Paine’ and the Bible, and was received warmly.⁶ Republican political

² PS PN 246/18, 6 Jan. 1815.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Bradley was formerly a Methodist, and this particular spiritual exercise of bibliomancy or ‘Bible-dipping’ – the divination or seeking of God’s purposes for an individual by the random selection of Bible verses – was especially associated with early Methodism, not least with its founder. John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley Vol.19: Journal and Diaries II (1738-43)*, ed. W.R. Ward (Nashville, 1990), p. 38. The practice was known in the medieval and Reformation periods: Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (Harmondsworth, 1973), pp. 51-2, 139 and 254.

⁵ *Gentleman’s Magazine*, 24 (Aug. 1845), 212.

⁶ *Gauntlet*, 6 Oct. 1833, p. 546.

journals were also read aloud in the chapel service. This event was the culmination of numerous interactions Bradley had had with English radical politics in the early 1830s. Despite Southcott herself having explicitly opposed Paineite republicanism in the very prophecies by which he set such store, Bradley had recently corresponded with illegal radical journals, drawn up petitions for political prisoners, and joined calls for more radical reform during the passing of the Reform Bill in 1831-32.⁷ Such actions, such guests and such political opinions sat incongruously with the reputation of Bradley's religious convictions. Despite investing so heavily in the hope of divine intervention on earth, he now consorted with atheists and supported dramatic social change through political means.

What had happened to Charles Bradley's Southcottian beliefs to lead him to such radical sympathies? As Bradley remained a consistent believer in prophecy, inspiration and a divine millennium throughout his life, how did he find himself involved with political campaigns largely associated with secular and republican principles of the Enlightenment?

Historians and Southcottian radicalism

A number of influential histories of the past five decades have recognised a relationship between the early nineteenth-century Southcottian millenarian sect and radical political movements in early 1830s Britain. Ever since Edward Thompson sought 'to rescue ... the deluded follower of Joanna Southcott, from the enormous condescension of posterity', by

⁷ Joanna Southcott, *An Answer to Thomas Paine* (London, 1812); on Southcott's political opinions, see James Hopkins, *A Woman to Deliver Her People: Joanna Southcott and English Millenarianism in an Era of Revolution* (Austin, 1982), pp. 179-86.

including them within his narrative of the emergence of class-conscious politics in *The Making of the English Working Class*, the millenarian movement has retained some association with radicalism.⁸ Thompson linked the enthusiasm for Southcott's prophecies during the Napoleonic Wars to early 1830s radicalism both directly and indirectly: directly in the case of 'Zion' Ward, a noted 'inheritor of Joanna's mantle', who appeared in radical venues during the Reform Bill agitation; indirectly in the broader way that millennial expectancy in the Southcottian mould remained resonant in English plebeian culture, and came to express itself in class-conscious terms.⁹

Thompson wrote his history in a period when prominent scholars were linking millenarianism to revolutionary movements in the medieval and early modern European past.¹⁰ Thompson, however, considered Southcott's to be a markedly different form of millenarian religion. He argued Southcottianism was an 'inverted chiliasm' – the reverse of revolutionary millenarianism. Rather than encourage its followers to seek radical political change, in the manner of Civil War sects or some prophetic groups of the 1790s period, 'Southcottianism ... did not inspire men to effective social action, and scarcely engaged with the real world'.¹¹ In an influential phrase, Thompson further labelled Southcottianism, along with revivalist Methodism, a 'chiliasm of despair' – a religious position embraced only temporarily during periods when poverty-stricken workers' hopes

⁸ Edward Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, revised edn (Harmondsworth, 1968), p. 13.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 878-80.

¹⁰ The most influential works included: Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Messianism in Medieval and Reformation Europe and Its Bearing on Modern Totalitarian Movements* (London, 1957); Christopher Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution* (London, 1958); Eric Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Manchester, 1959); Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (London, 1960).

¹¹ Thompson, *Making*, p. 424.

of radical political change had faded.¹² In exciting its adherents with an expectation that God would send a messiah – the ‘Shiloh’ – its popularity oscillated with that of ‘political messianism’.¹³

Despite this original apolitical emphasis, Thompson noted the Southcottianism of the early 1830s figure of Zion Ward, who ‘directed his messianic appeal towards the dynamic of Radicalism’. That Ward supported his claim to a messianic identity ‘with arguments derived from [Richard] Carlile’, intrigued Thompson, as did his appearing in Carlile’s venues. But Thompson made little effort to explain this. Ward’s popularity merely indicated that it was ‘premature, in the 1830s, to think of the English working people as being wholly open to secular ideology’.¹⁴

The ‘secular ideology’ of the time, present within the radical, utopian and socialist movements of the early 1830s, took its visionary cues – Thompson contended – principally from the Enlightenment. A tradition of freethought republicanism stretching back to the American and French Revolutions was sustained through the 1820s by figures such as Carlile. Over the same period, a more social vision was proposed by Robert Owen, the paternalist cotton-master, premised on the doctrine that individuals were formed by their social environment, not themselves. For Owen, society was capable of complete reformation, through the replacement of capitalist competition with a

¹² Thompson considered involvement in Southcottianism subject to the same ‘impermanence’ as Methodist conversion. *Ibid.*, pp. 426-7. On Thompson and Methodist historiography see, David Hempton and John Walsh, ‘E.P. Thompson and Methodism’ in Mark Noll (ed.), *God and Mammon: Protestants, Money and the Market, 1790-1860* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 99-120. Thompson later wrote more sympathetically of the radicalism of the alternative millenarian tradition of Muggletonianism in this period, yet this interpretation did not redraw his view of Southcottianism. See Edward Thompson, *Witness against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law* (Cambridge, 1993).

¹³ Thompson, *Making*, p. 427. The name Shiloh came from an obscure messianic passage in Genesis, translated in the Authorised Version as a person ‘unto him shall the gathering of the people be’ (Genesis 49:10).

¹⁴ Thompson, *Making*, pp. 879, 882.

communitarian, cooperative utopia, which he called ‘the millennium’. By the 1830s, elements of Owen’s ideas had been appropriated by groups of working people, especially his theories of cooperative trade, and coupled to forms of political radicalism, freethought, and trade union representation to form a recognisable ‘socialism’. This ideology, Thompson argued, appropriated the ‘emotional energy’ and ‘passion’ of an older millenarianism: ‘Mr Owen ... threw the mantle of Joanna Southcott across his shoulders’.¹⁵ As a consequence, Thompson concluded, the earlier oscillation of working people between spiritual and political messianism was resolved in the hope of a socialist millennium without God. With this came a consciousness of class, Thompson asserted. Working people discovered that they could be the agents of political change for the better: ‘With the Owenites the Millennium was not to arrive, it was to be *made*, by their own efforts’.¹⁶

From the late-1960s, a particular Southcottian, James Elishama Smith, who was influentially involved in early 1830s Owenism – yet unnamed in Thompson’s work – attracted growing attention from scholars. John Harrison, in a study linking Owen’s socialism to millennialism through its sectarian form and ‘the logic of its need to communicate’ – rather than any vague ‘emotional energy’ – identified James Smith’s career as an insightful bridge between two movements.¹⁷ In 1833-34, Smith was editor of the principal Owenite journal *Crisis*, a leading Owenite lecturer, and a prominent ideologue during the short-lived Grand National Consolidated Trades Union of 1834 – an ill-fated general union led briefly by Owen, and now known chiefly for the ‘martyrdom’

¹⁵ Thompson, *Making*, p. 865.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 883.

¹⁷ J.F.C. Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites in Britain and America: The Quest for the New Moral World* (London, 1969), pp. 102, 135.

of six of its members from Tolpuddle, in Dorset. In a well-known series of articles in the GNCTU's *Pioneer* journal, jointly written with its Owenite editor James Morrison, Smith propounded theories projecting a coming age when the working class would gain control of their labour and political power.¹⁸ Less than two years before, Smith, a Scots theology graduate with a long interest in the millennium, had been a paid-up Southcottian, associating with both Zion Ward and another claimant to Southcott's prophetic succession, John Wroe.¹⁹ For Harrison, Smith's shift from Southcottianism to Owenite socialism was confirmation that the latter was 'a parallel or alternative to religious sects of the Southcottian type'.²⁰

Significantly, Harrison argued that Smith did not renounce his religious millennialism (as qua Thompson's secularising thesis); he merely 'acquired a new social radicalism' which had been absent from his previous beliefs.²¹ Because it was essentially an 'ideology of change', Harrison argued, millennial expectancy was inherently 'revolutionary', only requiring personal religious concerns to merge with a social vision to turn political.²²

Succeeding studies of Owenism and millenarianism interpreted James Smith's career in varied ways. John Saville considered Smith almost a personification of the 'chiliasm of despair' argument: he saw Smith personally oscillating between enthusiasms for religious millenarianism and secular 'movements of social unrest', losing and

¹⁸ Studies of Smith's radical career before Harrison's study include Raymond Postgate, *Out of the Past: some revolutionary sketches* (London, 1922), pp. 97-106; idem. and G.D.H. Cole, *The Common People, 1746-1938* (London, 1938), pp. 268-71; William Oliver, 'The Consolidated Trades' Union of 1834' *Economic History Review*, 17:1 (1964), 77-95; D.R. Cook, 'Revd. James Elishama Smith: Socialist Prophet of the Millennium' (Iowa Univ. M.A. Thesis, 1961).

¹⁹ Harrison, *New Moral World*, pp. 109-22.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 101-2.

regaining his faith, before and after his political interests.²³ William Oliver saw Smith's precise personal beliefs as less important than his consistent mentality of millennial expectation throughout his career, and apparent ability to secularise millennial concepts as 'a vehicle for emergent socialist thinking'.²⁴ This assessment of Smith appeared in a study of how millenarian ideas came to be appropriated by political forces of both 'reaction' and 'radicalism' in Britain between the 1790s and 1840s. In the same work, Oliver also sought to explain Zion Ward's early 1830s radical links, and concluded that it was the Southcottian's language which provided his vehicle into politics.²⁵ In the concept of the millennium, Christianity offered 'a vocabulary of revolution' which the English radical tradition in the early 1830s, including freethought figures such as Carlile, still recognised as valuable to the communication of its message.²⁶

In 1979 and 1982, two detailed social histories of Southcottianism appeared, each essentially re-stating an existing argument in their discussions of millenarians and radicals.²⁷ Harrison's *The Second Coming*, a study of popular millenarianism with the Southcottian tradition as its central focus, extended his previous definition of millenarianism as an ideology of change.²⁸ It concluded that millenarianism could expand an individual's expectation of change beyond a concept of personal salvation

²³ John Saville, 'J.E. Smith and the Owenite Movement, 1833-1834', in Sidney Pollard and John Salt (eds.), *Robert Owen: Prophet of the Poor. Essays in Honour of the Two-Hundredth Anniversary of His Birth* (London, 1971), pp. 115-44.

²⁴ William Oliver, *Prophets and Millennialists: The Uses of Biblical Prophecy in England from the 1790s to the 1840s* (Auckland, 1978), p. 216.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 150-74.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 173-4.

²⁷ J.F.C. Harrison, *The Second Coming: Popular Millenarianism 1780-1850* (London, 1979), pp. 152-60, 229; Hopkins, *Woman*, pp. 214-5.

²⁸ The 'Southcottian tradition' is here defined as the millenarian movement during Southcott's public prophetic ministry (1801-1814), the 1790s career of the preceding prophet, Richard Brothers, and developments among surviving Southcottians after 1814 (in Harrison's study, up to 1850). Harrison's study explored millenarianism in the 1780-1850 period as a way of writing history about how ordinary people 'thought and felt', and included additional studies of popular millenarianism in North America.

towards a ‘social consciousness’.²⁹ This could leave no necessary polarity between religious and political commitment; an individual ‘could be both a millenarian and a radical at the same time’ – as the figures of Smith and Ward demonstrated.³⁰ James Hopkins’ subsequent study of Southcottianism up to 1814 came to alternative conclusions, largely upholding Thompson’s and Saville’s interpretation of the oscillating pattern to religion and radicalism, including in the later case of Smith.³¹

In the 1980s, new understandings of the historical contingency of language led to significant revisions to interpretations of 1830s radicalism, including the nature of the relation between millenarianism and Owenite utopian socialism. Barbara Taylor stressed the secularist character of Owenism, denying its direct equivalence with Southcottianism, but demonstrating instead how Owenite radicals could appropriate the language of the millennium – it being ‘the only language of social optimism’ available to most people at the time – and ‘turn it to new psychological and political purposes’.³² Gregory Claeys also declared the ‘millennial element’ of the Owenite movement ‘overemphasised’: his studies resituated much of Owen’s social and economic thought deeper within the political-intellectual context of its age.³³ Yet, while Claeys discussed James Smith’s

²⁹ Harrison, *Second Coming*, pp. xv-xvi, 222-3. Harrison’s definitions drew on the sociological work of Bryan Wilson, *Magic and the Millennium: A Sociological Study of Religious Movements of Protest among Tribal and Third-World Peoples* (London, 1973), p. 7.

³⁰ Harrison, *Second Coming*, pp. 141-57, 225.

³¹ Due to the chronological parameters of Hopkins’s study (1790-1814), his discussion of Southcottians and radicalism focussed on millenarians linked to 1790s radicalism who subsequently became Southcottians. Hopkins considered such believers as William Sharp and William Tooke Harwood’s involvement in radical political movements ‘tentative and exploratory’ unless and until ‘they... shed their religious beliefs’, an option they did not countenance. In a brief review of James Smith’s career, Hopkins concluded the same applied in his relation to 1830s radicalism. His study did not mention Zion Ward. Hopkins, *Woman*, pp. 149-69, 214-5.

³² Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1983), pp. 159-60.

³³ Gregory Claeys, ‘Review Article: The Triumph of Class-Conscious Reformism in British Radicalism 1790-1860’, *Historical Journal*, 26:4 (1983), 975. Idem., *Machinery, Money and the Millennium: From Moral Economy to Socialism, 1815-60* (Princeton, 1987); Idem., “‘Individualism,’” “‘Socialism,’” and

Owenite career with only the barest reference to his religion, Taylor presented a dramatically different reading of the significance of Smith's 1830s socialism and the radicalism of the Southcottian tradition; this focussed on their feminism.³⁴

Taylor's assessment of Southcott's prophetic career placed new emphasis on her apparent appeal to women. Southcott's writings connected 'religious enthusiasm and sexual heterodoxy', and, in their forms of expression and themes, 'were directed at a female audience in explicit defence of women's equal spiritual status'.³⁵ This view of Southcott's audience was corroborated, Taylor pointed out, in evidence for the substantial majority (63%) of Southcott's following being women, presented by both Harrison and Hopkins.³⁶ Such numbers, coupled with the ways Southcott's prophecies affirmed a redemptive role for women, allowed Taylor to assert Southcott's importance in widening 'women's moral jurisdiction' in her period. When Smith, two decades after Southcott's death, was drawn into Owenism, Taylor detected a link between this tradition of 'mystical' moral jurisdiction and Owenite feminism. In the mid-1830s, after his involvement with *The Crisis* and trades unionism, Smith popularised a 'doctrine of the woman' – a female messianism which combined his Southcottian beliefs with the utopian socialist thought of both Owen's followers and the contemporary Saint-Simonians.³⁷

Taylor's interpretation of the connected careers of Southcott and Smith has been recognised as an important corrective to histories of English nineteenth-century radicalism, particularly Thompson's *Making of the English Working Class*. Taylor is

"Social Science": Further Notes on a Process of Conceptual Formation 1800-1850', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 47:1 (1986), 81-93; Idem., *Citizens and Saints: Politics and Anti-Politics in Early British Socialism* (Cambridge, 1989).

³⁴ Claeys, *Citizens*, pp. 199-207; Taylor, *Eve*, pp. 161-72.

³⁵ Taylor, *Eve*, p. 165-6.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 162-4. This statistic was taken from Harrison's and Hopkins' respective studies of Southcottianism, Harrison, *Second Coming*, p. 110; Hopkins, *Woman*, p. 85.

³⁷ Taylor, *Eve*, pp. 166-8.

credited with revealing an alternative dimension to ‘radical’ behaviour, a feminine radicalism which Thompson’s history of ‘masculine ... rationalist politics’, with its heroic depiction of Thomas Paine and other radical male artisans, overlooked.³⁸ In an influential gender critique of Thompson’s study, Joan Wallach Scott contrasted his portrayal of Southcott in the *Making*, as ‘frenzied and hysterical ... deluded, yet charismatic’, with Taylor’s demonstration of how Southcott employed ‘sexualized language ... to express profoundly radical critiques’.³⁹ Scott judged Thompson’s thesis limited for having singled out ‘a particular strand of early nineteenth-century politics as the only example of working-class politics’.⁴⁰ Anna Clark’s account of ‘gender and the making of the British working class’ extended Taylor’s argument; she defined the radicalism of Southcott and her women followers specifically by their challenge to contemporary social and sexual hierarchies, with little reference to ‘masculine’ radical political campaigns of the 1830s.⁴¹ Susan Juster’s recent study of Southcott’s position in the public sphere has similarly redefined her ‘millenarian politics’ through the ways that

³⁸ Joan Wallach Scott, ‘Women in *The Making of the English Working Class*’, in *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York, 1988), p. 78.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 68-90. On *The Making of the English Working Class* and gender see also Catherine Hall, ‘The Tale of Samuel and Jemima’, in Harvey J. Kaye and Keith McClelland (eds.), *E.P. Thompson: Critical Perspectives* (London, 1990), pp. 78-102; Carolyn Steedman, ‘The Price of Experience: Women and the Making of the English Working Class’, *Radical History Review*, 59 (1994), 108-19.

⁴⁰ Scott, ‘Women in *The Making*’ pp. 77-8.

⁴¹ Anna Clark, ‘The Sexual Crisis and Popular Religion in London 1770-1820’ *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 34 (1988), 56-69; *idem.* *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley, 1995), pp. 91, 107-11. Other studies to take Taylor’s argument further include Kathryn Gleadle’s exploration of the feminist dimensions to Saint-Simonian and later Fourierist utopian socialist movements from the mid-1830s to early 1840s, with significant discussion of James Smith’s contribution in this period; Kathryn Gleadle, ‘“Our Several Spheres”: Middle-class Women and the Feminisms of Early Victorian Radical Politics’, in Kathryn Gleadle and Sarah Richardson (eds.), *Women in British politics, 1760-1860: the power of the petticoat* (Basingstoke, 2000), pp. 134-52. Jackie Latham’s study of the radical patrons, the aristocratic sisters Sophia Chichester and Georgiana Fletcher Welch, who donated funds in the mid-1830s to both Zion Ward and James Smith, has recovered an additional unseen link between the Southcottian movement and a radical feminism. J.E.M. Latham, *Search for a New Eden: James Pierrepont Greaves (1777-1842), the Sacred Socialist and His Followers* (London, 1999).

her language was distinctly ‘feminine’ and, by this, challenged the democratic politics of her period.⁴²

Since the 1980s, studies of the political culture associated with male artisan radicalism up to the 1830s have continued to include sporadic references to Southcottianism. A new interest in forms of radical expression and performance has led historians to note the nature of the respective preaching careers of Ward and Smith in London.⁴³ Iain McCalman located Southcottians among London’s ‘radical underworld’, a cultural milieu sympathetic to blends of heterodox religion and revolutionary sentiment since the 1790s.⁴⁴ For McCalman, the popular attention gained by Ward and Smith in the 1830s reflected a continuity in this milieu, rather than any distinct development from an earlier period, including during Southcott’s lifetime. This implied that though Southcott herself may have spurned political causes, many of her followers inhabited a cultural context where millenarianism and radicalism were rarely distinguishable.⁴⁵ Among

⁴² Susan Juster, *Doomsayers: Anglo-American Prophecy in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia, 2003), pp. 163-77. For further recent studies of Southcott as a literary figure, see Kevin Binfield, ‘The French, The “Long-Wished-for Revolution,” and the Just War in Joanna Southcott’, in Adriana Craciun and K.E. Lokke (eds.), *Rebellious Hearts: British Women Writers and the French Revolution* (Albany, 2001), pp. 135-59; Eitan Bar-Yosef, ‘“Green and Pleasant Lands”: England and the Holy Land in Plebeian Millenarian Culture, c.1790-1820’, in Kathleen Wilson (ed.), *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity, and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660-1840* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 155-75.

⁴³ Iain McCalman, ‘Popular Irreligion in Early Victorian England: Infidel Preachers and Radical Theatricality in 1830s London’, in R.W. Davies and R.J. Helmstadter (eds.), *Religion and Irreligion in Victorian Society: Essays in Honor of R.K. Webb* (London, 1992), pp. 51-67; James Epstein, ‘Reason’s Republic: Richard Carlile, Zetetic Culture, and Infidel Stylistics’, *Radical Expression: Political Language, Ritual, and Symbol in England, 1790-1850* (New York, 1994), pp. 143-6, 215-6. Iorwerth Prothero earlier recovered several new sources on Smith and Ward among Home Office spy reports. Iorwerth Prothero, *Artisans and Politics in Early Nineteenth-Century London: John Gast and His Times* (London, 1979), pp. 262-3.

⁴⁴ Iain McCalman, *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries and Pornographers in London, 1795-1840* (first published, 1988; Oxford, 1993), pp. 62-3, 200-2; idem., ‘New Jerusalem: Prophecy, Dissent and Radical Culture in England, 1786-1830’, in Knud Haakonssen (ed.), *Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 312-35.

⁴⁵ McCalman’s identification of ‘millenarian-radical culture’ centred more on the revolutionary followers of Thomas Spence. This variety of millenarianism was also the subject of Malcolm Chase’s *The People’s Farm: English Radical Agrarianism 1775-1840* (Oxford, 1988). For a comparison of Spenceans and Southcottians, and the arguments of these two works, see Chapter 3, pp. 127-32.

recent studies of political radicalism which take new account of the role of religion in nineteenth-century movements, further notice is given to the promotional material of Ward and, in greater detail, the ideas promoted by Smith during the 1830s.⁴⁶

Individual Radicals, Collective Southcottians

The experience of Charles Bradley, Southcottian and radical, is not recorded in any of these existing histories. He was one of hundreds of Southcottians to engage with the radical political movements of early 1830s England, under the leadership of the two individuals previously recognised for their prominent political careers in the period – Zion Ward and James Smith. In Bradley’s case, his radicalism was shaped by his relationship with Ward: in 1830, Bradley accepted Ward’s claim to be the Shiloh messiah that Southcott had prophesied, recognizing him also as the ‘Power from on high’ that God had promised him fifteen years before.⁴⁷ Through this relationship, something of the context of Bradley’s interaction with Richard Carlile is suggested, as Ward’s familiarity with the radical publisher is known. Yet, Bradley’s own radicalism is not adequately explained in an interpretation of his new leader’s messianic language. In the 1830s, Bradley’s and other Southcottians’ political sympathies were a long way from their founding prophet’s views, a distance nurtured not by a change of language, but by two decades of religious experience.

⁴⁶ Iorwerth Prothero, *Radical Artisans in England and France, 1830-1870* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 252-72; Eileen Groth Lyon, *Politicians in the Pulpit: Christian Radicalism in Britain from the Fall of the Bastille to the Disintegration of Chartism* (Aldershot 1999), pp. 90-1.

⁴⁷ Zion Ward to Charles Bradley, 15 Dec. 1829, in Zion Ward, *Letters, Epistles, and Revelations, of Jesus Christ addressed to the believers in the glorious reign of Messiah* (London, 1831), p. 105.

During her public career as a prophet, from 1801 to 1814, Joanna Southcott was adamantly opposed to her followers having anything to do with radicalism or revolution. ‘Rebellion is as iniquity and Idolatry’, her prophecies declared; her believers ‘do not trouble themselves about politics or parties and have no connection with desperate Men but it is their duty to avoid contention or strife’.⁴⁸ Southcott was a strong supporter of the established English state, a ‘throne and altar’ enthusiast. ‘His majesty,’ she once wrote, ‘has no better subjects in his kingdom, or who wish more for the perfect happiness of the nation, than the true believers in my visitation’.⁴⁹ Southcott composed a whole book in response to Paine’s *Age of Reason*, incensed by ‘his pernicious doctrines’, and the way ‘his former publications hurt many weak minds, and ... [were] contrived to make a mock of the Scriptures’.⁵⁰ Former radicals among her closest followers, most notably the engraver William Sharp, made clear their rejection of their former views when accepting her prophetic authority.⁵¹

Ward and Smith were the two figures who contradicted and overturned this apolitical stance in Southcottianism most publicly, and left the most evidence for their radical careers. The significance of Bradley and the other millenarians who followed them is not indicated by their numbers; they formed only a section of the several thousand surviving Southcottians.⁵² Rather, the radical hundreds of the 1830s, and the

⁴⁸ Joanna Southcott quoted in Thomas Foley, *The Answer of the Revd. Thomas P. Foley to the World* (Stourbridge, 1805), p. 27; University of Texas (UT), Joanna Southcott Collection (JSC), 415/44, quoted in Hopkins, *Woman*, p. 191.

⁴⁹ Joanna Southcott, *An Account of the Trials on Bills of Exchange* (London, 1807), p. 54. The Church of England was, for her, the true Church of God; in the Prayer Book, ‘all the glory of the Lord’ was apparent. Joanna Southcott, *The Strange Effects of Faith, Part 1* (Exeter, 1801), p. 9; idem., *Divine and Spiritual Communications* (London, 1803), p. 16.

⁵⁰ Southcott, *Answer to Thomas Paine*, p. 2.

⁵¹ William Sharp, *An Answer to the World* (London, 1806); Hopkins, *Woman*, pp. 154-69, 179-80.

⁵² At her death in 1814, Southcott had over 12,400 committed followers (those who had undergone a ceremony of membership). On these and surviving numbers see Chapter 1, pp. 43-51.

leading individuals within their collective numbers, reveal an aspect to the radical politics of their period still inadequately understood. They demonstrate, in a distinctive way, how religious experience could shape political engagement, and how visionary religion could prompt alliances for realising political visions.

This study challenges significant aspects of each of the existing arguments for why Southcottians were found among radical movements in the early 1830s. Such millenarians were not overwhelmingly poor, working people naturally predisposed to radicalism yet liable to temporary distraction by a religious solution to their ills. Nor did their occupation of the same social and cultural contexts as political radicals automatically align Southcottians' interests and objectives with radicalism. In the first five years after Southcott's death, when support for radicalism was especially strong, Southcottian numbers remained relatively high, and sources indicate their isolation from politics. Historians have jumped to the same conclusions as contemporaries, including the governing authorities, in mistaking millenarian excitement for radical sympathies. In this period, Southcottian millenarians retained a form of millennial expectation similar to that held by their founding prophet: national events were viewed as fulfilments of prophecies of the coming end; believers continued to await an imminent physical messiah to make all things new.

During the 1820s, sections of the increasingly fragmented Southcottian sect arrived at alternative understandings of how they should prepare for the millennium, the nature of the millennium itself, and the process of its realisation. Many surviving congregations of believers, who accepted the prophetic leadership of John Wroe, adopted religious customs with significant social implications. These practices centred on the

keeping of the Mosaic Law of the Old Testament and the formation of a sizeable millenarian community in the Lancashire mill town of Ashton-under-Lyne. Both were intended to represent the conditions to be experienced in the millennium. In the late-1820s, a number of Southcottian groups, unconnected to Wroe's body, accepted the leadership of Zion (previously John) Ward, not as a prophet but as the Shiloh they had expected since Southcott's lifetime. Ward's explanation of his messianic identity reshaped his followers' previous expectations about what the messiah would achieve, granting a new role to their activity in the arrival of the millennium itself.

Between the summers of 1830 and 1831, these developments, together with a series of personal encounters and experiences in specific social contexts, combined to redirect dramatically the attitudes to radicalism – and especially freethought radicalism – of a number of Southcottians. Only in this period did Zion Ward recognise contemporary radical rhetoric as a convenient means of communication of his message, and came in turn to be recognised by freethought radicals as a figure to encourage. James Smith, while a resident of Ashton and participant in Wroe's gathered community, forged his own personal links with radicalism, corresponding with the freethought associates of Carlile, and leaving evidence of his acquaintance with prominent trade-unionists in Ashton. During 1831-32, Ward's radical notoriety came as a direct result of promotion from Carlile. Yet, the Southcottian messiah's subsequent directing of his adherents to promote causes associated with Carlile, before and during Ward's imprisonment for blasphemy in 1832-34, reached beyond any shared rhetoric. This direction to followers such as Bradley reflected a new understanding of how political radicalism itself could serve his messianic cause. While this view centred on atheist radicals being essentially

unconscious agents of God's redemptive work, James Smith, by contrast, as a London radical lecturer and Owenite editor in 1832-34, re-formulated this argument to show how religious millenarians such as himself could be *conscious* agents of God's work. Smith's radical career, when understood in the theological terms within which he himself framed it, reveals a distinctive basis for the convergence of religious conviction and political action. Smith articulated a concept for how human action and divine action could relate in the making of the millennium.

This thesis has deliberate chronological boundaries and a conscious focus on forms of radicalism associated with distinct political movements, institutions and ideas. This is a history of Southcottian millenarians in the twenty years after Joanna Southcott's death, from the beginning of 1815 to the beginning of 1835; this is a study of 'radicalism' in predominantly its older, narrower, 'masculine' sense – meaning expressly male-dominated political organisations, radical journals, and the search for solutions to social problems framed, by-and-large, by men's priorities. This latter definition is adopted not to deny the validity of the gender critiques of histories such as Thompson's, but rather to take the older histories on, on their own terms. To understand how visionary religion could be radical does not necessitate a broadening of our definition of either what was 'radical' or what was 'political' – the tendency of the arguments of Taylor, Clark, Scott and Juster. It can be done by better conceiving of how religious ideas and experience could influence individuals to overt engagement with politics in conventional terms.

This study nonetheless engages with a significant dimension of the argument defining Southcottianism as a form of 'feminine radicalism'. While it accepts existing

interpretations of James Smith's career after 1834 as a notable, individual link between Southcottianism and utopian socialist feminism, this study queries the evidence taken by Taylor and Clark to suggest the Southcottian movement served as an earlier catalyst for the widening of women's 'moral jurisdiction', or, through its particular appeal to women, constituted an alternative radicalism of its time.⁵³ This thesis contends that the more collective view of Southcottian millenarianism as a movement expressive of a 'feminine radicalism' has been overstated. Southcottianism was not dominated by its female membership. Rather, it had no greater appeal to women than most forms of orthodox evangelical religion; in many areas, its appeal to women was weaker. James Smith, in his journal *The Shepherd*, published in the years after his direct involvement with the trades union phase of Robert Owen's movement, articulated a millenarian basis to socialist feminism.⁵⁴ Yet it is his prior career, and his articulation of how political radicalism and trade unionism could serve the coming of the millennium, which concern this study.

As a study of Southcottians *after* Southcott, this thesis addresses a lacuna in academic studies of this plebeian religious movement in early industrial Britain. The scope of Southcott's life and prophetic career has tended to dominate scholars' attention – from her first sense of spiritual inspiration in 1792, through subsequent struggle for recognition as a prophet in Exeter, her move to publish her prophecies in 1801, her receiving widespread notice and a national following during the Napoleonic War period,

⁵³ Taylor and Clark's identification of 'radical religion' as a form of alternative outlet for social criticism for women before 1820, one which equipped women with 'organisational skills and... a language of protest... which later aided them to join in radical political organisations' mirrored the contemporary work of Deborah Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters: Female Preaching and Popular Religion in Industrial England* (Princeton, 1985); Clark, *Struggle*, p. 117. The studies of Smith's later career are Taylor, *Eve*, pp. 167-72; Gleadle, 'Several Spheres'; Latham, *Search for a New Eden*.

⁵⁴ Smith published *The Shepherd* from late-August 1834-38, with some pauses in publication.

and her final, notorious end in death and failed ‘mystical pregnancy’ in 1814.⁵⁵ The figure commonly recognised as Southcott’s forerunner, the 1790s prophet Richard Brothers, has received yet greater academic attention.⁵⁶ Harrison’s *Second Coming* contains the fullest existing survey of post-1814 Southcottianism, yet covers three decades of post-Southcott prophets in only twenty-five pages.⁵⁷ Gordon Allan’s recent survey article of ‘Southcottian sects’ touches yet more briefly on the 1815-1835 period.⁵⁸ A handful of graduate theses have focussed on Southcottianism across longer periods of the nineteenth century, but reveal little not since noted in published studies.⁵⁹ Some non-academic or local historical works of the last half-century have produced a further body of work on later Southcottians, in some cases cited in more scholarly works.⁶⁰ Single studies of nineteenth-century Southcottian groups, such as Edward Green’s recent

⁵⁵ Clarke Garrett, *Respectable Folly: Millenarians and the French Revolution in France and England* (Baltimore, 1975); Hopkins, *Woman*; Juster, *Doomsayers*.

⁵⁶ Jon Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm: William Blake and the culture of radicalism in the 1790s* (Oxford, 1992); John Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death: figurative treason, fantasies of regicide, 1793-1796* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 504-47; Deborah Madden, *The Paddington Prophet: Richard Brothers's Journey to Jerusalem* (Manchester, forthcoming in 2010).

⁵⁷ Harrison devoted twice this number of pages to Southcott’s shorter career. Harrison, *Second Coming*, pp. 86-135 and pp. 135-60.

⁵⁸ Gordon Allan, ‘Southcottian Sects from 1790 to the Present Day’, in Kenneth Newport and Crawford Gribben (eds.), *Expecting the End: Millennialism in Social and Historical Context* (Waco, 2006), pp. 219-22.

⁵⁹ P.J. Tobin, ‘The Southcottians in England 1782-1895’ (Manchester Univ. M.A. Thesis, 1978); Edward Green, ‘Factors Accounting for the Popularity of the Christian Israelites from the 1820s’ (Portsmouth Univ. MA Thesis, 2000); Donald Cook’s MA thesis on James Smith is the most original study for its time, completed two years before Thompson’s book. Harrison acknowledges his debt to Cook’s research in his assessment of Smith’s thought in *New Moral World*, pp. 109-22. D.R. Cook, ‘Rev. James Elishama Smith: Socialist Prophet of the Millennium’ (Iowa Univ. M.A. Thesis, 1961).

⁶⁰ George Balleine’s 1956 account of ‘the tragic story of Joanna Southcott and her successors’, has remained a repeated reference for theological distinctions and relationships between groups of Southcott supporters after her death. It is cited by Thompson, Garrett, Harrison and Hopkins, despite its own lack of references for its sources. G.R. Balleine, *Past Finding Out: The Tragic Story of Joanna Southcott and Her Successors* (London, 1956); Thompson, *Making*, p. 880; Garrett, *Respectable Folly*, p. 210; Harrison, *Second Coming*, pp. 250, 252 and 265; Hopkins, *Woman*, pp. xix and 272. On the testing of Balleine’s study in this thesis, see Chapter 1, p. 38 n.6. Other recent non-academic studies include, J.D.M. Derrett, *Prophecy in the Cotswolds 1803-1947: Joanna Southcott and Spiritual Reform* (Shipston-on-Stour, 1994); Alan Crocker and Stephen Humphrey, ‘The Papermaker and the Prophetess: Elias Carpenter of Neckinger Mill, Bermondsey, Supporter of Joanna Southcott’, *Surrey Archaeological Collections*, 89 (2002), 199-235; Frances Brown, *Joanna Southcott: The Woman, Clothed with the Sun* (Cambridge, 2002); idem., *Joanna Southcott's Box of Sealed Prophecies* (Cambridge, 2003).

biography of the northern prophet, John Wroe, contain useful research in local archives, yet are limited in subject scope and critical historical analysis.⁶¹

While filling this particular scholarly lacuna, this thesis attempts to look beyond the history of a minor religious sect – albeit the largest popular millenarian movement of its age, with, as has been demonstrated, a considerable existing place in the historiography of the Romantic period.⁶² This thesis is a study in religious history, orientated towards politics. It sets out to demonstrate that a sensitivity to religious ideas and how belief shapes an individual can aid historians of political movements to understand more fully the motivations and ideals of their participants.

Religion and Politics in the Nineteenth Century

The intellectual and motivational role of religion in British political life in the nineteenth century was so extensive it can at times seem impossible to overlook. Late twentieth-century historians nonetheless found rich revisionist rewards in reminding a generation of colleagues and students, accustomed to correlating modern politics with secular concerns and motives, of religion's importance to an earlier age's political causes – both reactionary and radical.⁶³ The 1990s saw several new interpretations of nonconformist politics, though several studies downplayed any assumed sympathy for radicalism among

⁶¹ Edward Green, *Prophet John Wroe: Virgins, Scandals and Visions* (Stroud, 2005); See also, R.A. Baldwin, *The Jezreelites: The Rise and Fall of a Remarkable Prophetic Movement* (Orpington, 1961).

⁶² Iain McCalman (ed.), *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age: British Culture 1776-1832* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 217-23, 713.

⁶³ This revisionist trend began in the 1980s: David Hempton, *Methodism and Politics in British Society, 1750-1850* (London, 1984); Alex Tyrrell, *Joseph Sturge and the Moral Radical Party in Early Victorian Britain* (London, 1987); Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795-1865* (Oxford, 1988). Jonathan Clark's *English Society 1688-1832: Ideology, Social Structure and Political Practice During the Ancien Regime* (Cambridge, 1985), presented a significant argument for the pivotal role of religious issues both across its period and at its disruptive close.

early nineteenth-century Dissenters.⁶⁴ Innovative new arguments for the relation of both religious conviction and theological thought to political representations and philosophies were presented in two methodologically-diverse studies by Patrick Joyce and Timothy Larsen.⁶⁵ In the new century, Simon Skinner's re-assessment of the politics of the Oxford Movement and Arthur Burns' demonstration of the need to revise religion's place in the Reform debate of the 1830s are among those studies to extend the revisionist trend to the Church of England; attention to nonconformist politics has broadened, most notably in women's history.⁶⁶

The once strong association between 1790s-1840s political radicalism and deist or atheist freethought and the rejection of religion – represented most obviously in the personal beliefs of such leading figures as Paine, Carlile and Owen – first received significant correction in the 1980s in studies of Chartism, then of earlier eras.⁶⁷ The role of both orthodox and heterodox religious opinions in radical movements has continued to attract scholarly discussion since, though most often in either the 1790s or Chartist

⁶⁴ Michael Watts, *The Dissenters, Volume II: The Expansion of Evangelical Nonconformity* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 347-452; David Hempton, *The Religion of the People: Methodism and popular religion, c.1750-1900* (London, 1996), pp. 109-29, 162-78.

⁶⁵ Patrick Joyce, *Democratic Subjects: The Self and the Social in Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 1994); Timothy Larsen, *Friends of Religious Equality: Nonconformist Politics in Mid-Victorian England* (Woodbridge, 1999).

⁶⁶ Simon Skinner, *Tractarians and the 'Condition of England': The Social and Political Thought of the Oxford Movement* (Oxford, 2004); Arthur Burns, 'English 'Church Reform' Revisited, 1780-1840', in Arthur Burns and Joanna Innes (eds.), *Rethinking the Age of Reform* (Cambridge, 2003). Kathryn Gleadle, 'British Women and Radical Politics in the Late Nonconformist Enlightenment, c.1780-1830', in Amanda Vickery (ed.), *Women, Privilege and Power: British Politics 1750 to the Present* (Stanford, 2001), pp. 123-51; Sue Morgan (ed.), *Women, Religion, and Feminism in Britain, 1750-1900* (Basingstoke, 2002).

⁶⁷ On the association, see Edward Royle's important studies of the freethought tradition, including, *Victorian Infidels: The Origins of the British Secularist Movement, 1791-1866* (Manchester, 1974), and idem., 'Freethought: the religion of Irreligion' in D.G. Paz (ed.), *Nineteenth-century English religious traditions* (London, 1995), pp. 171-96. The key study of Chartism was Eileen Yeo, 'Christianity in Chartist Struggle 1838-1842', *Past and Present*, no. 91 (1981), 109-39. On other eras, see Jack Fruchtman, *The Apocalyptic Politics of Richard Price and Joseph Priestley* (Philadelphia, 1983); John Belchem, *'Orator' Hunt: Henry Hunt and English Working-Class Radicalism* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 155-7; McCalman, *Radical Underworld*. Though McCalman's study ostensibly covered a period from 1795 to 1840, his assessment of religious millenarianism was, in fact, predominantly of the period before 1820. See also Chase, *People's Farm*.

periods. For instance, Barbara Taylor's recent study of Mary Wollstonecraft has recovered the centrality of her personal religious beliefs to her revolutionary convictions; while the contribution of belief to the politics of several 'uneasy radicals' among Chartist leaders has interested Owen Ashton and Paul Pickering.⁶⁸ Religion also receives prominent attention throughout Malcolm Chase's yet more recent history of Chartism.⁶⁹

A book-length exception to this tendency to examine radicalism and religion in distinct decades is Eileen Groth Lyon's case for a 'Christian radicalism' working within British popular politics from 1789 to 1848.⁷⁰ Lyon's argument was based on the evidence of the print culture of radicalism – its language and rhetoric across this era, including during the 1830s Reform agitation and Poor Law campaigns. A wide variety of individuals involved in political movements were defined by Lyon as 'Christian radicals' due to their use of religious language or their justification of radical arguments from the Bible. However, in giving little notice to such individuals' modes of religious commitment, background or belief, Lyon lumped dramatically different views and people together. In one case, a pamphlet produced by Zion Ward was cited beside religious comments attributed to people of wholly different religious views, including, for example, the sedate home counties landscape painter, George Arnald.⁷¹ That Ward was a millenarian, and Arnald not, went unmentioned. It was the similar 'religiousness' of their language which was deemed sufficient to substantiate an argument, and no more. Few

⁶⁸ Barbara Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination* (Cambridge, 2003). For Taylor's influence on other historians, see Carolyn Steedman, *Master and Servant: Love and Labour in the English Industrial Age* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 4-6, 152-75. Owen Ashton and Paul Pickering, *Friends of the People: Uneasy Radicals in the Age of the Chartists* (London, 2002).

⁶⁹ Malcolm Chase, *Chartism: a new history* (Manchester, 2007).

⁷⁰ Eileen Groth Lyon, *Politicians in the Pulpit: Christian Radicalism in Britain from the Fall of the Bastille to the Disintegration of Chartism* (Aldershot, 1999).

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 90-1. Simon Houfe, 'The Bedfordshire Prodigy: George Arnald ARA', *Bedfordshire Magazine*, 2 (1990), 135-41.

historians have agreed, leaving Lyon's thesis to make little impact on accepted interpretations of radicalism in the last decade.⁷² The role of religious conviction in 1830s radical politics is a subject notably requiring a new approach, beyond the linguistic turn, if traditional analyses are to be revised convincingly.⁷³

The approach adopted in this thesis is influenced by methodologies demonstrated in several of the more persuasive studies of nineteenth-century religion and politics noted above. This is a study of individuals and ideas deeply conscious of the conditioning both receive in their social and cultural contexts, yet sensitive to the influence of personal beliefs on behaviour which seeks to transcend that context – in this case to achieve an imagined, altered future. In its focus on individuals engaged in radicalism, this study follows both the recent approaches of Taylor and Ashton and Pickering. The latter observe that 'to understand political action we must explore, first and foremost, the multi-layered micropolitics of everyday life,' an examination which 'inevitably ... must begin with the study of the individual'.⁷⁴ In attempting to engage as deeply as possible with religious ideas – to take the theologies of individuals seriously – in the interests of recovering political concerns, this study draws particular influence from Larsen's account of mid-century Congregationalist politics linking his subjects' theology and their egalitarian political philosophies.⁷⁵

⁷² David Bebbington, 'Book Review', *English Historical Review*, 115:464 (2001), 240-1; Edward Royle, 'Book Review', *Victorian Studies*, 43:4 (2001), 630-2.

⁷³ Raymond Cowherd, *The Politics of English Dissent: the religious aspects of liberal and humanitarian reform movements from 1815 to 1848* (London, 1959); J.C. Gill, *The Ten Hours Parson: Christian Social Action in the Eighteen-Thirties* (London, 1959).

⁷⁴ Ashton and Pickering, *Friends of the People*, p. 2. This observation reflected recent developments in political theory, particularly the work of William E. Connolly.

⁷⁵ Larsen, *Friends of Religious Equality*.

Religion and Agency

A recent collection of essays on English radicalism between 1550 and 1850 has identified ‘religion’ as a problematic theme in existing approaches to the subject.⁷⁶ For Glenn Burgess, the principal way that religion ‘unsettled many Marxist approaches to England’s radical past’ stemmed from the mistaken application of the term ‘radical’ – with its association with modern social equality and democracy – upon individuals and groups motivated by confessional concerns.⁷⁷ Many ‘radical’ movements in the English Revolution of the seventeenth century were really ‘unpolitical or antipolitical, relying not on human agency but on God to transform the world’.⁷⁸ The later emergence of ‘modern radicalism’, Burgess continued, by necessity had religion central to it, ‘for you cannot have a radicalism resting upon human agency unless an antidote is found for the opium of the people’.⁷⁹ For Jonathan Clark, writing in the same work, this ‘antidote’ was located in 1820s atheist utilitarianism, a secular ideology born out of religious dissent.⁸⁰ For Colin Davis, in turn reflecting on the arguments of Burgess, Clark and others, their views only restated the old view of ‘religion as an antithesis to politics’, and did not adequately readdress ‘the basic assumption’ behind it – the erroneous idea that a religious intention ‘to submit to the divine will’ could not constitute ‘freedom’ in political terms.⁸¹

⁷⁶ Glenn Burgess, ‘Introduction’ in Glenn Burgess and Matthew Festenstein (eds.), *English Radicalism, 1550-1850* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 1-16.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁷⁸ Glenn Burgess, ‘Radicalism and the English Revolution’, in Burgess and Festenstein (eds.), *English Radicalism*, pp. 62-86.

⁷⁹ Burgess, ‘Introduction’ p. 12.

⁸⁰ J.C.D. Clark, ‘Religion and Origins of Radicalism in Nineteenth-Century Britain’, in Burgess and Festenstein (eds.), *English Radicalism*, pp. 241-84.

⁸¹ J.C. Davis, ‘Afterword: Reassessing Radicalism in a Traditional Society - Two Questions’, in Burgess and Festenstein (eds.), *English Radicalism*, pp. 359, 366-7.

This historians' debate strayed near to, yet failed to engage with, similar recent discussions among scholars of religion concerning the relation of religion to agency.⁸² Thus far, it is religious scholars who have more effectively critiqued traditional social science notions of the agency of the modern individual. These define religious conviction as either a regressive influence on the exercise of autonomy, or a peripheral dimension of the self readily displaced by secular priorities in any conscious choice of action.⁸³ In secular society, Phyllis Mack observes, 'religion is perceived chiefly as a form of self-estrangement'; its practice and authority is located 'outside the spheres of politics or the marketplace' – the archetypal contexts of agency's display.⁸⁴ Despite redefinition from feminist and poststructuralist scholars in the 1980s and 1990s, in the light of new theories of the subject and subjectivity, agency remains at odds with religion in most theory.

In addition to this critique, Phyllis Mack has demonstrated an alternative theoretical model of agency available within religious commitment.⁸⁵ In a study of the political activity of eighteenth-century Quaker women, Mack argues that 'a secular liberal model of agency' is inadequate to fully understand the nature of 'the experience of agency' felt by religious women.⁸⁶ This was 'generated not by the principle of individual free will but by the freedom to do what ... was right'.⁸⁷ As what was 'right' was identified with the will of God, or divine desire, this was a freedom involving discipline

⁸² Mary Keller, *The Hammer and the Flute: women, power, and spirit possession* (Baltimore, 2002); Phyllis Mack, 'Religion, Feminism, and the Problem of Agency: Reflections on Eighteenth-Century Quakerism', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 29:1 (2003), 149-77; Amy Hollywood, 'Gender, Agency, and the Divine in Religious Historiography', *Journal of Religion*, 84:3 (2004), 514-28; Phyllis Mack, *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment: gender and emotion in early Methodism*, (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 8-15.

⁸³ Mack, 'Problem of Agency', p. 150.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 149-77; *idem*, *Heart Religion*.

⁸⁶ Mack, 'Problem of Agency', pp. 155-9, 174.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

and an agency involving obedience – ‘self-negation as well as self-expression’.⁸⁸ Mack has subsequently traced an identical form of agency among early Methodists, locating in their self-analysis, self-discipline and dream experiences the same form of agency centred on self-negation.

The goal of the individual’s religious discipline was to shape her personal desires and narrow self-interest until they became identical with God’s desire, with absolute goodness. The sanctified Christian wants what God wants; she is God’s agent in the world.⁸⁹

It is a contention of this thesis that insights from Mack’s theories represent a valuable tool for understanding the social and political implications of millenarians’ religious activity. They further address the problems which historians of radicalism have identified in religious convictions expecting profound and dramatic social change, which do not adequately distance human activity from a concept of ‘the divine will’ – or God as agent. To understand why religious people, previously uninterested or averse to causes which sought temporal, this-worldly improvement, came to engage in politics, requires especial attention to their changing conceptions of divine and human agency.

Millenarians and Agency

Despite its only recent popularity among scholars of religion in general, agency is a concept long featured in particular interpretations of prophetic and millenarian religion by historians. During the 1950s and 1960s, many historians’ discussions of millenarian mass movements were framed by an interest in agency. For Marxist scholars, instances of

⁸⁸ Mack, ‘Problem of Agency’, pp. 156-7.

⁸⁹ Mack, *Heart Religion*, pp. 9-10.

millenarianism in the European past offered engaging examples of both a primitive vision of class upheaval, and a 'pre-political stage' of popular protest.⁹⁰ For such historians, class-consciousness marked the stage beyond this religious vision of a better world, producing an all-important sense of political agency. In the terminology of Eric Hobsbawm, the millenarian was required to exchange the 'primitive costume' of religious hope for 'the modern costume of Socialist or Communist politics'.⁹¹ It was modern ideologies which produced free human agents conscious of how the exercise of their will in revolutionary activity would result in political change.

Thompson's approach to millenarianism in *The Making of the English Working Class* reflected this distinct view of historical development. The contrasts drawn between Southcottian millenarianism and earlier examples of 'revolutionary chiliasm', as well as between Southcottianism and contemporary political radicalism, signalled progressive stages in this development. The latter were essentially divided by their anticipated agent of dramatic change. While Southcottianism encouraged its believers to expect an external agent of rescue – God's coming messiah – political radicalism encouraged working people to view themselves as the agents of change. Hence the 'chiliasm of despair': religious millenarians despaired of their own agency to escape the misery of their early industrial circumstances. And hence the significance of what Thompson saw as the teleological end-point of the secular radicalism of the Romantic age – the 1830s followers of Robert Owen believing 'the Millennium was not to arrive, it was to be *made*, by their own efforts'.⁹²

⁹⁰ Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*; Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution*; See also, Vittorio Lanternari, *The Religions of the Oppressed*, trans. Lisa Sergio, (London, 1963).

⁹¹ Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, pp. 106-7.

⁹² Thompson, *Making*, p. 883.

From the late-1960s, several studies of millenarianism by non-Marxist historians challenged these interpretations assuming that religious expectations of the millennium diminished appetites for human action.⁹³ They also questioned the correlation commonly drawn between millennial beliefs and socio-economic tension.⁹⁴ The historical movements influenced by millennial ideas were found to be far more diverse than this: in Britain and North America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries belief in a coming millennium was both widespread across social strata and an influence on those seeking revolutionary change or other progressive improvement through human action. Many Americans understood the success of their revolution within a framework of millennial expectancy.⁹⁵ British middle-class evangelicals sent missionaries to spread the Gospel abroad believing ‘conversion of the heathen ... would usher in the millennium’.⁹⁶ A number of prominent 1790s Unitarians considered revolution to be a step towards the millennial state.⁹⁷

To differentiate between such divergent groups of millenarians the categories of ‘premillennialist’ and ‘postmillennialist’ were widely adopted in historical and theological studies.⁹⁸ The difference they marked was essentially one of attitude to

⁹³ For surveys of such works see Garrett, *Respectable Folly*, pp. 6-10; Hillel Schwartz, ‘The End of the Beginning: Millenarian Studies 1969-1975’, *Religious Studies Review*, 2:3 (July 1976), 1-15.

⁹⁴ Norman Cohn’s *Pursuit of the Millennium* was not written from a Marxist perspective, but it nonetheless linked messianic movements closely to experiences of poverty and dispossession in European societies. Leading correctives to the link between millenarianism and poverty were Harrison’s *New Moral World* and William Lamont, *Godly Rule: politics and religion, 1603-60* (London, 1969).

⁹⁵ Ernest Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation: the idea of America's millennial role* (Chicago, 1968); Ruth Bloch, *Visionary Republic: millennial themes in American thought 1756-1800* (Cambridge, 1985).

⁹⁶ Oliver, *Prophets and Millennialists*, pp. 86-90; David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* (London, 1989), pp. 62-3.

⁹⁷ Oliver, *Prophets and Millennialists*, pp. 42-50; Fruchtman, ‘Apocalyptic Politics’.

⁹⁸ The terms are nineteenth-century in origin, coined by George Stanley Faber, though more associated with the Princeton Theological Seminary from the mid-century. G.S. Faber, *The Many Mansions of the House of the Father* (London, 1851), pp. 192-205. The two works which popularised the categories in modern scholarship were Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation*, pp. 32-5; Ernest Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American millenarianism, 1800-1930* (Chicago, 1970).

agency: *premillennialists* were defined as those looking only to a divine agent, seeing no merit in human action as they expected earthly conditions to get worse before a messiah suddenly returned to institute the millennium. *Postmillennialists* had, in contrast, an optimistic sense of human agency in the future coming of the millennium. A postmillennialist such as Joseph Priestley envisaged human technological and social progress would realise the Christian millennium.

Weaknesses or inconsistencies in these categories have been acknowledged.⁹⁹ Postmillennialists could turn pessimist if the realisation of the millennial dream seemed too distant; middle- and upper-class Victorian evangelicals combined premillennialist views with sympathy for factory reform. Additional or expanded terms have been suggested in response. Harrison's distinction 'between what may be called respectable, orthodox, scholarly millennialism ... and popular (or folk) millenarianism' allowed sociological differences between adherents to be further defined.¹⁰⁰ The sub-category of 'historicist premillennialism' has been recently proposed by Martin Spence to explain a 'willingness to amend the environmental factors which caused material deprivation' among some Victorian Anglicans, on the basis of their theological emphasis on the divine interest in human history and present, earthly time.¹⁰¹

Neither of these new terms, however, adequately addresses an additional fundamental weakness of the pre- and post- categories: the negating of any distinction between what may be called the epistemologies of millennial conviction – the bases of *knowing* that the millennium was approaching. Some people believed that the millennium

⁹⁹ J.W. Davidson, *The Logic of Millennial Thought* (New Haven, 1977), pp. 261-77; Harrison, *Second Coming*, p. 4; Bloch, *Visionary Republic*, pp. 130-44.

¹⁰⁰ Harrison, *Second Coming*, pp. 5-6.

¹⁰¹ Martin Spence, 'Time and Eternity in British Evangelicalism, c.1820-c.1860' (Oxford Univ. D.Phil. Thesis, 2007) pp. iv-v.

was imminent entirely from an interpretation of the Bible; others believed it was coming because a person accepted as inspired by God – a modern prophet – told them so. Examples of the latter millenarians, such as Southcottians, are typically designated premillennialist automatically, because their divine revelations are taken to be signs of God’s imminent action – the messiah’s arrival. This has the effect of determining their respective attitudes to human and divine agency according to a timetable for the millennium, and not the utterances or ideas of prophets themselves. In practice, the pre- and postmillennialist labels are a heuristic device to distinguish between groups which interpret the Bible. This underestimates the potential which prophets possessed to alter their followers’ conceptions of their own, human agency, without altering their prospective timeline for the millennium. This they could do through declaring new dispensations, new interpretations of the Bible, and new practices among their followers. These could each redefine how the millennium was understood to commence, and the interrelating of human and divine activity in its realisation.

Among the Southcottians discussed in this thesis, the chronological relationship between the arrival of the messiah and the arrival of the millennium had no bearing on their attitude to human agency. Changes to the way they understood their own role in the coming of the millennium were determined by other ideas, shaped by shifts in other beliefs than merely *when* the messiah would come. A new understanding of how Southcottians themselves (and others) could be agents of the millennium developed from the sources of their knowledge of the millennium’s imminence: a revelation to their prophet, an interpretation of the Bible, or both. No believing Southcottians ever reached a view where they expected the millennium to be achieved *entirely* by human efforts, but a

number came to envisage a far less precise form of divine involvement in its realisation than expecting a messiah to achieve it all. A changing expectation of the nature of divine intervention – whether it would come quickly or gradually, through a physical messiah or a messianic spirit – determined a new dynamic between human action and the work of God.

To define these varieties of beliefs relating to the millennium more easily, and to recognise how understandings of agency and the millennium were shaped by combinations of ideas, a new system of categorisation is formulated in this study. This takes account of both the nature of expected change, and the nature or basis of knowledge of the change itself – how the millennium *is expected to be realised*, and how it is *known to be coming*. Attention to both these issues produces a double or multiple category definition of millennial belief, better suited to marking shifts between modes of thought and expectation by some millenarians, and the holding of disparate, even apparently contradictory beliefs by others.

The first category concerns eschatology – beliefs about both the ‘end times’ and the ways that God is envisaged ‘breaking in’ or intervening in the existing order of things.¹⁰² At one end of a discernable spectrum of such beliefs is an ‘evolutionary’ eschatology – where the divine reordering of the present world is expected to take place gradually, developmentally, over an extensive time. At the other extreme is a wholly disruptive eschatology – where the change is expected to be sudden, immediate, and dramatic. The second category concerns epistemology – the theory of knowledge of the millennium. At one end of this second spectrum is a personal interpretation of the Bible,

¹⁰² Christopher Rowland and John Barton (eds.), *Apocalyptic in History and Tradition* (London, 2002), pp. 2-4.

at the other, an immediate inspiration, or the claim to receive a revelation from God. These categories are distinct, yet are definitively related, in the sense that a millennial conviction depends on both for its definition: one person might believe the millennium is coming on the basis of a personal interpretation of Scripture, and that its coming will disrupt the present state of the world; another believes in the millennium because they accept the message of a modern prophet who tells them it is coming, yet its realising will involve an evolutionary alteration. Yet others' beliefs involve different combinations of these interpretative/revelatory, evolutionary/disruptive categories.

Crucially, an individual millenarian's attitude to human or divine agency could be shaped by any aspect of their beliefs measured in these categories. Beliefs about the arrival of a divine messiah and their role on earth could also relate to any number of positions on both spectrums. In the permutations between beliefs, attitudes to agency are apparent, leaving the envisaged roles for God and humanity in the commencement of the millennium, to be anticipated or acted on.

Structure and Sources

This thesis is structured in three Parts, each of three chapters. The Parts are chronologically-defined, reflecting the argument of the thesis that Southcottians were only drawn into radical politics in the 1830s due to changes within the millenarian movement in the prior two decades. Between 1815 and 1835, what it was to be a Southcottian evolved for many, following shifts in their millennial theologies. Part 1 essentially records the condition, context and political concerns of Southcottianism in

1815-20; Part 2 identifies the developments within the movement which altered some of its adherents' attitudes to human and divine agency before 1830; and Part 3 re-examines the radical careers of Southcottians between 1830 and 1835 in the light of these developments.

Each Part of this thesis is the result of extensive research in a defined body of sources, significant elements of which have not been utilised in any academic study before. The single most important archive for this study is that held by the Panacea Society of Bedford, a twentieth-century Southcottian society. This organisation's substantial private collection of original nineteenth-century manuscript and rare printed material relating to successive generations of Southcottians, has only recently been made available for outside research, following its discovery by Dr Jane Shaw.¹⁰³ Part 1 makes notable use of the Panacea Society manuscript collections, along with other Southcottian archives in the British Library, University of Texas and elsewhere, to present a markedly revisionist account of surviving Southcottianism by 1820.¹⁰⁴ Additional accounts and data relating to Southcottians are also gleaned from material in the National Archives and local public records.

The three chapters in Part 2 utilise more printed evidence, though several of these works have never previously been studied. Chapter 4 presents a new interpretation of the Southcottian tradition in the 1820s under the leadership of John Wroe, based on an extremely rare edition of Wroe's prophetic writings – *The Private Communications*.¹⁰⁵ This edition, different in significant parts from Wroe's previously known and publicly-

¹⁰³ The opening of this Bedford archive has acted as a catalyst for the Oxford University Prophecy Project, directed by Jane Shaw and Christopher Rowland, within which this thesis has been researched and written.

¹⁰⁴ The interrelating of these archives is explained further in Chapter 1, pp. 39-43.

¹⁰⁵ [PS PN 561] John Wroe, *Private Communications given to John Wroe* (Wakefield, 1845).

available, *Divine Communications*, was for ‘believers’ eyes only’, but is made available for study for the first time through its presence in the Panacea Society archive.¹⁰⁶ Chapter 5, chronicling the 1820s career of Zion Ward, also cites pamphlets of Ward’s unreferenced in existing studies, as well as an extensive collection of writings by Ward and his followers, printed later in the century.¹⁰⁷ In Chapter 6, James Smith’s career up to 1830 is similarly traced in later published versions of his private letters and Southcottian sources, together with a range of printed sources on the wider culture of millennial interest and prophecy in 1820s evangelicalism, within which his pre-Southcottian beliefs developed.¹⁰⁸

Part 3 makes further use of the same Southcottian collections and sources as previous Parts, yet also reconstructs the history of such millenarians’ political activities from a wide selection of sources more commonly consulted by historians of radicalism. References to Southcottians in Home Office spy reports and the unstamped radical press are traced; private correspondence between Ward, Smith and radicals such as Richard Carlile is recovered and subjected to new examination.¹⁰⁹ Finally, a new interpretation of Smith’s radical career is drawn from a detailed analysis of his writings in radical publications between 1832 and 1834.

¹⁰⁶ John Wroe, *Divine Communications and Prophecies Given to John Wroe, During Ten Years from the Beginning of the Year 1823 to the End of 1832...* (Wakefield, 1834); Harrison and Green both quote from *Divine Communications*.

¹⁰⁷ Ward’s *Letters, Epistles, and Revelations* is not cited in other studies. Charles Bradley Holinsworth, grandson of the original Charles Bradley, privately published sixteen volumes of *Zion’s Works* between 1899 and 1904, which contain most of Ward’s published pamphlets between 1828 and his death in 1837, as well as hundreds of letters between Ward and his followers, including Bradley.

¹⁰⁸ Much of Smith’s personal correspondence is reproduced in his nephew’s biography, William Anderson Smith, *‘Shepherd’ Smith the Universalist: The Story of a Mind* (London, 1892).

¹⁰⁹ Manuscript letters from Ward and Smith in Richard Carlile’s Papers in the Huntington Library, cited only briefly or not at all in existing literature, inform significant aspects of the arguments of Chapters 7-9.

PART 1

1815-1820

Chapter 1

NUMBERS, GEOGRAPHIES AND GENDERS

On the first day of 1815, Joanna Southcott was buried at St John's Wood on the northern edge of London. The ceremony was carried out as secretly as possible. The coffin was removed from the Manchester Street rooms where the prophet had died, late at night, while the mob were dispersed; the grave was booked in an alias.¹ Four men attended the burial of the female prophet: three believers and an officiating clergyman. The three mourners were Col. William Tooke Harwood, a retired cavalry officer, William Sharp, the noted engraver, and William Tozer, a leading preacher at the Southcottian chapel in Duke Street, Southwark.² Each had been a frequent visitor to Southcott's bed-side during her final days, and ranked among the closest and most committed of her followers. Standing together in public, struggling in themselves to make sense of the apparent failure of Southcott's prophecy of Shiloh, they represented many thousands of other men and women across England, who also, on this and succeeding days, were privately reacting to the denial of their recent millenarian hope. The three left the graveside together, but in the year which followed, the ways Harwood, Sharp and Tozer came to understand Southcott's death, her prophetic claims, and the future prospects for the millennium, diverged dramatically. Each of their understandings further represented a mode of response in the wider Southcottian movement.

¹ British Library (hereafter BL), Add. MSS 26039/55-56, 1 Jan. 1815; see also F.W. Read, 'Joanna Southcott' *Notes and Queries*, 10th Series, 16, 16 Apr. 1904, pp. 301-2.

² Frances Brown, *Joanna Southcott: The Woman, Clothed with the Sun* (Cambridge, 2002) p. 301. For biographical details see, *Ibid.*, pp. 332-4 and James Hopkins, *A Woman to Deliver Her People: Joanna Southcott and English Millenarianism in an Era of Revolution* (Austin, 1982), pp. 154-69.

Harwood's belief in Southcott was 'very shaken' by her death, and within months friends reported his faith to be 'quite gone'.³ He had little further to do with those with whom he previously shared his millennial convictions, retiring from London to his native East Anglia. William Sharp, by contrast, came to be convinced Southcott's prophecy had been fulfilled: he resolved that Shiloh must have been born on Christmas Day, two days before Southcott's death on 27 December, but in a spiritual sense. Southcott had believed she was 'the woman clothed with the sun' described in Revelation 12; now the fate of her child fulfilled the vision of that biblical figure: 'she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations ... and the child was caught up to God, and to his throne'.⁴ For Sharp, Southcott's prophecies remained as important as ever to understanding how the millennium would soon arrive. Her hand-written and printed communications from God only required continued study and interpretation, alongside the Bible, to decipher God's intentions for the world. In the case of William Tozer, Southcott's death represented only the silencing of one voice of prophecy. There followed a consequent need to find an alternative source of divine inspiration and current insight. By April 1815, Tozer had reopened his Duke Street Chapel, closed since the previous August, to read and preach on the communications of a new prophet, George Turner, a Leeds merchant and leading Southcottian in the North.⁵

³ BL Add. MS 47795/67-68, 26 Apr. 1815.

⁴ Revelation 12:1-5; J.F.C. Harrison, *The Second Coming: Popular Millenarianism 1780-1850* (London, 1979), pp. 98 and 136.

⁵ BL Add. MS 47795/66, 26 Apr. 1815.

Archives and Interpretations

That a proportion of those that had believed in Joanna Southcott in 1814 withdrew or ‘fell away’ from her millenarian movement in 1815, that a further proportion re-interpreted her written prophecies to enable continued belief in their predictions and fulfilment, and that a remaining proportion looked to the message of new prophets, is broadly recognised in John Harrison’s standard history of the sect in the aftermath of Southcott’s death.⁶ Harrison asserted that ‘a majority of the believers’ continued as Southcottians after 1815, and that these divided between ‘old believers’ – those such as William Sharp who remained loyal to Southcott alone – and the followers of ‘false prophets’.⁷ Among the latter, George Turner was the dominant figure for the first five years after Southcott’s death, gaining ‘many believers in the north and ... elsewhere’. Several of Turner’s rivals to prophetic leadership were London-based: Samuel Sibley, a watchman in the City; Alexander Lindsey, who gathered a congregation in south London, and ‘Zebulon’ – the assumed name of Joseph Allman – who would have a long-standing following in the capital.⁸ Other figures identified by Harrison were two successors to Turner – Mary ‘Joanna’ Boon from south Devon and John Wroe from Bradford – in addition to Zion

⁶ Harrison, *Second Coming*, pp. 112-14, 135-6. Harrison’s references reveal his reliance on George Balleine’s account of the Southcottian tradition, *Past Finding Out* (London, 1956), for details of rival claimants to Southcott’s prophetic mantle and ‘rival theories’ developed to explain the Shiloh failure. This reliance is problematic given Balleine’s omission of references for his own research. In this thesis, Balleine’s account is treated with caution, and any point made by Harrison referencing Balleine is tested against the evidence of known Southcottian archives.

⁷ Harrison, *Second Coming*, pp. 114, 119-21, 135-9. ‘Old believers’ is Harrison’s term. Later in the nineteenth century, this tradition would adopt the name ‘Old Southcottians’, which they still retain. Gordon Allan, ‘Southcottian Sects from 1790 to the Present Day’, in Kenneth Newport and Crawford Gribben (eds.), *Expecting the End: Millennialism in Social and Historical Context* (Waco, 2006), p. 220.

⁸ Harrison, *Second Coming*, pp. 136-7.

Ward, ‘the last of the false prophets’ detailed in Harrison’s study.⁹ All of these, Harrison concluded, were only able to convince ‘a minority of Southcottians’; they ‘were false in that they were not acceptable to the majority of Southcottians’.¹⁰

Harrison’s assertions regarding majorities and minorities in the Southcottian movement were not substantiated by numbers. Rather, they appeared to be extrapolated from sociological case-studies of other millenarian movements in addition to both the quantity and content of the Southcottian archives available to him. To explain the strength of Southcottianism after 1814, Harrison identified the successful use of ‘failure mechanisms’ to overcome believers’ disappointment.¹¹ His terminology was drawn from *When Prophecy Fails*, a seminal post-war study of twentieth-century American sects expecting the destruction of the world, and their reactions to prophecy’s ‘disconfirmation’.¹² As the Southcottian failure mechanisms ‘operated quite smoothly’ – either re-framing previous beliefs about Shiloh or authorising a new prophet to reveal God’s message – so Southcottians mirrored the exemplar of the modern cases where ‘a majority’ of the previously-committed remained believers.¹³ Harrison’s subsequent assessment of the popularity of post-Southcott prophets noted the ‘sparse’ records available on most. This contrasted significantly with the prodigious volume of manuscript material generated by the ‘old believers’ deposited in the British Library and London

⁹ Harrison, *Second Coming*, pp. 137-52. Harrison’s study concluded in 1850. A number of figures claimed to be successors to Southcott after this, in Britain and North America, well into the twentieth century. See Allan, ‘Southcottian Sects’, pp. 234-6.

¹⁰ Harrison, *Second Coming*, pp. 152, 160.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 114, 206, 262.

¹² Leon Festinger, Henry Riecken and Stanley Schachter, *When Prophecy Fails: A social and psychological study of a modern group that predicted the destruction of the world* (New York, 1964).

¹³ Harrison, *Second Coming*, p. 114, Festinger, Riecken and Schachter found that those longest or most strongly convinced and deeply committed to a prophetic belief adapted most easily to a prophecy’s failure, remaining unshaken in their faith. Some very committed but beginning to doubt could find the experience a spur to greater commitment. It was typically those most recently converted, or displaying less commitment that were likely to relinquish their faith. *When Prophecy Fails*, pp. 193-208.

Metropolitan Archives.¹⁴ Harrison's study cited these letter collections extensively, and their correspondents' unswerving suspicions of later prophets were taken to be the predominant views of surviving believers.

Two further aspects of the Southcottian movement, besides the proportions of surviving believers, have been similarly evaluated on the basis of limited archive evidence, and had the result become standard opinion: the geographical spread of Southcottians and their gender composition. Both of these subjects were explored by James Hopkins in his 1972 doctoral thesis based on the University of Texas' substantial Southcottian manuscript collection.¹⁵ From three particular vellum scrolls in this archive, containing the names and place of residence of nearly 7000 early nineteenth-century Southcottians, Hopkins mapped the distribution of the Southcottian movement across England, and calculated a ratio of female to male members.¹⁶ He identified Southcottian strongholds in London, Yorkshire, Devon and Somerset, and concluded there was a 'much larger proportion of women over men in the Southcottian movement, 63 percent to 37 percent'.¹⁷ These findings were first published in Harrison's subsequent study, then Hopkins' own book.¹⁸ They have since been cited in numerous works, with the gender proportion in particular used as key evidence in the arguments of Barbara Taylor and

¹⁴ Harrison, *Second Coming*, pp. 136, 246-7. For full titles of these collections, see Bibliography, p. 332. Harrison was also aware of the University of Texas Southcott collection and a manuscript collection owned by the Blockley Antiquarian Society, but did not consult these directly in his study. His reference to material in the Texas collection were quoted from James Hopkins' Ph.D. thesis. See footnote below.

¹⁵ James Hopkins, 'Joanna Southcott: A Study of Popular Religion and Radical Politics, 1789-1814' (Texas Univ., Austin, Ph.D. Thesis, 1972); Eugene Wright, *A Catalogue of the Joanna Southcott Collection at the University of Texas* (Austin, 1968).

¹⁶ These are University of Texas, Austin (UT), Joanna Southcott Collection (JSC) 370, 371 and 372. In his subsequent book, Hopkins added data from several further manuscript lists in the London Metropolitan Archives, though the names on these lists totalled only a few hundred. These took Hopkins' total sample to 7,249 names.

¹⁷ Hopkins, *Thesis*, pp. 168-72, 418-26; idem, *Woman*, p. 85.

¹⁸ Harrison *Second Coming*, pp. 110, 249; Hopkins, *Woman*, pp. 75-86, 219-25. Harrison recognised Hopkins' sources to be incomplete, noting their omission of groups of West Midlands believers. He did not, however, present an alternative, more accurate geographical guide.

Anna Clark for Southcott's appeal to women, and her followers' place among those plebeian women contesting the sexual hierarchies and class agendas of their age.¹⁹

The opening of the Panacea Society archive in Bedford and an opportunity to re-read manuscript material used in existing academic studies of Southcottianism allows this thesis to revise these current views, in some cases significantly. Through a process perhaps best described as the triangulation of archives, new sources in Bedford have been related to Southcottian material in London (used by Harrison) and in Texas (used by Hopkins), both to identify significant new evidence on the millenarian movement and to reinterpret previously cited sources, to reach alternative conclusions on the proportional size of surviving groups, the spread of Southcottians before and after Southcott's death, and the ratio of men to women believers. In addition, evidence from each of these archives has enabled the locations of an unprecedented number of Southcottian meeting places, particularly before 1814, to be traced in chapel licensing records, for the first time.

The insights of archives

The crucial insight provided by this research method, and the historical point made most clear, is that from the first year after Southcott's death, what remained of the Southcottian movement was fiercely divided between those that accepted George Turner as a succeeding prophet to Southcott and those that did not. This divide generated two distinct networks of shared belief, of perhaps similar size, stretching across varied parts of the country, and linked by personal correspondence or personal visits. The divide was

¹⁹ Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1983), p. 166; Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley, 1995), pp. 110.

crossed on rare but notable occasions, when an individual or group chose to leave one network for the other, after doubts or new convictions. Yet, in most cases, the decision to accept or reject a new prophet after Southcott was a decision for life: the two separate epistolary networks, where believers corresponded with the like-believing, effectively cemented a sectarian split in the Southcottian religious body. Their correspondence and opinions reflected their side of this split, and its physical remains have come to form separate manuscript collections in different parts of the world.

The manuscript collections consulted directly in Harrison's study belonged exclusively to surviving Southcottians who rejected all post-Southcott prophets.²⁰ Two collections found in the Panacea Society archive were produced by groups on either side of the 1815 divide: one set of several hundred letters dated 1815-1822 were exchanged within a network of Turner followers; an entirely separate body of correspondence, from these years and later, belonged to 'old believers' of the same opinion as Harrison's subjects.²¹ The Texas collection has a more complicated provenance: it belonged to the Bennett family of London who initially accepted the prophetic claims of Turner, then left this network before 1820 to join the rival 'old believers'.²² It consequently contains manuscripts relating to Turner Southcottians between 1815 and 1819, but later letters from allies of William Sharp and others.²³ Significantly, specific sources from this period of affiliation to Turner have not been adequately understood in the context of the beliefs and practices of this distinct section of Southcottianism.

²⁰ Harrison, *Second Coming*, pp. 246-7. Individuals involved in post-Southcott prophecy, including Turner himself, feature in these MSS collections, yet only in pre-1815 material.

²¹ Panacea Society (PS) PN 238-243 and PS PN 246-252. For full titles of these collections, see Bibliography, p. 332.

²² Wright, *Catalogue*, p. 1; UT JSC 372.

²³ Wright, *Catalogue*, pp. 68-100.

This chapter presents a new interpretation of the numerical state of Southcottianism after Southcott's death, and the relative size and autonomy of surviving groups. It identifies the limitations of existing maps of Southcottian reach, and offers a corrective assessment of the geographical scope of the movement before and after December 1814. Finally, it queries the evidential basis for existing opinions on the proportion of female Southcottians, and puts forward a revised gender ratio for the movement based on more comprehensive and consistent sources. This last point is shown to have particular implications for arguments presenting Southcottianism as a 'feminist' movement. The other points also relate to interpretations of radicalism, by demonstrating the essential distinction between groups and networks of surviving Southcottians. Later chapters will show how these differences determined, in significant part, the evolution of patterns of religious behaviour influential in James Smith's developing opinions, as well as the reception that Zion Ward's messianic and political claims received among Southcottians.

Numbering the Remnants

Like many millenarians, Southcottians loved to count themselves. The biblical scenes of Revelation, which they wished so much to witness and partake in, are awash with precisely numbered multitudes. In a practice adopted during Southcott's public ministry, Southcottians brought themselves consciously closer to the drama of such scenes by being 'sealed', so hoping to number among the celebrated 144,000 'sealed out of every

tribe' in Revelation 7.²⁴ The process of 'sealing' involved an individual signing a petition for 'Christ's glorious and peaceable Kingdom to be established ... and Satan destroyed', after which they received one of Southcott's 'seals' – a stamped piece of paper with her signature.²⁵ The collating of the petitions, to form long scrolls of names kept in Southcottian chapels, formed a further step towards their becoming 'those who are written in the Lamb's book of life' in Revelation 21.²⁶ Such practices were sustained or adapted after Southcott's death: 'Old believers' continued to seal new converts on the same petitions; succeeding prophets often instituted their own counting regimes, attesting to new beliefs but always including the idea of 'signing' or giving one's name.

Only a fraction of the original sealing petitions from Southcott's lifetime survive; extensive records of post-1814 counting exercises are extant for George Turner's followers only.²⁷ In previous studies, this complicated efforts to number Southcottians during Southcott's career accurately; here it complicates the exercise of calculating proportions of different believers after her death.

The most reliable estimate of the number of convinced, committed Southcottians at the moment of their founding prophet's death is just under 12,400. This statistic is compiled from reports in Southcottian sources of the specific numbers of people undergoing Southcott's sealing exercise in the later years of her prophetic career

²⁴ Revelation 7:4.

²⁵ Joanna Southcott, *Divine and Spiritual Communications* (London, 1803), p. 20. The seals were controversial because they gained a reputation, during the Napoleon invasion scare of 1803-04, as a protective charm. Southcott was repeatedly accused of selling the 'seals' for profit. Edward Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, revised edn (Harmondsworth, 1968), pp. 423-4; Hopkins, *Woman*, pp. 103-7.

²⁶ Revelation 21:23-27. In October 1812, George Turner wrote to William Wadman: 'there is a great work begun at Birmingham ... they have 2 meeting houses about a mile distant from each other... I was there 2 Sundays and the first Sunday 21 gave in their names. [T]hey keep them upon a Roll'. PS PN 252/5, 12 Oct. 1812.

²⁷ Hopkins, *Woman*, pp. 75-6. The various surviving lists of Southcottians, from different dates, are discussed below, pp. 46-7, 53-4, 67-8.

(between 1808 and 1814).²⁸ Both Harrison and Hopkins erroneously added to this figure a further number reported to be ‘sealed’ by January 1804 – 8144 – so claiming a total Southcottian membership in late-1814 of over 20,000.²⁹ This notably ignored the evidence for the drastic changes made to the ‘sealing’ process, and the genuine beliefs of those it counted, between its first introduction in 1803 and the later period. Before 1805, Southcott stated that the seals were for both ‘believers or unbelievers’; she was directed to offer them to all, ‘whether they were true believers in thy visitation or not’.³⁰ In the wake of criticism that she was selling the seals for profit, Southcott made several attempts to control their distribution between 1804 and 1807, instructing that the sealing ‘for unbelievers [be] ceased’, then instituting a ‘second sealing’ (started from zero) and insisting each applicant for membership of her millenarian movement produce evidence of their acquaintance with her prophetic writings.³¹ Given that committed believers sealed under the old system were ‘re-sealed’ in 1807 and counted anew, the figures for the sealed from this point onwards represent a far better guide to the movement’s true membership at the close of 1814.

²⁸ BL Add. MSS 47800/126-131 record that by September 1808, 4673 previously-sealed men and women were recorded receiving ‘the second sealing’, while a further 1298 people had come to the sealing as new recruits, making a total of 5971. Between the end of 1808 and December 1814, ‘upwards of 6400 have given their names’ to be sealed. Philip Pullen, *Index to the Divine and Spiritual Writings of Joanna Southcott* (London, 1815), p. 170.

²⁹ Joanna Southcott, *Sound an Alarm* (Leeds, 1804), p. 24. Neither historian accepted even the 20,000 figure as representing ‘the total number of adherents to the Southcottian cause’. It was substantially lower than contemporary rumour: newspapers consistently reported tens of thousands of people – in one report, over 100,000 – to be followers of Southcott. Harrison concluded that ‘the sealed were the hard core of believers’, and, as in other movements, ‘an unknown number of attenders and readers of her pamphlets’ lay beyond this nucleus, a group still ‘to some degree influenced by Joanna’. Hopkins assumed that ‘the names of many believers never found their way onto the lists’. For him, the estimated 108,000 copies of Southcott’s works circulating in England by 1816, suggested contemporary accounts of several tens of thousands of believers deserved greater weight. Harrison, *Second Coming*, p. 109; Hopkins, *Woman*, pp. 83-5.

³⁰ Joanna Southcott, *Answer to the Five Charges* (London, 1805), p. 18.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 18; Southcott, *Sound an Alarm*, p. 52; *Trewman’s Exeter Flying Post*, 25 Dec. 1806, p. 4. In 1808, Southcott attended a London sealing ceremony where applicants had ‘questions put to them’ before the seals were physically handed over, see UT JSC 331/50-51. Believers usually proved their possession of one or more of Southcott’s books.

No equivalent estimate is required of the number of Southcottians who accepted George Turner as Southcott's successor in the years immediately after her death: a complete register of his national following survives in the University of Texas archive.³² Turner publicised his prophetic claim within days of Southcott's burial, pointedly insisting his communications came from the same source as the previous prophet: 'Give Ear for I am God', Turner's first prophecy declared; 'the visitation of my spirit is from me the Lord ... my spirit shall direct my people'.³³ Turner, a former Methodist and prominent follower of the 1790s prophet Richard Brothers, had reported receiving prophetic insights long before this, and, significantly, had had several of his prophecies approved by Southcott.³⁴ This lent considerable legitimacy to his assurances and instructions to Southcottians from early 1815, that Shiloh's arrival was only temporarily delayed, and they should continue to wait, meet, and worship together, preparing for the messiah and the millennium's imminent arrival. From May 1816, Turner placed frequent advertisements in London newspapers declaring 'Earth, earth hear the Voice of the Lord! Prepare for the coming of Shiloh!'; he then predicted the messiah's arrival on several dates, up to 28 January 1817.³⁵ In preparation for these predicted dates, Turner instituted his first method of registration for groups accepting his prophecies. In a manner echoing Southcott's sealing petition, followers were instructed to give their names to attest to their

³² UT JSC 372.

³³ BL Add. MS 47798/72, 30 Jan. 1815.

³⁴ Turner published pamphlets and hand-bills of his own prophecies in Leeds before and during Southcott's public prophetic career, including *Communications of the Holy Spirit of God immediately imparted at different times to George Turner of Leeds* (Leeds, 1795) and *A Call to all the World, Nations and People commanded by the Lord God* (Leeds, 1800). On Turner see Harrison, *Second Coming*, pp. 119-21. Deborah Madden has researched George Turner's prophetic career for a forthcoming article, 'Israel's Scattered Seed: Restoration and the 'place' of Zion in the Prophecies of Richard Brothers, George Turner and John Wroe'. I am grateful to Dr Madden for sight of this article, and I indicate below where insights from her research are relevant to this study.

³⁵ *Imperial Weekly Gazette*, 12 May 1816; George Turner, *A Book of Wonders* (London, 1817), pp. 194-248.

belief in ‘the command of the Lord to George Turner’, and their desire to ‘unite to obey the Lord ... waiting his appearing and his son Shiloh to reign over us on earth’.³⁶ A single vellum scroll collating the names subscribed in this ritual reveals that 4045 adult men and women, in 80 different locations across England, counted themselves Turner followers.³⁷

This remarkable source was utilised by both Harrison and Hopkins. It is undated, yet its title – ‘The Roll of names by the command of the Lord to George Turner’ – led both scholars to date it loosely ‘between December 1814 and January 1817’.³⁸ The scroll may now be dated with more confidence: it was compiled following an explicit prophetic direction from Turner to ‘make up the roll of names’ in January 1816, removing the names of sealed Southcottians who did not accept Turner, then ordering ‘the rolls ... to be sent’ to Turner in London.³⁹ Two followers were then instructed, ‘to write them all in one roll; preserving the smaller rolls’, as, Turner’s prophetic voice declared, ‘thou must have all my children about thee in their names – to prove they are waiting my appearing to join my Son Shiloh, as my family on earth’.⁴⁰ The single, total roll was completed within the year.⁴¹

Though the title of the scroll itself strongly implied its exclusive relation to post-1814 Turner Southcottians (and it therefore not recording any other kind of surviving

³⁶ UT JSC 372.

³⁷ Ibid. This number is the actual number of names appearing on this source, not the last number recorded next to the last name (as quoted by Harrison and Hopkins). Errors were made in the original entry of names, with duplication of some numbers, or numbers with no name next to them. All numbers from UT sources given below are similarly recounted.

³⁸ Harrison, *Second Coming*, p. 248; Hopkins, *Woman*, p. 243.

³⁹ Turner, *Book of Wonders*, pp. 181-3. Harrison does not cite this prophetic work.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 183.

⁴¹ A letter exchanged among Turner followers indicates the roll was completed by January 1817. In May 1820, in answer to a request for a copy of the names given in the Yorkshire town of Pontefract, the group lamented that, ‘we cannot get the roll as the man that kept the righting [sic] fell from the visitation to Mr Turner in Jan[uary] 1817’. PS PN 238/50, 21 May 1820.

Southcottian of its time), neither previous study recognised its significance as an apparently comprehensive record of a strain of post-Southcott belief. Hopkins, especially, treated the source as commensurate with any other from when Southcott was alive, so underestimating the partiality of its picture of the millenarian movement.⁴² This single scroll of over four thousand names enables close to one third of the total number of Southcottians at the end of 1814 to be identified with the new prophet Turner within two years.

For all other Southcottian remnants in 1815 and after – all those who could not accept Turner’s claims in 1816 – the numerical evidence is, once again, largely a case of estimates. Several sources suggest groups of ‘old believer’ Southcottians felt little enthusiasm for revising their total numbers of ‘the sealed’ downwards after secessions or withdrawals prompted by doubt: they were only interested in sealing new members as a continuation of Southcott’s mission, and the sources they left reflect this.⁴³ However, some indicators are available which point to this second sort of Southcottian, and its alternative correspondence network, approaching perhaps an equivalent size to Turner’s millenarian body, but not exceeding it. Their numbers may be put at between a quarter and a third of the total Southcottians in late-1814; they were not a majority.

One indicator of the minimum numbers involved in groups who refused to accept Turner’s prophetic claim is an extrapolation from figures of those later attracted to the claims of Zion Ward. This is because Ward’s Southcottian following from the late-1820s came in large part from among believers who had not accepted a preceding prophet since

⁴² Hopkins, *Woman*, pp. 242-3.

⁴³ BL Add. MSS 57860/239-240, includes 18 new names to be sealed by Thomas Foley. UT JSC 370 – a sealing petition used in a London Southcottian chapel between 1809 and late-1814 – includes 27 names added between 1815 and 1839.

Southcott. Ward gained stronger support in parts of the Midlands than Turner ever did, in Birmingham especially, but also in parts of Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire.⁴⁴ In Nottingham, for instance, Turner had 36 followers in 1816; in the early 1830s, Ward had ‘upwards of 200 believers’ in the town.⁴⁵ That these were Southcottians surviving from 1814 is evident from letters exchanged between them and groups elsewhere, un-cited in previous studies. During 1829, the Nottingham group wrote to London Southcottians specifically assuring them that they had not followed any prophet since Southcott: ‘we have ... been steady Believers in the sacred Mission of our dear spiritual Mother with yourselves for many years; neither have we turned to the right or left to follow any other visitation’.⁴⁶

Ward is known to have instituted his own ceremony for Southcottians ‘signing’ for belief in him in 1831, and this attracted nearly 2000 names.⁴⁷ Only a small section of this support came from Southcottians once associated with Turner, in south-west Yorkshire, south Lancashire, and Kent.⁴⁸ The overwhelming majority of those who flocked to acknowledge Ward as Shiloh at this later point had been ‘old believers’ and correspondents in the alternative network of Southcottian groups. Letters exchanged in this network which survive in both the British Library and Panacea Society collections attest to the threat seen to be posed by Ward – the ‘perfidious and deluded false prophet

⁴⁴ On Birmingham believers accepting Ward, see PS PN 239/5 26 Sep. 1830; 246/42, 3 Nov. 1831; Zion Ward, *Zion’s Works*, vols. xiii-xiv. This is discussed further in Chapter 5. On *Zion’s Works* see Introduction, p. 34 n.107.

⁴⁵ UT JSC 372; Zion Ward to James Smith, 24 July 1832, in *Zion’s Works*, xvi. 209.

⁴⁶ Thomas Pierce to Richard Stephens, 14 Oct. 1829, in Zion Ward, *Letters, Epistles, and Revelations, of Jesus Christ addressed to the believers in the glorious reign of Messiah* (London, 1831), p. 78.

⁴⁷ Ward compiled a ‘book’ of ‘the names of all those who wish for Christ to reign and rule in them, and are longing for redemption from all evil’. Zion Ward to Thomas Pierce, 9 Nov. 1831, *Zion’s Works*, xvi. 331. James Smith, who was closely acquainted with Ward during this counting exercise, gives a figure of ‘nearly two-thousand’ followers in an article on Ward in *Crisis*, 31 August 1833, iii. 275.

⁴⁸ Zion Ward, *Creed of the True Believers* (Birmingham, 1832), pp. 7-8; Zion Ward to John Hague of Chatham, 6 Aug. 1829, in *Letters, Epistles, and Revelations*, p. 36. Most of Turner’s supporters in these areas remained loyal to John Wroe, the successor they accepted in 1822-23. See Chapter 4, pp. 140-5.

that has of late rose up'.⁴⁹ Considerable bitterness was shown to those who opted to follow him. Yet the 'old believer' network evidently endured, surviving the withdrawal of many of its Midlands groups, and some in London.⁵⁰ From this, as well as less direct evidence including the tenor of discussion and debate in letters, it may be inferred that the near 2000 figure did not constitute an entirely ruinous secession from this body, though still a significant one. Beyond this, it is difficult to project with any real accuracy. That Ward drew away about a half is probable: traceable correspondents rarely give the impression that their letters were written on behalf of a local group anything larger than a hundred, and their addresses indicate their presence in between ten and twenty other locations.⁵¹

From this, Harrison's original assertion that 'a majority' of Southcottians continued to adhere to the movement in 1815 is both borne out by figures, and exceeded by circumstantial evidence. His proportions, however, were inaccurate. Close to half of the 12,400 sealed by 1814 may be accounted for in the registered followers of just post-Southcott claimants – Turner and Ward. These put the numbers of surviving Southcottians in the six thousands themselves, and, with those who remained 'old believers', most likely into the 7000-8000 range. The proportional fate of Southcottians in 1815 may in fact have reflected the fate of the three public mourners at Southcott's funeral: one in three appears to have followed a new prophet; one in three remained adherents of solely Southcott's prophecies (until a sub-section of this group accepted

⁴⁹ BL Add. MSS 57860/231-33, 7 and 9 Feb. 1830; PS PN 246/42, 3 Nov. 1831.

⁵⁰ In the early 1840s, elements from this network formed 'the Southcottian Church'. London Metropolitan Archives (LMA) Acc 1040/288-297.

⁵¹ See below pp. 58-63.

those prophecies were fulfilled in Zion Ward); and the remaining one in three cannot be traced believing any more.

It is worth noting, briefly, where such figures put the Southcottian movement in relative scales of English religious dissent in this period. In numerical terms, Southcottianism between 1815 and 1820 sat somewhere above the non-Calvinist General Baptists and various small Methodist offshoots such as the Bible Christians, and just below the still regionally-specific Methodist New Connexion.⁵² All other official forms of Protestant dissent in this period were substantially larger: Particular Baptists and Congregationalists numbers stood around the thirty and forty-thousand marks respectively, as probably did the combined total of Presbyterians and Unitarians.⁵³ Wesleyan Methodism – by far the most successful form of English dissent in the age – had numbers approaching 150,000.⁵⁴ Figures for Primitive Methodism are only available in the 1820s, though its extremely rapid growth will have taken its numbers above those for Southcottians comparatively quickly.⁵⁵ Indeed, this example underlines the extent Southcottian millenarianism was unusual as a form of Protestant dissent in this age, in its declining after 1814, and not enjoying incremental growth. The Quakers were the only other national dissenting body to experience actual numerical decline in this period.⁵⁶

⁵² Comparisons in this paragraph are based on figures in Alan Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change, 1740-1914* (London, 1976), pp. 30-48. General Baptist (1810-5322; 1820-7,673); Methodist New Connexion (1811-7448; 1821-10,404). The Bible Christians barely exceeded 6,000 before 1830. On sectarian Methodism see Deborah Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters: Female Preaching and Popular Religion in Industrial England* (Princeton, 1985) pp. 140-58.

⁵³ Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, p. 41.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 30-7.

⁵⁵ David Hempton, *Methodism and Politics in British Society, 1750-1850* (London, 1984) pp. 67-73; Julia Stewart Werner, *The Primitive Methodist Connexion: Its Background and Early History* (Madison, 1984).

⁵⁶ Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, pp. 40-1. Quaker numbers were between a third and 50% more than Southcottians.

Geographical Spread

Joanna Southcott lived the last months of her life in the glare of nationwide press attention. Within a month of her death, the news was carried by newspapers in almost every English region.⁵⁷ Such notice in part reflected the extraordinary nature of Southcott's story. Yet the wide extent of interest in the expected birth and the fulfilment of her prophecies also mirrored the spread of the prophet's organised community of followers by this date. Organised, public religious meetings of Southcottians, rare before 1811, proliferated widely following the changes in the religious toleration laws in 1812, so that by 1814, a national network of Southcottian chapels was established from Devon to the South-east, the West Midlands to the Yorkshire coast.⁵⁸

Existing histories have known little about these Southcottian chapels outside London, barely even their locations. Better evidence has been available on early meeting spaces in south London – in Bermondsey, the Elephant and Castle, and Southwark.⁵⁹ The Texas archive includes a second scroll of Southcottian names (dated this time) from one London chapel recording 1421 people applying to be sealed between March 1809 and December 1814.⁶⁰ To gauge the provincial spread of the movement in Southcott's lifetime, scholars have turned to alternative non-chapel sources, and notably relied on

⁵⁷ *London Morning Chronicle*, 2 Jan. 1815; *Hull Packet and Original Weekly... Advertiser*, 4 Jan. 1815; *Trewman's Exeter Flying Post... and Cornish Advertiser*, 5 Jan. 1815; *Ipswich Journal*, 7 Jan. 1815; *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 7 Jan. 1815; *Liverpool Mercury*, 20 Jan. 1815.

⁵⁸ The 1812 Places of Religious Worship Act relaxed elements of the licensing conditions for Protestant dissenters' meetings, though still required the ecclesiastical or civic authorities – the local bishop or Quarter Sessions – to maintain licence registers. David Hempton, *The Religion of the People: Methodism and popular religion, c.1750-1900*. (London, 1996), pp. 109-29; C.W. Welch, 'The Registration of meeting-houses', *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 3:3 (1966) 116-20.

⁵⁹ Hopkins, *Woman*, pp. 98, 205; Alan Crocker and Stephen Humphrey, 'The Papermaker and the Prophetess: Elias Carpenter of Neckinger Mill, Bermondsey, Supporter of Joanna Southcott', *Surrey Archaeological Collections*, 89 (2002), 129-31.

⁶⁰ UT JSC 370. This also includes a further 27 names added between 1825 and 1839.

post-1814 sources. In his original doctoral research, Hopkins collated the data from the London sealing scroll, with that from the scroll of 4000-odd Turner followers in 1816, and from a third scroll – a list of 1291 names in 59 different English locations dateable after 1816 – to produce a single statistical sample of nearly 7000 names and addresses.⁶¹ From this Hopkins drew his analysis of Southcottian strongholds and the national reach of the movement, which, as indicated above, is reiterated in every subsequent study of Southcottianism.⁶²

This approach, collating data from sources dated before and after December 1814, and relying heavily on registers counting only a section of surviving Southcottians (those linked to George Turner), is problematic. The extent of the sectarian split within Southcottianism from 1815 onwards means that this approach could only ever produce a partial, and to some extent distorted, picture of Southcottian geography. The third Texas scroll, though titled only ‘The Roll of Believers’, is recognisably also a source only on Turner’s following and features many duplications of names from the larger scroll.⁶³ As a result, Hopkins’ measure of the spread of Southcottians beyond the capital was based entirely on areas of the country where Turner was accepted; it did not record where any other form of post-Southcott belief survived, nor where Southcottians were known before 1814 and not after.

Alternative maps of the traceable geographical spread of Southcottianism by 1814, and the comparative extent of the two networks of surviving believers after this date, may be drawn using both a more diverse range of sources, and known evidence with

⁶¹ The third scroll is UT JSC 371. Though undated, it has a watermark of 1816, indicating it was compiled after this date.

⁶² Hopkins, *Thesis*, pp. 168-72, 418-26; idem, *Woman*, p. 85.

⁶³ See below, pp. 65-6.

greater circumspection. It is now possible to piece together previously-unknown elements of the original Southcottian chapel network, from contemporary license applications and references in Southcottian correspondence. A significant number of other Southcottian locations are revealed in alternative pre-1815 sources. Two years later, the relative strength of support for George Turner in each region and individual settlement, at the single point of his registration of followers, may be mapped using the largest of the Texas manuscript scrolls. Finally, the addresses of correspondents in the old believers' national network after 1815 enable something of the reach of this alternative body of surviving belief to be recorded, albeit without the confidence of comprehensiveness available in the sources on Turner Southcottians.

Mapping Southcottians in 1814

The first public meetings of Southcottians took place in London in early 1803, and accounts of their locations and ceremonies, including the distribution of 'wine and cakes', the reading of Southcott's prophecies, hymn-singing, and 'the uplifting of hands for Christ's Kingdom to come' are well-described in existing histories.⁶⁴ Beyond London, Southcottians also gathered together from this period, more often in private houses.⁶⁵ In Yorkshire, due to rigorous record-keeping by the ecclesiastical authorities, the proliferation of such Southcottian meetings is traceable in the license registers for Protestant dissenters' meetings. Cross-referencing the names and addresses of known Southcottians (from their surviving correspondence) with license applications reveals that by 1806, Southcottian meetings had multiplied in the West Riding, with licences granted

⁶⁴ Hopkins, *Woman*, pp. 109-12.

⁶⁵ Southcottian correspondence records these early meetings of 'the friends' in Chesterfield, Stockport, Nottingham, Exeter, and Bristol. BL Add. MSS 32636/33 and 177, 13 Oct. 1803 and June 1805; BL Add. MSS 447794/59 and 94, 5 Aug. 1805 and 23 Feb. 1807; BL Add. MS 447795/56, 22 Nov. 1808.

to houses in central Leeds and nearby Holbeck, in Bradford and numerous villages and townships to the south and west to Halifax.⁶⁶

When the national network of Southcottian chapels was established after 1811, the best records were again kept in Yorkshire. Leeds Southcottians licensed a ‘Chapel in George Court’ and Halifax Southcottians a ‘Zion Chapel’.⁶⁷ Further chapels were opened at York and Doncaster, and numerous rooms were licensed across the North and West Ridings.⁶⁸ In Lancashire, Southcottians conformed to a practice first adopted by London chapels, calling their meeting space ‘the Millennium Chapel’ (though with less conformity in its spelling).⁶⁹ In 1812-1814, a ‘Mellennium Chapel’ was opened in Manchester in June 1813, two ‘Mellenium Chapels’ in Blackburn, and a ‘Millenium Chapel’ in Salford.⁷⁰ In 1813, a substantial meeting space was acquired for the many Southcottians recorded in Ashton-under-Lyne, and further rooms were licensed in the Colne region in the Pennines.⁷¹ Beyond the two Pennine counties, designated chapels were known in Devon, Somerset and Bristol, while in Birmingham there were ‘two meeting houses about a mile distant from each other’.⁷² At Chesterfield in Derbyshire, believers rented ‘a meeting house lately occupied by the Kilhamites Methodists’; while chapels were opened at the same time in neighbouring Nottinghamshire. By 1812, Southcottians ‘at Deptford’ were reported to ‘have a large meeting place and crowded

⁶⁶ Borthwick Institute of Historical Research (BIHR), University of York, Records of the Diocesan Administration of the Archbishop of York, Dissenters, Fac Bk 3 (1793-1816) ff.342 and 346, 392, 396, 404, 409, 414 and 422. These meeting spaces were traced by cross-referencing the names of the 12 sponsors of each application against registers of Southcottians in that precise locality.

⁶⁷ BIHR, Fac Bk 3 (1793-1816) ff.603, 642.

⁶⁸ Ibid., ff.608-610, 613, 622, 636-637, 643, 652 and 659; PS PN 237/24.

⁶⁹ PS PN 242/1.

⁷⁰ Lancashire Record Office (LRO), QDV/4/53-54. Record Book of Dissenting Meetings registered in the Consistory Court of the Diocese of Chester [since 1812].

⁷¹ LRO, QDV/4/55; BL Add. MS 447794/128.

⁷² LMA Acc 1040/3-4, 7; PS PN 239/2 15 Jan. 1815; PS PN 252/5 12 Oct. 1812; On Somerset Southcottians see P.J. Tobin, ‘The Southcottians in England 1782-1895’, (Manchester Univ. M.A. Thesis, 1978), pp. 197-244.

and in other places within 10 or 14 miles of London ... they are continually beginning new meetings'.⁷³ One of these chapels, at Teddington in Middlesex, notably left detailed records of its 125-strong membership by this date.⁷⁴

If the locations of designated chapels and meeting spaces are taken to indicate places of particular numerical strength for Southcottians, the addresses of more isolated individuals or small groups of believers enable the broader national reach of Southcott's movement to be demonstrated. Such provincial addresses survive in both the correspondence exchanged with London Southcottians, and sources from London chapels, included the surviving sealing register from 1809-1814.⁷⁵ Believers living in counties with no urban chapel could apply to be sealed at a London chapel, and close to 150 named Southcottians, in disparate locations in the Home Counties and further afield, are recorded in this way. Figure 1 maps their distribution together with the Southcottian chapel network by 1814.

Mapping Turner Southcottians

Every Southcottian chapel was closed from the end of August 1814, following a prophetic decree from Southcott that 'no more preachings or meetings of the Friends are to be holden ... till after the Birth of Shiloh'.⁷⁶ This left the future of the chapels and any other form of public meeting of believers in 1815 unclear, given that Shiloh had not, after all, been born. For followers of George Turner, his claims to divine insight allowed new

⁷³ PS PN 252/5, 12 Oct. 1812.

⁷⁴ This survives in LMA Acc 1040/1-2.

⁷⁵ UT JSC 370. This includes the addresses of believers, with most in London but close to 150 names from disparate locations in the Home Counties and further afield.

⁷⁶ PS PN 237/24.



Figure 1: Southcottian Locations 1814 – traced meeting places and believers’ addresses.

Sources: PS PN 237/24; PS PN 252/1-5; BL Add. MSS 32636/33; 447794/59 and 94; 32636/177; 447795/56; LMA Acc 1040/1-4, 22-3, 86-7; BIHR, Fac Bk 3 (1793-1816) ff. 342, 346, 392, 396, 404, 409, 414, 422, 543, 603, 608-10, 613, 622, 636-7, 642, 643, 649, 652 and 659; LRO, QDV/4/53-5; UT, JSC 370.

prophecies to supersede prior commands; old directions from Southcott could be replaced by new instructions from Turner. Through Turner, the divine instruction in early 1815 was: ‘let my children meet in a body before me the Lord that are in one place ... that I may bless them’.⁷⁷ For this reason, by Spring 1815 Turner’s prophecies were read in ‘many private houses opened once a week’ across the country, in addition to Tozer’s Southwark Chapel.⁷⁸ In time, the former chapels in many other areas were re-opened, and numerous new venues were licensed.⁷⁹

The most complete record of the extent of surviving Southcottianism adhering to Turner’s prophecies remains the single Texas collection scroll of 4045 names, now dated 1816.⁸⁰ An invaluable feature of this source is its distribution of names under their nearest meeting. This enables a map of post-Southcott adherents of Turner to be drawn, denoting not only geographical position but the relative numerical size of each surviving congregation. Figure 2 confirms Turner’s success in Yorkshire, Lancashire and the West Country, while also illustrating a significant following in London and the Thames estuary, yet only smaller, scattered groups elsewhere.

Other surviving Southcottians

To those Southcottians for whom Southcott’s prophetic communications remained central to their understanding of the coming of the millennium post-1814, disobeying a directive given by the prophet, or acting in ways which negated it, were unacceptable. Because of this, ‘old believers’ were firmly opposed to the re-opening of any chapel in 1815. Such

⁷⁷ PS PN 240/11, 1 July 1819.

⁷⁸ BL Add. MS 47795/66, 15 Apr. 1815.

⁷⁹ Records of new licenses are, again, most easily traceable in Yorkshire. BIHR, Dissenters Meeting Houses Register 1 (1816-1834) ff.58-61, 63-64, 102, 105.

⁸⁰ UT JSC 372.

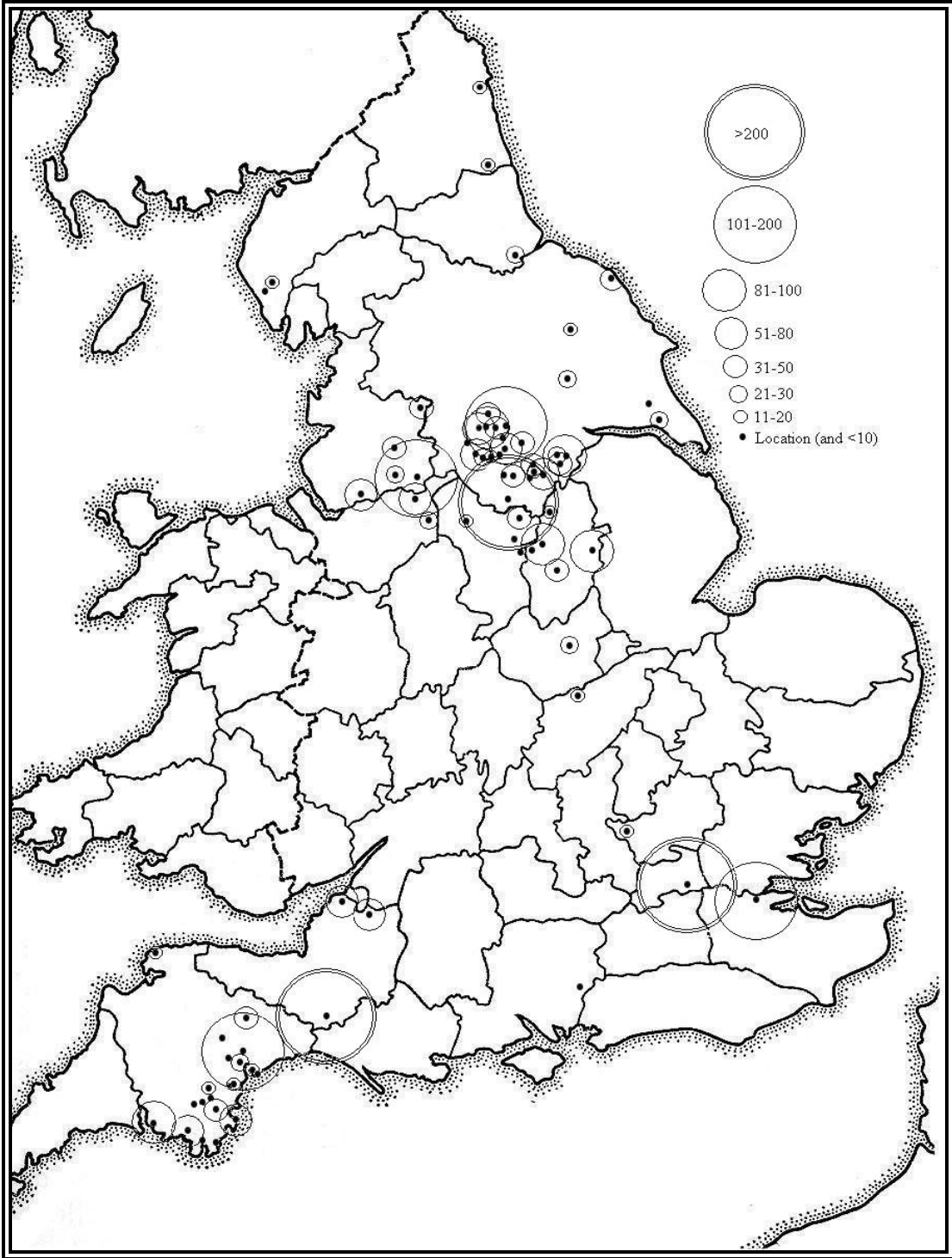


Figure 2: Locations of George Turner followers in 1816, by size of congregation.

Source: UT JSC 372.

Southcottians, including William Sharp, the clergymen Thomas Foley and Samuel Eyre, and Southcott's aristocratic amanuensis Jane Townley, all firmly believed the conditions for no public meetings still applied; such meetings would only be allowed once the messiah had come physically.⁸¹ For several years, these Southcottians and others like them continued to meet nonetheless in private, in meetings hosted in believers' homes.

In 1817, Townley advised a York Southcottian that 'if you meet in harmony' and went no further than 'a few friends meeting together at each others houses, not at any regular house or to have any speaker but to converse friendly together and point out the fulfilments [of prophecies]', then this still obeyed the direction.⁸²

Significant numbers of 'old believers' persisted in regions also populated by Turner followers. The distinction between Southcottians prepared only to meet in private, and those permitted to gather in public in Turner's chapels, could divide near neighbours as well as adjacent villages and towns. In Halifax, the substantial Zion Chapel was closed in 1814, and never re-opened. Many surviving Southcottians in and around the Yorkshire textile town remained 'old believers', yet evidently severed all links with those groups in the neighbouring valleys of Huddersfield and Bradford that largely accepted Turner.⁸³ In or near several major towns where Turner followers were numerous, including London, Leeds, Sheffield and Exeter, prominent correspondents in the alternative letter network of 'old believers' are also traceable.⁸⁴ In other northern towns like Manchester and York, where the numbers of Turner Southcottians registered in 1816 appear comparatively low

⁸¹ Several of these figures are profiled in Hopkins, *Woman*, pp. 88-103.

⁸² PS PN 252/37-38, 25 Apr. and 2 May 1817.

⁸³ PS PN 252/39 and 41, 20 May 1817 and 14 July 1817.

⁸⁴ PS PN 246 and 252. See also PS PN 239/1, 29 June 1826.

when set beside the pre-1815 strength implied by the presence of Southcottian chapels, further ‘old believer’ correspondents are apparent.⁸⁵

It was in the Midlands, and especially the Birmingham region, where Turner most notably failed to gain adherents, despite the prior popularity of Southcottianism during Southcott’s lifetime. The West Midlands was, by contrast, a significant hub for correspondence in the old believers’ network: the Revd Thomas Foley, the Rector of Old Swinford in Worcestershire, kept up a frequent correspondence with like-minded believers across the country. Individuals and small groups wrote directly to Foley, to discuss news and interpretations of prophecies, or exchange copies of hand-written Southcott communications.⁸⁶ In the same period, Foley worked to sustain the beliefs of locals, ‘considerably more than 100’ of whom had previously gathered under his leadership, yet were now directed to meet in smaller, low-key groups.⁸⁷ Foley’s authority among Southcottians in his region, bolstered by his religious and social position and close acquaintance with Southcott while she was alive, is the most likely reason that claimants to Southcott’s prophetic mantle such as Turner were rejected by many in the Midlands. The several Nottinghamshire groups who would come to accept the claims of Zion Ward in 1829 were among many to have looked to Foley’s guidance in the previous fifteen years. It was their breaking of this convention which caused significant ruptures in the region.⁸⁸ In Birmingham, Charles Bradley, the tobacco merchant who contemplated suicide at Southcott’s death, and later Ward follower, was another ally of Foley in the

⁸⁵ BL Add. MSS 57860/223; 70933/47; PS PN 252/24-5.

⁸⁶ PS PN 247/18-30; PN 252/24, 30-41; BL Add. MSS 47794-477803, 57860, 70933.

⁸⁷ UT JSC 444/20, 6 July 1805.

⁸⁸ BL Add. Mss 70933/21-47; Zion Ward, *The Living Oracle; or, the Star of Bethlehem: written in answer to a letter of the Rev. T.P Foley, addressed to Mr T. Pierce of Nottingham* (Nottingham, 1830), p. 11. See Chapter 5, pp. 182-5.



Figure 3: Locations of correspondents in the old believers' correspondence network 1815-1830.

Sources: PS PN 246/12, 18-19, 22, 33-4, 37-9, 41-3; BL Add MSS 47794/132, 47795/66-104, 47798/80, 89, 120, 123-4, 57860/233-41, 245, 70933/9-42, 48; LMA Acc 1040/34-5, 78-9, 88, 92.

years after 1814.⁸⁹ Figure 3 records the locations of surviving Southcottians traceable by their frequent, familiar correspondence with figures such as Foley, Jane Townley in London and several others well-represented in Southcottian archives.

Southcottianism and Gender

That the Southcottian millenarian movement appealed especially to women has become a minor historical commonplace. It is an opinion based on the identity of its founder, the themes of its theology, and the modern analysis of evidence of its nineteenth-century membership. Significantly, it is not based on comments or reports made in its contemporary period: no traceable newspaper article or other public record, among all that were written on Southcott and her followers, either during her lifetime or immediately after, defined the movement explicitly by its women's membership. Neither did any comment on how many more women were involved in the movement than men. One newspaper story, reporting on a Southcottian meeting in Kent in 1817, even noted the relatively low proportion of women involved: those gathering numbered 'about 100 persons, 18 of whom were women'.⁹⁰ That Southcott herself was a woman at the head of a popular religious movement certainly dominated contemporary responses to Southcottianism. Yet the ways this gender identity informed her role and authority within the movement, and acceptance or rejection without it, are issues engaged with only since mid-twentieth-century scholarly appraisal. That Southcott's prophetic writings themselves contained a distinct theological message potentially attractive to women –

⁸⁹ BL Add. MSS 47798/80, 120-24, 26 Jan. 1816-17 Aug. 1826.

⁹⁰ *Morning Chronicle*, 28 Oct. 1817.

proclaiming a redemptive role for a woman in God's millennial plans – is a yet more recent reading, only given relative prominence in historical interpretations since the 1980s.⁹¹

Barbara Taylor's original argument for the significance of the Southcottian movement's 'theological feminism', and its contribution to the feminist dimension to English radicalism, was premised upon Southcott's writings attracting a largely female readership and her securing the especial sympathy of fellow women.⁹² Anna Clark's subsequent extension of Taylor's interpretation also presupposed many more Southcottians were women: the contrast of Southcott's perceived opposition to marriage with the conservatism of other groups such as the Methodists, led Clark also to assume more single women were present among Southcottians than among more male-dominated evangelical sects.⁹³ Both Taylor's and Clark's arguments were given notable credence by the figures given in the respective studies of Harrison and Hopkins demonstrating the gender ratio of the movement's membership was 63% women to 37% men.⁹⁴

As with his analysis of Southcottian locations, this statistic was originally calculated by Hopkins from collating the names appearing on the three separate manuscript scrolls in the University of Texas archive.⁹⁵ The 7000-odd names were then simply divided according to their apparent gender, and a percentage worked out.⁹⁶ The result showing a near two-thirds proportion of women, Harrison considered

⁹¹ Hopkins, *Woman*, pp. 85, 216. Taylor, *Eve*, pp. 162-8; Clark, *Struggle*, pp. 107-11; Susan Juster, *Doomsayers: Anglo-American Prophecy in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia, 2003). Harrison defined Southcott's 'doctrine of the woman' as 'socially... a form of feminism', but devoted barely more than two paragraphs in total to the subject, across his whole study. Harrison, *Second Coming*, pp. 31, 108-9.

⁹² Taylor, *Eve*, p. 166.

⁹³ Clark, *Struggle*, pp. 107-11; Clark, 'Sexual Politics', pp. 60-1.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*; Taylor, *Eve*, p. 162-3.

⁹⁵ Hopkins, *Thesis*, pp. 168-72, 418-26.

⁹⁶ Hopkins *Woman*, pp. 219-25, 242-3.

‘confirmatory’ rather than surprising: ‘the preponderance of women ... is characteristic of millennial sects elsewhere’, he noted, and therefore did ‘not ... call for special explanation’.⁹⁷ Hopkins, in contrast, considered such a proportion slightly higher than the plain majority of females that might automatically be expected ‘in any religious movement, regardless of its character’. For this reason, he argued, Southcott’s message – that ‘God had selected a woman, not a man, through which to reveal Himself’ – was worth acknowledging as a factor to explain such a gender ratio.⁹⁸

Such minor differences in interpretation were in fact immaterial: the 63% figure itself was flawed. A re-examination of the manuscript scrolls in the Texas collection makes clear that one of them – the scroll dated after 1816 and listing 1291 names in 59 locations – effectively distorted the larger sample and its resultant gender statistics. This was because every person named on this scroll was a woman.⁹⁹

Defining and dating sources

Unlike the other two scrolls in Hopkins’ sample – the sealing petition from Southcott’s lifetime and George Turner’s 1816 register of his adherents – the third list of names was never designed to record membership. Rather, it was intended to record those Southcottians willing to undergo a particular (and peculiar) ceremony instituted by Turner under his prophetic leadership, and, crucially, only open to women. The ceremony is mentioned briefly in existing histories, and involved Turner visiting every community under his direction. In each place, female believers were individually made a ‘bride of Christ’, by stating in Turner’s presence their desire ‘to be married to the Lord’, then

⁹⁷ Harrison, *Second Coming*, pp. 110-11.

⁹⁸ Hopkins, *Woman*, p. 85.

⁹⁹ UT JSC 371.

exchanging kisses with the prophet, and having him, in Christ's stead, place his hand on their knee to signify their bowing to the Lord.¹⁰⁰ The ritual, which prepared for Shiloh's physical arrival, expressed an aspect of such believers' Southcott-derived beliefs in its specific preparation of women for the messiah and the millennium, by their being 'lifted up from the fall of women; to be my brides and inherit my kingdom'.¹⁰¹

The ceremonies were carried out in July and August 1820, and involved almost 1500 of Turner's female believers.¹⁰² Yet it is clear that the ritual had been planned from some time before. Letters in the Panacea Society archive reveal the names of eligible women were first collected in 1818, then updated (with those no longer prepared to undergo the ritual removed and others added) in 1820. In May 1820, James Tyson, leader of a small group of Turner Southcottians in Wasdale, Cumberland, wrote to apologise for 'not having sent the names of the women that had sined [*sic*] their names in February 1818 who have folen of [*sic*]'.¹⁰³ Tyson then listed five of the ten women listed under 'Nether Wasdale' on the Texas all-women scroll.¹⁰⁴ Numerous other letters of the same date list the 'names of the women who have receded', in every case matching names on the Texas scroll in question, strongly implying that this is the original, 1818 list.¹⁰⁵

Neither this date nor this original purpose and nature of the scroll were recognised by either Hopkins or Harrison.¹⁰⁶ This allowed its contents to be treated as equivalent data to that drawn from other sources which recorded both men and women believers.

¹⁰⁰ George Turner, *Wonderful Prophecies by George Turner... being a Call to the Jews to Return Part II* (London, 1818), p. 70. Scholars have justifiably commented on the rite's dubiousness. Harrison, *Second Coming*, p. 121; Edward Green, *Prophet John Wroe: Virgins, Scandals and Visions* (Stroud, 2005), p. 32.

¹⁰¹ Turner, *Wonderful Prophecies... Part II*, pp. 70-77.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 106.

¹⁰³ PS PN 238/54, 27 May 1820.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*; UT JSC 371.

¹⁰⁵ PS PN 238/19-37, 48 Apr.-May 1820.

¹⁰⁶ Both historians dated it only 'after 1816', due to its watermark. Harrison, *Second Coming*, p. 248; Hopkins, *Woman*, p. 243.

The inclusion of a sizeable, all-women group within what was otherwise a mixed-gender sample had an all too obvious effect on the gender proportions of the total. It may be shown to have overestimated the likely proportion of women Southcottians by about 8%. When this source is discounted and the two other Texas scrolls are analysed separately, or when other, smaller surviving registers of Southcottian groups are considered, a significantly closer gender ratio is apparent: women on average constituted less than 55% and men more than 45% of Southcottians.

Alternative gender ratios

The two larger Texas manuscript scrolls represent, in their own right, sizeable samples of Southcottians with which to gauge gender proportions. They also, significantly, offer the opportunity to establish whether any notable change occurred in the proportion of women involved in Southcottianism before and after the death of its female leader, as they date before and after 1814, respectively. Of the 1421 individuals sealed at one London chapel between 1809 and December 1814, 773 were women (54.4%) and 648 men (46.6%).¹⁰⁷ Of the 4045 named believers accepting Turner's prophetic leadership in 1816, across a wider stretch of the country, remarkably similar proportions were women and men: 2204 were female (54.5%) and 1842 male (45.5%).¹⁰⁸ This consistency persuasively counters any assumption that relative levels of women's participation in the millenarian movement may have declined when the prophetic figure-head was no longer a woman.

Two smaller and more localised samples of Southcottian groups during Southcott's lifetime suggest a slight variation in proportions of men and women between

¹⁰⁷ UT JSC 370.

¹⁰⁸ UT JSC 372.

geographical regions. A surviving register of 125 members of a Southcottian chapel at Teddington, just outside London, dated around 1811, records 71 women (57%) and 54 men (43%).¹⁰⁹ A sealing register of 227 names, previously undated and unidentified by place yet now locatable to the Ashton-under-Lyne area c.1813, features 116 women (51%) and 111 men (49%).¹¹⁰ A comparative analysis of the individual congregations making up the national body of Turner Southcottians in 1816 corroborates this trend: groups in the north of England consistently featured gender ratios significantly closer to parity, and sometimes even more men than women, while congregations in the south had noticeably more women (see Table 1).

In Yorkshire, male Turner Southcottians frequently outnumbered women, but not only in the smaller, Pennine textile and agricultural communities where the general population in the period had fewer women due to patterns of female migration for factory or other urban employment. Women did not predominate even among recorded believers in some of Yorkshire's rapidly growing towns. In Sheffield, Bradford and Huddersfield, men still formed a minor majority in sizeable congregations; in Leeds the balance was different but still close, with women in a slight 52:48 majority. This was the same ratio as Ashton followers – a one percent change on four years earlier.¹¹¹ The most notable contrast to such figures was in communities in the south-west of England, especially Southcott's home county of Devon. Congregations of Turner followers in this region

¹⁰⁹ LMA Acc 1040/1-2.

¹¹⁰ BL Add. MS 48898/165. Harrison notes the existence of this list, but does not attempt to date it or work out its place of origin. Harrison, *Second Coming*, p. 248. A direct comparison of the names on this list with the names of Turner followers in Ashton in 1816, reveals a majority – over 100 names – to be the same. The 1813 dating is most likely, given, first that the manuscript is identifiable as a sealing petition and therefore pre-Southcott's death, and second the contents of an 1813 letter in the same archive mentioning 'a very great increase' in the numbers of Southcottians in Ashton. BL Add. MS 47794/128, 13 Feb. 1813.

¹¹¹ UT JSC 372. Of 201 names, 105 are women, 96 men.

Table 1

Gender proportions of Turner Southcottians in 1816 by region and selected location

<i>Location</i>	<i>No. of believers</i>	<i>% men</i>	<i>% women</i>	<i>Methodist % women*</i>
South-east	806	44.2	55.8	60.8
- London	610	42.8	57.2	
- Gravesend, Kent	173	49.1	50.9	
South West	933	38.2	61.8	59.8
- Crewkerne	214	44.0	56.0	
- Plymouth Dock	85	31.0	69.0	
- Exeter	141	26.9	73.1	
- Totnes	44	43.2	56.8	
East Central Counties	311	45.3	54.7	56.1
West Central Counties (Cheshire)	99	48.5	51.5	55.9
Lancashire	381	48.0	52.0	(Combined Lancashire and Yorkshire) 58.2
- Ashton	201	47.8	52.2	
- Warrington	75	45.3	44.7	
- Colne (Pennines)	36	55.5	44.5	
Yorkshire	1674	56.6	43.4	
<i>Urban Centres</i>				
- Sheffield	255	53.7	46.3	
- Leeds	187	47.8	52.2	
- Bradford	88	55.7	44.3	
- Huddersfield	65	52.3	47.7	
<i>Pennine Townships</i>				
- Horton	67	58.2	41.8	
- Idle	37	45.9	54.1	
- Kirkburton	26	61.5	38.5	
Far northern counties	75	52.0	48.0	55.7
<i>Total</i>	<i>4045</i>			

Source: UT JSC 372.

* Figures taken from Clive Field, 'The Social Composition of English Methodism to 1830: A Membership Analysis', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 76:1 (1994), 159.

consistently contained 60-70% women, in 1816. In Exeter, Southcott's home town, the majority was stronger than anywhere: of the 141 names, 103 (73%) were female.

It is well-recognised that women commonly comprise a majority of participants in religious movements open to them in the modern era, in Christianity especially.¹¹² Within more evangelical or revivalist forms of religion, including millenarian sects, in western societies since the eighteenth century, a proportional scale of female involvement has typically run between 55% and 66%.¹¹³ Clive Field's detailed analysis of gender in English 'Old' and 'New' Dissent has established that over a three hundred-year period, it was rare for 'the predominance of women in Nonconformist membership ... [to] fall below three-fifths'.¹¹⁴ The one period when the proportion dipped perceptibly below 60% among Methodists, Congregationalist, and Baptist groups was between 1750 and 1830; though even in these years national percentages of women were never less than 55%.¹¹⁵ In sociological studies, Bryan Wilson has defined a 'preponderance of women' in religious movements at around the two-thirds/one-third mark. In one study, when Wilson measured a 56:44 women to men ratio among the late nineteenth-century Christadelphian sect, he considered this such a 'relatively close ratio' it required explanation, and became the basis of his conclusion that 'Christadelphianism has no distinctive appeal to women'.¹¹⁶

¹¹² Linda Woodhead, *Christianity: a very short introduction* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 128-45; On the nineteenth-century 'feminisation of religion', see Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain* (London, 2001).

¹¹³ David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London, 1989), pp. 25-6, 128-9; Bryan Wilson, *Sects and Society: A Sociological Study of Three Religious Groups in Britain* (London, 1961), pp. 101-2, 198-200; 297-8.

¹¹⁴ Clive Field, 'Adam and Eve: Gender in the English Free Church Constituency', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 44:1 (1993), 65; Idem., 'The Social Composition of English Methodism to 1830: A Membership Analysis', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 76:1 (1994), 155-9.

¹¹⁵ Field, 'Social composition', 159; Idem. 'Adam and Eve', 65.

¹¹⁶ Wilson, *Sects and Society*, pp. 102, 298.

The revised calculations for the gender proportion of the Southcottian movement in the early nineteenth century surely encourage a similar conclusion. On the evidence of sealing membership and chapel registers, Southcottianism as a national movement appears also to have had no distinctive appeal to women. Women may well have formed a majority in most Southcottian groups, in most parts of the country; yet that majority was no greater – indeed, in places, was smaller – than their fellow women formed in other religious groups. Field’s research on gender in Methodist groups contemporary with Southcottians includes regional comparisons which mirror some general trends in the Southcottian findings, but with noticeably less fluctuation (see Table 1). Thus, Field noted of Methodist groups that ‘south-eastern and south-western counties registered the highest percentages of women in membership’, while northern groups had fewer women.¹¹⁷ The differences were, however, approximately two-percentage points (between 59% and 57%), not the dramatic disparity evident between Yorkshire groups of Southcottians with near equal men and women, and Devon groups averaging two-thirds women and higher.

Such evidence is clearly counter-intuitive to how Southcottianism has been understood from a gendered perspective. To suggest that a religious movement founded and, at first, led by a woman, which centred in its beliefs on a woman’s role in humanity’s redemption, attracted no more women to its overall membership than other, parallel groups with no such leader or theology, flies in the face of existing theories not only of Southcottianism’s appeal but also its radical character in the early nineteenth-century period. Southcott can no longer be considered to have secured the especial sympathy of women. As her female followers were no more a majority, and sometimes

¹¹⁷ Field, ‘Social composition’, 157-9.

less, than in other sects, then Southcott's popular movement can no longer be considered to have widened women's 'moral jurisdiction' to any significant extent beyond the more general efforts of evangelical religion in these years.¹¹⁸

A mistake of the existing theories of Southcottian radical feminism is their reliance on a concept of gendered experience as the principal explanation for involvement in a religious movement. Taylor's particular mode of interpretation of Southcott's writings – drawing out their themes of male betrayal and women's defiance, as well as their references to Southcott's own life as an unmarried working woman – was an approach common within gender scholarship in the period that *Eve and the New Jerusalem* was written. This relied on a close reading of women's writings to recover not only something of the historical experience of the author, but of her readers also. A writer's experience was considered to speak to the experience of her readers; women read and related themselves to the words and expression of a fellow woman.¹¹⁹ Clark's argument that Southcott's followers included 'women who felt sexually victimised', such as 'plebeian wives estranged or at least independent from their husbands', was also based, in notable part, on the conjecture that because Southcott's writings 'articulated sexual antagonism and advocated marriage to the "Divine Husband"...', then a proportion of her readership were likely to have been unhappy in their experience of earthly marriage.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ See essays in Sue Morgan (ed.), *Women, Religion, and Feminism in Britain, 1750-1900* (Basingstoke, 2002).

¹¹⁹ For an influential critique of this trend in women's history, see Amanda Vickery, 'Golden Ages to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and chronology of English Women's History', *Historical Journal*, 36:2 (1993), 383-414.

¹²⁰ Anna Clark, 'The Sexual Crisis and Popular Religion in London 1770-1820' *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 34 (1988), 61. The one facet of the revised proportions of Southcottian men and women arguably still able to sustain the supposition that Southcott's claims and articulation as a Woman, drew an especial reaction from fellow women is the gender breakdown of her Exeter following, and the

Such explanations rely heavily on simplistic divisions between the concerns of men and women in the past. They are founded upon rigid distinctions between male and female mentalities, between people's priorities or sympathies according to their sex, which many historians as well as theorists would now reject.¹²¹ Women in history had no common 'womanly nature' or essential identity determined by their gender making them sympathetic to the experience, case or claim of other women; neither were men by any 'nature' bound to prioritise the interests of fellow men. Instead, individual sympathies and concerns were more constructed, as post-structuralist theorists would claim is the case for all aspects of identity, within contexts of language and culture. Then as now they were contingent, variable and malleable, unfixed to any gender.¹²² It is not necessary to follow such ideas to the relativist extremes taken with them by some theorists to allow their insights to inform interpretations of the re-calculated levels of female and male participation in the Southcottian movement.¹²³ The mere undermining of links assumed to lie between women in the past, and the questioning of pre-determined distinctions in gender interests, leaves space clear for alternative hypotheses for why individuals became Southcottians.

proportions of women recorded in surrounding congregations. The relatively high numbers of women followers in Devon, even taking account of patterns in the general urban and rural population, could suggest that those sharing Southcott's background, those most familiar with the life within which her prophecies were framed, responded strongly to the commonalities in their lives and her message. How far such a response was measurably different from something recognisable as local pride in 'one of their own' finding national fame, is, however, difficult to establish, as also is the potential for the only partial fulfilment of the old adage on the acceptance of prophets in their homelands – where a working Woman, prophet was rejected by the men of her region, more than the women.

¹²¹ For Barbara Taylor's own reflections on these issues of gender and identity see her 'Religion, Radicalism, and Fantasy', *History Workshop Journal*, 39 (1995), 102-12.

¹²² Denise Riley, 'Am I That Name?': *Feminism and the Category of 'Women' in History* (Basingstoke, 1988); Sue Morgan, 'Women, Religion and Feminism: Past, Present and Future Perspectives' in *Women, Religion and Feminism*, pp. 1-19; Harriet Bradley, *Gender* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 69-76.

¹²³ Joan Wallach Scott, 'The Evidence of Experience', *Critical Inquiry*, 17:4 (1991), 773-97.

As Harrison observed, most Southcottians ‘were sincere, earnest Christians, dependent for guidance on a literal interpretation of the Bible’.¹²⁴ He thus emphasised the place of Southcottians within an extensive Christian culture of their time. This also serves as a reminder of the continuities Southcottianism shared with wider contemporary religion, not least in its relation to the Christian Scriptures, and the appeal of belief to both men and women.

Surviving accounts of how male Southcottians came to believe in Southcott and her prophecies indicate that her claims and message were capable of striking men with the force of a conversion experience, while relating in specific ways to both the Bible and their prior personal convictions of the work of the Christian God.¹²⁵ Thomas Foley read Southcott’s first published works in June 1801, and believed ‘these writings’ to be a ‘greater Body of Spiritual Light given to the World ... than was ever given since the Bible was completed.’¹²⁶ In 1812, ‘a Mr Barnes ... a sincere Methodist’ reported reading Southcott’s 1804 work, *Sound an Alarm*, when ‘the Lord broke in upon him with light and love and heaven in his soul, ... the Lord by his spirit has powerfully convinced him the work was of God’.¹²⁷ Zion Ward, when a south London shoemaker, came to believe in Southcott in 1814 after her *Fifth Book of Wonders*, ‘fell into my hands’.¹²⁸ This, Ward read ‘with peculiar pleasure and delight; for I saw it was a work of God, and not of man, and as the word of God I received it’. Ward later described his experience, reading ‘the Scriptures, night and day, more than ever, for the light I received from Joanna’s writings

¹²⁴ Harrison, *Second Coming*, p. 132.

¹²⁵ Encounters with books were a common means of Puritan, Methodist and evangelical conversion in late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England. Philip Lockley, ‘“Tolle lege” or “Pick up and read”: books and conversion in early eighteenth-century England’ (Oxford Univ. M.St. Dissertation, 2004).

¹²⁶ Quoted in Hopkins, *Woman*, p. 89.

¹²⁷ BL Add. MS 57860/181, 7 July 1812.

¹²⁸ Zion Ward, *The Judgment Seat of Christ*, 4 July 1831, p. 69.

gave me to see something – the beauty of them’.¹²⁹ The Revd Robert Hoadley Ashe of Crewkerne, Somerset, a man of very different social position and education, similarly described how, ‘after 17 days close reading and studying of Joanna Southcott’s writings he received more real light into the mysteries of the Bible than ever he had received before’.¹³⁰

Such cases underline the role of personal religious experience in Southcottians’ reasons for membership of their movement. Yet if the role of specifically gendered experience is now queried, and with it those arguments for the nature of Southcottian radicalism related to it, an alternative form of ‘experience’ remains a potent explanatory factor in Southcottian histories, including arguments for how Southcottians could also be radicals – their ‘social experience’. It is to this subject that we now turn.

¹²⁹ Ward, *Judgment Seat*, p. 70. Ward’s phrasing and experience is notably similar to his exact contemporary and American millenarian, William Miller. In 1816-18, Miller studied the Bible intensively – ‘The Bible was now to me a new book... it was indeed a feast of reason’: Sylvester Bliss, *Memoirs of William Miller* (Boston, 1853), p. 77.

¹³⁰ PS PN 252/22, 3 Dec. 1807.

Chapter 2

SOUTHCOTTIANS IN SOCIETY

Of the ‘dual revolutions’ traditionally recognised to have taken place in Europe in the 1780-1830 period – or the rough lifetimes of first and second generation Southcottians – the ‘industrial revolution’ was referred to in far less direct terms than its political equivalents in Southcott and her successors’ prophetic rhetoric.¹ Its influence and effects are no less strongly associated with the appeal of millenarian beliefs. Historians have consistently assumed that the sense of instability and uncertainty which framed so many British people’s eschatological worldviews across this period were shaped as much by the social disruptions brought on by changes in the means, mode and ownership of industrial production as the demise of political certainties which followed the revolutions in France and America, and the wars they caused.² Correlations between places of strong Southcottian recruitment and regions either undergoing substantial industrial development or affected by its occurrence elsewhere are clear, though not comprehensive. The maps presented in the previous chapter (figures 1-3) reveal how some emergent industrial regions contained no traceable Southcottian groups before the 1820s (South Wales, the Potteries and Clydeside), while Southcottians were also known across considerable stretches of more stable parts of southern England.³ However, the clusters of chapels and post-Southcott congregations in the Pennine districts of

¹ The phrase ‘dual revolutions’ was coined by Eric Hobsbawm in *The Age of Revolution* (New York, 1962), p. xv.

² J.F.C. Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites in Britain and America: The Quest for the New Moral World* (London, 1969), p. 100; William Oliver, *Prophets and Millennialists: The Uses of Biblical Prophecy in England from the 1790s to the 1840s* (Auckland, 1978), pp. 16-18.

³ See above, pp. 59 and 62.

Lancashire and Yorkshire, the West Midlands, London and the Thames estuary, confirm that a strong majority of Southcottians will have witnessed industrial change at first hand.

The extent to which these early nineteenth-century millenarians' religious beliefs were forged in direct experience of the social dislocation of industrialism – that they were not just witnesses, but its principal victims – remains a subject of minor scholarly dispute. For Edward Thompson, the 'deluded follower of Joanna Southcott' belonged to a cast of 'casualties' of industrialism; they ranked beside the 'the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper' and others whose lives were lived in the face of 'acute social disturbance'.⁴

Southcott's appeal 'was felt most strongly among working people of the west and north'; Thompson concluded that Southcottianism was 'certainly a cult of the poor'.⁵ John Harrison initially queried this direct association between millenarianism and poverty, as such religious views were not restricted to any social class.⁶ After further research, he concluded there was 'little to suggest that the disinherited and outcasts of society found solace or hope in millenarian belief'.⁷ Instead, Harrison concluded that believers were predominantly literate, 'artisans, small tradesmen and servants, and a top leadership drawn from the more educated and affluent classes'.⁸ James Hopkins dissented from these conclusions considerably, declaring it 'perilous' to deny the poor a place in Southcott's movement. 'Circumstances of insecurity, economic deprivation, and social

⁴ Edward Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, revised edn (Harmondsworth, 1968), p. 13;

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 421-4.

⁶ Harrison, *New Moral World*, p. 138. William Oliver also doubted that Southcottians were comprehensively those 'uprooted by the new capitalist economy': Oliver, *Prophets and Millennialists*, p. 15.

⁷ J.F.C. Harrison, *The Second Coming: Popular Millenarianism 1780-1850* (London, 1979), p. 221.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 110-11.

immobility,' Hopkins argued, were 'an endemic feature of Southcottian recruitment'.⁹ 'Many Southcottians', he concluded, 'were chiliasts, drawn to the movement because it offered an escape from suffering'.¹⁰ Each of these divergent interpretations of Southcottian social identities have been cited since, wherever one has suited an historian's argument. Barbara Taylor and Anna Clark each cited Harrison's conclusions; more recently, Hopkins' views have been referenced in Susan Juster's study and Edward Green's biography of John Wroe.¹¹ Thompson's original interpretation also remains a common reference for works which equate Southcottian millenarianism with social oppression, such as Theodore Koditscheck's seminal study of Bradford and Boyd Hilton's wider history of the period.¹²

Despite the evocative use of the singular in his famous preface phrase, Thompson's account of Southcottians in *The Making of the English Working Class* mentioned few individual millenarians by name. Besides Southcott herself, the only believer identified in her lifetime was William Sharp.¹³ Thompson's definition of the thousands of others as 'working people of the west and north' was drawn largely from secondary sources, especially local, antiquarian accounts written later in the nineteenth

⁹ James Hopkins, *A Woman to Deliver Her People: Joanna Southcott and English Millenarianism in an Era of Revolution* (Austin, 1982), pp. 72-3.

¹⁰ Hopkins, *Woman*, pp. 80, 83.

¹¹ Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1983), p. 162; Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley, 1995), p. 110; Susan Juster, *Doomsayers: Anglo-American Prophecy in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia, 2003), p. 250; Edward Green, *Prophet John Wroe: Virgins, Scandals and Visions* (Stroud, 2005), pp. 23-6.

¹² Theodore Koditscheck, *Class Formation and Urban-Industrial Society: Bradford, 1750-1850* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 76; Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad and Dangerous People?: England 1783-1846* (Oxford, 2006), p. 400.

¹³ George Turner is also mentioned by Thompson, as is Zaccheus Robinson, a weaver from Great Horton near Bradford, but only as followers of Richard Brothers, not the Southcottians they would become. Thompson, *Making*, pp. 129, 420, 425.

century.¹⁴ Thompson's northern sources linked Southcottianism to the particular occupational group and geographical location recognised to be central to his study – the textile hand-workers of the Yorkshire and Lancashire Pennines.¹⁵ From this, the social experience of the individual follower of Southcott was extrapolated, deduced from the wider story of an occupational group and its collective experience of decline – in wages, piece-rates and their attachment to the land, in their senses of independence and economic security.¹⁶ Thompson's argument for the 'chiliasm of despair' – as with his wider class-consciousness thesis – stemmed from a specific interpretation of textile hand-workers' oscillating political dreams and religious fantasies during this experience.¹⁷

A significant limitation of both the archive-based studies of Harrison and Hopkins which subsequently tested the extrapolations of Thompson's work, is their only minor reference to this key region and occupation in the latter's argument. While both studies were able to note the apparent popularity of the Southcottian movement in Pennine districts – from Hopkins' doctoral analysis of its geographical spread – both scholars found the evidence available for the economic and social circumstances of ordinary Southcottians in this region difficult to come by. Manuscript lists of believers, such as those in the Texas collection discussed extensively in Chapter 1, allowed Southcottians to be identified by name, yet few of these appeared in the contemporary trade directories

¹⁴ Thompson, *Making*, p. 425.

¹⁵ Much of Thompson's study was, as he himself admitted, 'coloured... by West Riding sources'; Thompson, *Making*, p. 14. On the centrality of the Pennine region to Thompson's work see Edward Royle, 'Historians and the Making of the English Working Class, 1963-1988', *Trans. of the Halifax Antiquarian Society*, (1989), 73-82, and other articles in the same journal edition; Carolyn Steedman, *Master and Servant: Love and Labour in the English Industrial Age* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 29; Katrina Navickas, 'Moors, Fields, and Popular Protest in South Lancashire and the West Riding of Yorkshire, 1800-1848', *Northern History*, 46:1 (March 2009), 96.

¹⁶ Thompson, *Making*, pp. 207-32, 297-346. On the ways this narrative and its relation to the making of English class has become a 'myth' itself, see Steedman, *Master and Servant*, pp. 29-46.

¹⁷ Thompson, *Making*, p. 427.

from their areas, and this evidence itself was difficult to corroborate with other sources.¹⁸

Both scholars therefore looked to other regions, and more limited sources, for their assessments of their millenarian subjects' relative social position and poverty.

Harrison's principal evidence for his revisionist view of Southcottians' social status was a printed document from as late as 1844, relating to a small group of Birmingham Southcottians (34 in number).¹⁹ This designated most of the male believers as metal-work artisans, and listed the women's occupations as 'nurses, tailoresses, school teachers and servants'.²⁰ Harrison further asserted that the movement was a 'mixture of merchants, tradesmen, professional and popular elements' elsewhere, after identifying a few leading followers in provincial groups and several people involved in two south London chapels.²¹ Searching for evidence to confirm Southcottians were among those experiencing the sharp-end of early industrial conditions in northern contexts, Harrison further deemed the available sources 'at best fragmentary and inconclusive'.²² He concluded that Southcottianism lacked 'any substantial following among the very poor'.²³

Hopkins' alternative case for the relative poverty of many involved in the millenarian movement was based predominantly on background evidence for economic distress in times and locations of Southcottian strength in the South. Key examples of this

¹⁸ Harrison, *Second Coming*, p. 110; Hopkins, *Woman*, pp. 77 and 81-2. Those names that did match entries in directories suggested several Southcottians in London, Sheffield, Leeds, Manchester and the Bristol region were artisans and tradesmen. However, these matches were acknowledged to be questionable in their reliability as evidence: too many people in such locations shared the same name.

¹⁹ LMA Acc 1040/297 'The Minutes of Conference, 19-25 November 1844'. This group were descended from the tradition of 'old believers', which in the 1840s took the name of 'the Southcottian Church'.

²⁰ Harrison, *Second Coming*, p. 110. The male occupations were entirely typical of Birmingham artisan industry of the time.

²¹ Harrison, *Second Coming*, pp. 113, 124-5.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 150.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

were Southcott's home region of Exeter at the specific date she began to publish her prophecies, and the areas of London where signatories to the 1809-1814 sealing scroll were listed as living.²⁴ In Devon in 1801, a series of poor harvests and the on-going decline of the serge cloth industry due to the war and northern competition, meant much of the population was experiencing considerable hardship when Southcott's millennial message attracted attention.²⁵ In London most sealed Southcottians who provided their addresses lived in poorer parts of the capital – east-end neighbourhoods like Shoreditch and Whitechapel, or areas south of the Thames such as Lambeth and the Borough.²⁶ This established for Hopkins, that 'the overwhelming number of London believers were humble souls, ... living in impoverished circumstances'.²⁷

Weaknesses in Hopkins' argument were subsequently identified by Hugh McLeod, who considered its use of social categories 'much too vague' and its evidence 'inconclusive'.²⁸ McLeod took particular issue with Hopkins' assumption that those in places such as Exeter 'suffering the most acute distress' were necessarily 'the same ones who flocked to the Southcottian banner'.²⁹ He further deemed the assessment of poverty according to residence in London districts, and not specific neighbourhoods, unsatisfactory. Harrison's preceding study has not been subjected to the same critical dismantling, despite its own flaws: the Birmingham artisans source was an especially limited sample, dated a full thirty years after Southcott's death; leading believers in

²⁴ Hopkins also pointed to frequent references to poverty and suffering in Southcottian hymns and sermons as further evidence of the movement's closer relation to the poor. Hopkins, *Woman*, pp. 110-12.

²⁵ Hopkins, *Woman*, pp. 63-72.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 80-82.

²⁷ Hopkins, *Woman*, p. 80.

²⁸ Hugh McLeod, 'Book Review', *English Historical Review*, 100:394 (Jan. 1985), 201-2.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 202.

London and the provinces might be assumed to be the more literate, better-off element of her following, and not especially representative of 'rank-and-file' millenarians.

This chapter presents a new assessment of Southcottian social identities and their relation to industrial conditions. It deliberately addresses the limitations and weaknesses of existing studies by drawing on primary sources to produce a focussed analysis of Southcottian occupations in the Pennine region of northern England, contextualising their relative poverty and prosperity, and recovering details of the lives of hundreds of individual believers before the 1820s. Such a case-study of Southcottians in the Yorkshire, Lancashire and Cheshire region enables Thompson's interpretation of who such millenarians were to be examined in the key location of his original argument. The validity of Thompson's view of poverty-stricken hand-workers, subject to the vagaries of an emergent industrial, market economy, briefly embracing millenarianism at points of desperation and political hopelessness, is tested using new sources for their identities. These were discovered in the Panacea Society archive, and notably now invalidate Harrison's description of the evidence for northern millenarians' occupations as 'fragmentary and inconclusive'.

Five definable bodies of Southcottian believers which persisted in the period immediately after Southcott's death are surveyed in this chapter. Four of the five bodies are congregations who accepted the prophecies of George Turner after 1814, in the Pennine townships of Bradford, Huddersfield, Ashton-under-Lyne and Stockport. The remaining group is of 'old believer' Southcottians scattered across a similar Yorkshire, Lancashire and Cheshire region who rejected Turner's claims. To explore these

millenarians' relation to industrial society, in each case, evidence for the history of their community, as well as individual believers' occupations and relative economic position, has been sought, and set within the local context. Due to the sources available, studies vary in detail and coverage of the congregation. The distinction between Turnerite and other Southcottians additionally enables an investigation of whether any social distinction applied between those that centred their belief on Southcott's writings, and those that followed a new prophet after 1815.

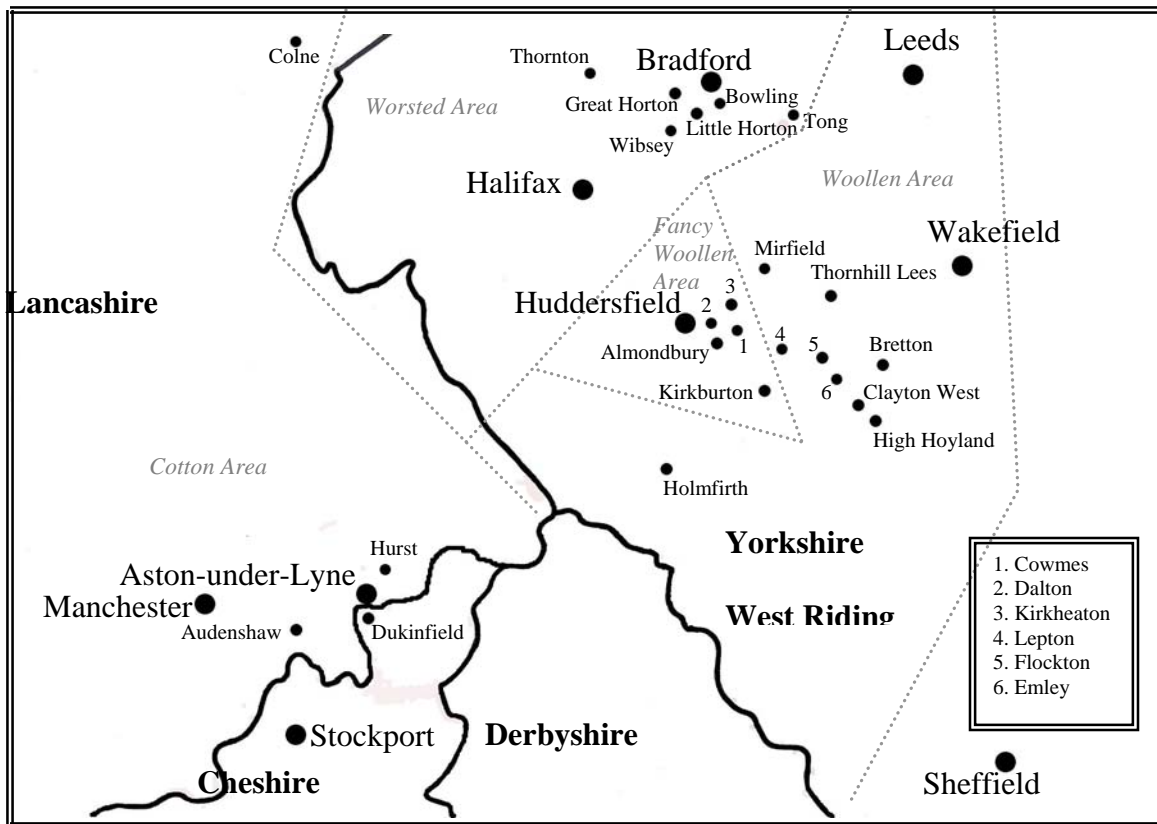


Figure 4: The Pennine region with Southcottian locations and textile areas 1815-1820.

Bradford

A meeting of Southcottians in the Yorkshire town of Bradford is first recorded in July 1805, when twelve men from both the town and surrounding settlements applied for a licence to meet in ‘the house of Dinnis Jardeen situate in Market Street’.³⁰ Jardeen was a tailor, with a shop in nearby New Street.³¹ Other signatories to the licence notably included Joshua Haley, Robert Fox and Zaccheus Robinson. Robinson, a worsted weaver from Great Horton, had been identified four years earlier as a leading follower of Richard Brothers in the region.³² The Brothers’ believers had been known locally as ‘Jerusalemites’, as, according to several contemporary reports, they expected to follow their prophetic leader ‘to Jerusalem, to commence the Millennium’.³³ At Great Horton they were known to meet in private houses, to ‘cite and explain such Prophecies and parts of Scripture, as seem to accord with their Doctrine’.³⁴ Robinson had been a Methodist class leader in his Horton district for much of the 1790s, and was accompanied by a significant proportion of his class when dismissed for millenarian opinions in 1800-1801.³⁵ Surviving membership lists show Robinson and thirteen other Horton Methodists designated ‘backsliders’ at this specific date, including his wife, Judith, Joshua Haley and Robert and Betty Fox.³⁶ In 1801, George Turner, the Leeds merchant and later prophet was identified as having introduced these Horton Methodists and others in the region to

³⁰ Borthwick Institute of Historical Research (BIHR), University of York, Records of the Diocesan Administration of the Archbishop of York, Dissenters, Fac Bk 3 (1793-1816) f.392.

³¹ A ratebook from 1805 shows him paying £4 0s. in rent for his shop in New Street. William Cudworth, *Historical Notes on the Bradford Corporation* (Bradford, 1881), p. 30.

³² Sheffield Archives (SA) WWM/F/45/a/8, 19 Mar. 1801, Lamplugh Hird to Earl Fitzwilliam.

³³ *Ibid.*; SA WWM/F/45/a/6, 2 Mar. 1801, Edward Brittlebank to Duke of Portland.

³⁴ SA WWM/F/45/a/8.

³⁵ The National Archives (TNA) HO 42/61/253 19 Mar. 1801, J.A. Busfield to Lord Portland; West Yorkshire Archive Service (WYAS) DA 17 D81/18, Bradford Circuit list of members, 1794-1802.

³⁶ WYAS DA 17 D81/18. Robinson married Judith Knight, member of another Great Horton class meeting in 1797.

‘the Doctrines of Mr Brothers and his followers’.³⁷ Turner played a further central role in persuading the same group to accept Southcott’s prophetic claim by 1805.³⁸

Southcottian meeting places proliferated in the Bradford locality before 1814. Gatherings were held in Bowling and Wibsey Low Moor on the edges of Bradford (see figure 4), and a further room off the more central Tyrrel Street.³⁹ A distinction between congregations of Southcottians in Bradford itself and townships on its periphery remained two years after Southcott’s death, as the 1816 register of believers in George Turner’s prophecies recorded 88 names under Bradford and a further 67 under ‘Horton’.⁴⁰ The latter group met in two venues, in both Great Horton and Little Horton as ‘James Laycock of Toby Lane in Great Horton ... by trade a staymaker’, and ‘John Brunton of King St in the township of Little Horton ... a breeches maker’, both licensed their respective houses for religious worship, each designating their group as ‘an assembly or congregation of Protestant dissenters calling themselves Millenarians’.⁴¹ By 1820, these several congregations had appointed a central committee, and were increasingly viewed collectively, by Southcottians in other parts of the country, as ‘the Bradford friends’.⁴²

A significant amount of historical information may now be known of many of the individuals and families that made up this combined Bradford-region Southcottian

³⁷ SA WWM/F/45/a/8.

³⁸ For more on this role, see Deborah Madden, ‘Israel’s Scattered Seed: Restoration and the ‘place’ of Zion in the Prophecies of Richard Brothers, George Turner and John Wroe’ (*forthcoming*).

³⁹ BIHR, Fac Bk 3 (1793-1816) ff.392, 409, 613. Later Southcottian meetings were recorded being held ‘in the upper room of the old Cock-pit’ in Tyrrel St and Bridge St. William Scruton, *Pen and Pencil Pictures of Old Bradford* (Bradford, 1889), pp. 244-6.

⁴⁰ University of Texas, Austin (UT), Joanna Southcott Collection (JSC) 372.

⁴¹ BIHR, DMH Reg 1 (1816-1834) f.59. The licence application were worded and dated the same (16 Mar. 1818) and constitute a rare instance in Christian history of chiliastic believers adopting this term for themselves.

⁴² Panacea Society (PS) PN 238/63, 10 Oct. 1820.

congregation. On the 1 January 1821, the group drew up a manuscript register of themselves, recording 128 adult believers' names, the 'women's maiden names', their parents' names, their mothers' maiden names, and 209 'children's names of the believers under twenty one years of age'.⁴³ The additional family information stemmed from the unique purpose the register served: to discover to which ancient tribe of Israel each believer belonged.

By 1820, Southcottians who followed Turner as a prophet believed themselves to be Israelites – 'hidden Hebrews' or descendants of the ten lost tribes of Israel. Those in the Bradford region who had originally been Brothers' followers may have held this belief consistently since the 1790s, as a principal doctrine of the 'Jerusalemites' was their identity as Israelites, and expectation of returning to their Holy Land 'homeland'.⁴⁴

Southcott's prophecies contained no references to the tribes, though her concept of 'sealing' significantly evoked scenes in Revelation 7, where the sealed are the explicitly 'tribes of Israel'.⁴⁵ Turner is recognised to have revived many of the Israelite doctrines of Brothers among his followers, combining these with Southcottian expectations.⁴⁶

Turner's instructions for followers' eating and dress – on not consuming 'the unclean

⁴³ This manuscript survives as PS PN 240/20, 1 Jan. 1821.

⁴⁴ Brothers styled himself 'the Prince of the Hebrews', and considered it his prophetic role to gather Israel, and build the new Jerusalem in the Holy Land. Deborah Madden, *The Paddington Prophet: Richard Brothers's Journey to Jerusalem* (Manchester, forthcoming in 2010) [ch.4]; Eitan Bar-Yosef, *The Holy Land in English Culture 1799-1917: Palestine and the Question of Orientalism* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 18-60. On the myth of the lost tribes of the northern Israelite kingdom, who disappear from the Old Testament narrative after invasion by assorted Assyrians, see Tudor Parfitt, *The Lost Tribes of Israel* (London, 2003), pp. 44-8.

⁴⁵ Southcott also had notably different views on Jerusalem, giving it both physical and metaphorical meanings, as a place to which she expected the Jews of Europe to return (a common expectation in contemporary Christian eschatology), and as a synonym for an edenic, millennial England, after the return of the Messiah. See Chapter 3, p. 119; Madden, *Paddington Prophet*, [ch.6]; Bar-Yosef, *Holy Land* pp. 48-57.

⁴⁶ Harrison, *Second Coming*, pp. 120-1; Gordon Allan, 'Southcottian Sects from 1790 to the Present Day', in Kenneth Newport and Crawford Gribben (eds.), *Expecting the End: Millennialism in Social and Historical Context* (Waco, 2006), p. 221.

beast', and wearing of blue – represented 'the first recognisable movement toward keeping the law of Moses', which would take on greater significance under Turner's 1820s successor, John Wroe.⁴⁷ For Turner, belief in his prophetic inspiration confirmed an individual's Israelite origin. Yet, in April 1820, it was reported that one of Turner's followers, a Rebecca Woods of Brixham, had 'told some of the friends of what tribe they belong to'.⁴⁸ When Turner's prophetic voice confirmed her claim, congregations of Turner followers across the country compiled lists of their chapel memberships to send to Woods for her oracular opinion of their tribe. The Bradford group entitled their list, 'A List of names to be laid before the Lord by his hand maid ... to know from what Tribe we are sprung', believing the more family information Woods received, the easier discernment would be.⁴⁹

Of the Bradford families with children on the register, the settlement and occupations of 34 fathers (61%) have been traced in the baptism records of parish churches and dissenting chapels in the area.⁵⁰ This represents a far more accurate method of tracing, than comparing names with trade directories on their own. A few Bradford families attended chapels where occupations were not recorded in naming ceremony

⁴⁷ Allan, 'Southcottian Sects', p. 221; PS PN 240/12-13, 1-3 Mar. 1821.

⁴⁸ PS PN 243/39, 24 Apr. 1820.

⁴⁹ PS PN 240/20, 1 Jan. 1821. Many of the adults' names on this register match those appearing on the Texas scrolls linked to Turner's following, UT JSC 371 and 372.

⁵⁰ The children's names and ages entered on the register permit the tracing of the occupations of adult male Southcottians who were fathers. From a child's age, a baptism date was estimated and checked against baptism records which, in many West Riding records, detail a village address and father's occupation. A corresponding name, year and two parents' names was the normal criteria for a confident match, though exceptions were made for more unusual names where only one parent was recorded. Until the 1820s, Southcottians had no baptism or equivalent naming ceremony of their own. Those who had their children named in dissenting chapels were not necessarily adherents of the denomination. In this period, a significant proportion of entries in nonconformist baptism registers were not church members. Michael Watts, *The Dissenters, Volume II: The Expansion of Evangelical Nonconformity* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 676-81.

registers; the remaining untraced either did not give a confirmatory mother's name on the parish register, or avoided the rite altogether.⁵¹

A clear majority of the families traced did not live in Bradford itself, but in outlying townships such as Great and Little Horton, Bowling, Wibsey and Tong, between one and three miles from the town. This population spread follows the general pattern of the area at the time, just prior to Bradford's immense growth as an urban centre.⁵² The occupations of male Southcottians were also largely representative of the vicinity: the single most common profession was weaver (ten fathers, including Zaccheus Robinson), four were wool-combers, and another three termed themselves a clothier or 'piecemaker' – all roles in the region's worsted cloth industry.⁵³ Samuel Walker made combs used in the preparation of the particular long-staple wool required to produce worsteds.⁵⁴ Six fathers belonged to other artisan trades related to clothing, but engaged in its finishing: beside Dennis Jardeen, there were two other tailors, James Laycock was one of two stay-makers, John Brunton was the only breeches-maker, while Joshua Jennings was a stocking-maker.⁵⁵ Three men were shoemakers.⁵⁶ The minority of occupations not

⁵¹ William and Hannah Farar's sons, Samuel, David and William, were named at Pellon Lane Particular Baptist Chapel in Halifax in 1812. James and Hannah Clayton's son William was named on 6 May 1802 at the Independent Chapel in Horton. Neither chapel register recorded the father's occupation. TNA RG4/3165 and 3139. Population historians define the period between the early 1790s and the early 1820s – precisely that covered by these two registers – as the worst period for 'under-registration' of birth and deaths in modern English history. Up to one-third of births and deaths in some years in this period were unregistered as baptisms and burials. E.A. Wrigley and R.S. Schofield, *The Population History of England, 1541-1871* (London, 1981), pp. 1-154. See also E.A. Wrigley et al., *English Population History from Family Reconstitution 1580-1837* (Cambridge, 1997).

⁵² Koditscheck, *Class Formation*, pp. 81-2.

⁵³ WYAS BDP14/1/1/9 (1801-03, 1810); BDP14/1/1/10 (1806); BDP14/1/2/1 (1808-15) BDP14/1/2/2 (1817) BDP14/1/2/3 (1819); RDP58 2/7 (1810); BDP94 1/2/1 (1817); See also TNA RG-4/1711. For Parish Church names, see Bibliography, pp. 333-4.

⁵⁴ BIHR, DMH Reg 1 (1816-34) f.351; WYAS BDP14 1/2/3 (1820).

⁵⁵ WYAS BDP14/1/1/9 (1802-03); BDP14/1/2/3 (1816-18). Joshua Jennings' occupation is given in PS PN 238/132, 10 Nov. 1822. See also Edward Baines, *History, Directory and Gazetteer of County of York...* (Leeds, 1822), i. 154.

⁵⁶ WYAS BDP14/1/1/9 (1803); BDP14/1/2/1 (1815) BDP14/1/2/2 (1816).

involving textiles included various grades of agricultural work: Thomas Ackroyde was a farmer, John Walton and Jonas Verity were husbandmen, and John Mitchell a labourer.⁵⁷ Abraham Watmuff of Great Horton was described as a ‘driver’, a term which could relate either to livestock or to operating a vehicle such as a chaise.⁵⁸ Two men were miners, most likely of coal as they lived at Bowling – which, from the late eighteenth-century, was the local source of coal.⁵⁹

The work of the women named on the registers is harder to confirm, as the occupations of married mothers were not given in baptism records, and they are not mentioned in correspondence. Only one Southcottian woman’s occupation is discernable from baptism forms – Milcah Elsworth of Thornton some distance west of Bradford, who bore two sons, Edward and Abraham, apparently unmarried.⁶⁰ Elsworth is recorded as a ‘spinster’ – a title which might initially appear to indicate her unmarried status. However, the term is entered in the occupation column, and the economic historian Pat Hudson has taken equivalent records to indicate a woman’s occupation as a spinner of worsted yarn.⁶¹

The extent to which the occupation of a father determined the working lives of others within a household in a region such as Bradford in this period, is a matter of some historical debate. Historians have recently revised assumptions about the size, consistency and ‘complexity’ of the English household and domestic unit of production

⁵⁷ WYAS BDP14/1/1/9 (1801, 1803); RDP58/3a/3 (1818); BDP94/1/2/1 (1818).

⁵⁸ WYAS BPC BDP14/1/1/9 (1803). Elvira Willmott, ‘Occupations in Eighteenth-century Bradford’ *Bradford Antiquary*, 4 (1989), 67-77.

⁵⁹ WYAS BPC BDP14/1/1/9 (1800); BDP14/1/2/2 (1818).

⁶⁰ WYAS D92/1/2/1 (1815). Her maiden name is given as Elsworth and she appears on the list without a husband.

⁶¹ Pat Hudson ‘Landholding and the organisation of textile manufacture in Yorkshire rural townships c.1660-1810’ in Maxine Berg (ed.), *Markets and Manufacture in early industrial Europe* (London, 1991), pp. 269 and 289.

in the early industrial period.⁶² Households were not always formed from simple ‘nuclear’ families, with parents the principal income-earners or producers and children labouring in addition: a complex household might include other married couples under a head-couple, grown-up children, grandchildren, or other kin such as cousins. Research conducted on the West Riding suggests strongly that many other Bradford women Southcottians, most especially those married to weavers or clothiers, were likely to have spun yarn, in addition to Milcah Elsworth; though Carolyn Steedman has recently noted that we still ‘know relatively little about the labour process in worsted spinning and even less about the system of domestic production in which ... [women] took part’.⁶³ Nevertheless, in wool textile production, unlike cotton, the cottage spinning-jenny is recognised to have remained a ‘women’s technology’ for much of this early nineteenth-century period.⁶⁴ Women – and indeed children – were also known to participate in the same or complementary stages of cloth hand-production as the men in their household, but this work was rarely subject to independent record.⁶⁵

During the first two decades of the nineteenth century, the manufacture of worsted cloth had grown to dominate Bradford and its immediate neighbourhood. This reflected a tendency of textile production in the Pennine area to generate regional concentration on a single fabric. As figure 4 shows, ‘King Cotton’ was dominant in

⁶² B. Reay, ‘Kinship and the Neighbourhood in Nineteenth-century Rural England: The Myth of the Autonomous Nuclear Family’, *Journal of Family History*, 21 (1996), 87-104; Steven King, ‘Migrants on the Margin: Mobility, Integration and Occupations in the West Riding, 1650-1820’, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 23 (1997), 284-303; idem., ‘The English Protoindustrial Family: Old and New Perspectives’, *History of the Family*, 8 (2003), 21-43.

⁶³ Steedman, *Master and Servant*, p. 36; Richard Soderland, ‘Resistance from the Margins: The Yorkshire Worsted Spinners, Policing and the Transformation of Work in the Early Industrial Revolution’, *International Review of Social History*, 51 (2006), 217-42.

⁶⁴ Maxine Berg, ‘Women’s work, mechanisation and the early phases of industrialisation in England’ in Patrick Joyce (ed.), *The Historical Meanings of Work* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 78-9.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 81; John James, *History of Worsted Manufacture*, (first published, 1857; London, 1968), pp. 289, 312, 325.

southern Lancashire, while in Yorkshire dividing lines split modern-day West Yorkshire into a worsted-producing region around Bradford, Halifax and the uplands to the west, and a woollen-producing region from Huddersfield to Wakefield and Leeds.⁶⁶

Fundamental distinctions existed between the costs required in the acquisition of raw materials, the processes applied in the manufacture of each cloth, and the common extent of the use of both power and factories for such processes. These distinctions, along side relative soil-qualities, inheritance patterns, and population densities in specific localities, are recognised to have contributed to significant differences in development between industries.⁶⁷ Cotton and worsteds were the more capital-intensive cloths, producing a more merchant-based system of production, involving piece-work ‘put out’ to domestic hand-workers paid a wage for their work, with no stake themselves in the sale of the finished product. By 1820, the lives of the inhabitants of Bradford and surrounding townships where Southcottians lived, are traditionally considered to have been ruled by this ‘intensive, market-driven form of textile production’, particularly those engaged in combing and weaving.⁶⁸ Cash incomes from such textile work offered households an alternative means of survival to subsistence agriculture, which the poor soils and small land holdings of these upland areas made especially hard in any case. Such wage-labour led the weavers and combers of the ‘putting-out’ system to be viewed as the proto-typical growing proletariat of the period – victims of the vagaries and volatilities of the market.

⁶⁶ Pat Hudson, *The Genesis of Industrial Capital: A Study of the West Riding Wool Textile Industry c.1750-1850* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 28-9; John K. Walton, ‘Proto-Industrialisation and the First Industrial Revolution: The Case of Lancashire’, in Pat Hudson (ed.), *Regions and Industries: A Perspective on the Industrial Revolution in Britain* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 64-7.

⁶⁷ Hudson, *Genesis*, pp. 25-9, 61-70. The differences in processes included the sourcing and preparation of fleeces, and finishing of the fabric.

⁶⁸ These were the processes of hand-production either side of the increasingly-mechanised stage of spinning. Koditscheck, *Class Formation*, p. 34,

Some relatively recent case-studies of West Riding industrialising communities have moderated this pitiful depiction of those working in worsted production.⁶⁹ Despite their wage labour, some hand-workers in worsted districts were known to retain significant land-holdings, and therefore relative financial independence and security. Occupational labels of ‘weaver’, ‘comber’ and ‘clothier’ could cover a multitude of circumstances. Among Bradford Southcottians, Zaccheus Robinson, with five surviving sons by his wife Judith by 1821, was not only a weaver, ‘but of some little property’ also.⁷⁰ Thomas Ackroyde of Tong, who had seven surviving children with his wife Frances Sugden by 1821, rented a house and 69 acres of farmland from the local squire, for £62 pounds per annum – a considerable tenancy for the region.⁷¹ Ackroyde is also recorded taking on local children as apprentices.⁷² John Wroe the future prophet, who appears on the Bradford 1821 manuscript register having joined the Southcottian congregation the previous year, numbers among the four hand-combers recorded in the group. Yet, Wroe was no wage-labourer: like his father and brother, he took on several apprentice-combers, had his own capital in the fleeces he combed, and held his own tenancy on a small farm at Tong.⁷³ Even so, evidence survives to indicate at least some among the Bradford congregation did indeed struggle in their circumstances. In October 1820, Samuel Walker, the Bradford comb-maker, and William and Samuel Muff, Little Horton and Wibsey weavers, wrote to George Turner to request permission ‘concerning some old friends’ for ‘a collection for their relief in the meetings’.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Hudson, ‘Textile Manufacture’, pp. 261-91.

⁷⁰ TNA HO 40/61/253, 19 March 1801, J.A. Busfeild to Lord Portland.

⁷¹ WYAS, Tong/3/728, Deeds of Land Lease, 1 Jan. 1807; Hudson, ‘Textile Manufacture’, pp. 273-9.

⁷² WYAS, Tong/12a/212, Apprentice Indenture, 5 May 1809.

⁷³ Details of Wroe’s family background and financial affairs are given in John Wroe, *Divine Communications and Prophecies...* (Wakefield, 1834); pp. 3-7.

⁷⁴ PS PN 239/30, 31 Oct. 1820.

Huddersfield

The Huddersfield region, twelve miles due south of Bradford, was another area known to have been visited by George Turner in his efforts to promote the prophecies first of Brothers, then of Southcott.⁷⁵ No meetings of Southcottians are recorded being licensed in Huddersfield itself during Southcott's lifetime, but other venues in the wider area were, including several closer to Halifax to the north-west, and two at Thornhill, some eight miles east of Huddersfield, closer to Wakefield (figure 4).⁷⁶ In 1816 this area from Huddersfield to Thornhill had four distinct groups of Southcottians registered as accepting Turner's prophecies, listed as Huddersfield (65 believers), 'Cowmbs' [*sic*] (26 believers), Clayton (17 believers) and Thornhill Lees (59 believers).⁷⁷ In 1818, three separate houses were licensed for meetings of Turner Southcottians named under the previous Huddersfield, Cowmes and Clayton entries: their applications reveal the difficulties some had with articulating their denominational identity, as they were termed 'malenians' in one case, 'Millians' in another, and 'millenarians' in the third.⁷⁸ These houses belonged to 'Anthony Mellor of Heaton Hall in the township ... of Kirkheaton, clothier', Benjamin North of the 'township of Dalton, Weaver' and Francis Farrand, of the 'township of Lepton ..., Clothier'.⁷⁹ As with the Bradford groups to the north, by 1820, these three groups were, to an extent, merged under a single Huddersfield committee, the Thornhill group looking more towards Wakefield.

⁷⁵ SA, WWM F45/63, 13 June 1802, Walker to Earl Fitzwilliam.

⁷⁶ BIHR Fac Bk 3 (1793-1816) ff.346, 422, 610, 643, 649.

⁷⁷ UT JSC 372.

⁷⁸ DMH Reg 1 (1816-1834) ff.63-64.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

As with Bradford, new sources have enabled a useful proportion of these Huddersfield-region Southcottians to be traced, by location and occupation, in the historical record. In early 1821, a register was compiled of 103 adult believers (just five fewer than the combined total of Huddersfield, Cowmes and Clayton four years before), which included 40 families with 149 children under twenty-one.⁸⁰ This was designed for the same purpose as the Bradford register: before a list of adults and children (with children's ages) in family blocks, the Huddersfield list begins with a long petition to God to reveal 'of what Tribe we belong'. The occupations of 23 of the 40 fathers (58%) were traced in contemporary records; a significantly higher proportion (79%) appear in baptism or naming records, but do not give their occupation.⁸¹

As the spread of meeting venues suggest, the Southcottian families attached to the Huddersfield congregation resided over a far wider area, some at a considerable distance from Huddersfield itself, in the first two decades of the century, than their Bradford counterparts. The fathers were also less varied in their occupations. Only two families were recorded living close to the centre of Huddersfield itself.⁸² Most lived in the townships scattered to the east and south-east of the town, such as Kirkheaton, Dalton, and Lepton. In all these locations, every traced father (17) termed himself a clothier in the

⁸⁰ PS PN 243/81, 23 Feb. 1821.

⁸¹ As with Bradford, a strong majority of the Southcottians traced appear in the baptism records of the established church, predominantly in rural parish churches up to fifteen miles south and east of Huddersfield. In this region, paternal occupation recording was especially rare in the registers of dissenting chapels before 1812, most notably at the Queen's St Wesleyan Chapel in Huddersfield, and two Independent chapels at Clayton West and Hopton, all of which were attended at some point by Southcottian families. TNA RG-4/2650 (1802); RG-4/3148 (1802-08). RG-4/3036 (1801-08). See Edward Royle, 'Religion in Huddersfield since the mid-eighteenth century' in E.A.H. Haigh (ed.), *Huddersfield – a most handsome town: aspects of the history and culture of a West Yorkshire town* (Kirklees, 1992), pp. 100-44. and idem., 'The Church of England and Methodism in Yorkshire, c.1750-1850: From Monopoly to Free Market', *Northern History*, 33 (1997), 137-61.

⁸² Only William and Hannah Barrowclough and Richard and Hannah Hanson had their children baptised at Huddersfield Parish Church, WYAS WDP32/6 (1814-16). James Riley Harling (wife unknown) had his children George and Hannah Harling baptised at Queen's St Wesleyan chapel in Huddersfield, but his occupation was not recorded: TNA RG-4/3036/8 and 11.

baptism records of his children, including Benjamin North the Dalton weaver.⁸³ The remaining traced families (including those for whom no occupation is recorded) lived between five and fifteen miles out from Huddersfield, in Mirfield, Flockton, Emley, Clayton and Bretton, on higher, less densely populated hilltops. Here, the six Southcottian fathers traced were three weavers, two agricultural labourers, and, in Joseph Clarkson of Bretton's case, a tailor.⁸⁴ Some fathers apparently changed occupation between children – a scenario less apparent in the Bradford records which showed fathers consistently giving the same occupation at the baptisms of all their children. Jonathan Shaw of Broadroyd Head was a nail-maker when his wife Mary gave birth to their children Fanney and James in 1806 and 1809. By 1812, when their son Israel was born, Shaw gave his occupation as 'labourer'.⁸⁵

The extent of regional specialisation in cloth manufacture by 1820 is sufficient to indicate that many of these Huddersfield region Southcottian clothiers were most likely engaged in the production specifically of 'fancy woollens' – a high-grade woollen cloth (figure 4).⁸⁶ Here, women were also likely to hand-spin woollen yarn, as mechanised spinning processes came particularly slowly to woollens production.⁸⁷ That the men in their households were clothiers, may, for some Southcottian women, have meant they were also: an 1806 Parliamentary woollen committee were informed that among clothiers in Yorkshire 'wives and daughters as well as men used the loom in cottage industry'.⁸⁸

⁸³ WYAS WDP160/1/1/4 (1800-12), WDP160/1/2/1 (1813-22);, WDP12/13 (1813-22); WDP1/3.

⁸⁴ WYAS WDP118/2-4; WDP2/4; WDP62/1/3; WDP137/1/2/1; E.B. Armitage, *The Parish Register of Hartshead in the county of York, 1612-1812* (Leeds, 1903), p. 276.

⁸⁵ WYAS WDP62/1/3 (1806-12).

⁸⁶ 'Fancy' woollens were finer quality cloths, such as elastics, beaverettes, honleys and kerseymeres, which tended to command a premium at sale in the local cloth halls and other markets. Hudson, *Genesis*, pp. 26-8.

⁸⁷ Maxine Berg, 'Women's work', pp. 78-9.

⁸⁸ Select Committee on the Woollen Manufacture, Parliamentary Papers 1806, quoted in Berg, 'Women's work', p. 81.

Fancy woollens production also provided a defined role for clothiers' children, as the Jacquard loom used for such cloth, requiring the menial task of 'reading' the cloth pattern on to cards, a task almost exclusively devolved to drawboys and drawgirls.⁸⁹

The wage-based 'putting-out' system was rare in the Yorkshire woollens district in 1820; the area retained many more independent producers who bought fleeces themselves, carried out the spinning and weaving processes within their own cottage or in shared workshops, and sold on their near-finished cloth at the local cloth hall.⁹⁰ Here, more productive land was owned by more people, in larger plots, allowing many clothiers to balance their textile occupation with farming.⁹¹ Such arrangements, together with the premium nature of many of the cloths produced, and slower rate of mechanisation, have been taken to that indicate woollens hand-workers were less affected by changes in the textile market than elsewhere in the Pennines.⁹² Yet, not all Huddersfield Southcottian clothiers necessarily enjoyed a greater stake in the produce of their hands and land, than their fellow believers in the worsteds district to the north. A revisionist study has proposed that a considerable landless, journeymen population also existed in this region in the period, living off work provided by their independent clothier neighbours.⁹³ Such families claimed the label 'clothier' in baptism records, but tax returns and probate records reveal them to have retained little access to the land, and depending on spinning and weaving employment delegated by master clothier neighbours in periods of demand. Few if any of the Southcottian clothiers appear in contemporary cloth-hall records, which

⁸⁹ Hudson, *Genesis*, pp. 26-8; Berg, 'Women's work', p. 81.

⁹⁰ Pat Hudson, 'Proto-Industrialisation: The Case of the West Riding Wool Textile Industry in the 18th and Early 19th Centuries', *History Workshop Journal*, 12 (1981), 46-50.

⁹¹ Hudson, *Genesis*, pp. 64-7.

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 64-7.

⁹³ Hudson, 'Textile Manufacture in rural Yorkshire', p. 279.

may signify that many belonged to this less independent, less financially-secure section of the population.⁹⁴

Ashton-under-Lyne

The Lancashire cotton-town of Ashton-under-Lyne, 20 miles south-west of Huddersfield, across the Pennines, is synonymous with Southcottianism. This is largely due to developments in the 1820s, when John Wroe made the town the centre of his prophetic leadership for eight years, and called it Jerusalem.⁹⁵ Southcottians were known to be numerous in the town by 1813, when Southcott noted ‘a very great increase of believers’ there.⁹⁶ Many were evidently drawn from the sizeable Methodist population in the district, as Southcott subsequently addressed a letter to two Ashton preachers directly, rebutting their attempts to persuade former members of their flock to return to the Methodist fold.⁹⁷ This substantial body of believers met in a building in Charlestown, a neighbourhood on the northern edge of Ashton town; and many continued to meet in this venue from the point that Turner declared the chapels should re-open in 1815.⁹⁸ In 1816, 201 names were entered from Ashton for belief in Turner.⁹⁹

No register with equivalent family information to the Bradford and Huddersfield groups survives from the larger Ashton group by 1820, but the occupations and other aspects of the lives of a small selection of Ashton families are still possible to recover.

⁹⁴ *Directory, general and commercial, of the town & borough of Leeds* (Leeds, 1817); Baines, *History, Directory and Gazetteer... 1822*.

⁹⁵ See Chapter 4, pp. 137-67.

⁹⁶ British Library (BL) Add. MSS. 47794/128, 13 Feb. 1813.

⁹⁷ Joanna Southcott, *Letters and Observations to Ministers*, 2nd ed. (London, 1814), p. 39.

⁹⁸ Lancashire Record Office (LRO) QDV/4/58d-59 (1814-15); BL Add. MSS 47798/72, 12 Apr. 1815.

⁹⁹ UT JSC MS 372.

Those lists of Southcottian names from Ashton which do survive may be read carefully for the insights they reveal, and tested against baptism and marriage records, correspondence between Ashton and other groups of Turner supporters, and more public records such as trade directories.¹⁰⁰ Ten Southcottian families in the Ashton district were traced in this way.

As with the Bradford and Huddersfield groups, a significant proportion of traced Ashton Southcottians were involved in the hand-production of the textile that dominated their region: five Southcottian fathers were hand-loom cotton weavers. Three lived in Ashton, Charlestown and Littlebanks - another neighbourhood on the edge of the township; James Mills and Joseph Grimshaw were both weavers in Hurst, a mile to the north-east of Ashton.¹⁰¹ Two further Southcottian families had links to the building trade: William Greenall of Charlestown was a stonemason, while father and son, William and Thomas Stones of Hurst, were joiners.¹⁰² Three further Southcottian families – the Stanley, Swire and Lees families – may be traced in considerable detail beyond their parish register entries. This is due to their achieving some prominence in Ashton itself,

¹⁰⁰ The marked correlation in names appearing on the British Library manuscript that lists 227 sealed Southcottians, most likely in 1813, and the 201 names entered under Ashton in the Texas scroll of 1816, was noted in Chapter 1, p. 68. Common to both these lists are consecutive entries of people with the same surname, often a male name, then a female name, in a manner indicative of married couples. A particular difference between the two lists, meanwhile, are additional people with the same surnames appearing below such couples on the later list but not the earlier, so suggesting children coming of Southcottian age (21 years old) between the compiling of the two. For instance, James Mills and Mary Mills are listed together on both sources, but on the 1816 list are followed by 'Betty Mills' and 'Mary Mills' (BL Add. MS 47798/165; UT JSC 372). The other Texas scroll - the list compiled in February 1818 of the women to be 'married to the Lord' - provides a further, confirmatory source for the discerning of Southcottian family units: the entry for the Ashton group lists several more same-surnamed women together (UT JSC 371). These findings have been cross-referenced with the parish records for Ashton and the surrounding area to trace the home locations and male occupations of Southcottian families.

¹⁰¹ Tameside Local Studies Centre (TLSC) St Michael's Parish Church, Ashton-under-Lyne, Baptism Register, 1720-1814, ff.23-26; See also TLSC, St Michael's PC, Marriage Register, 1720-1837, ff.218, 388; TLSC, Mottram-in-Longdendale PC, Marriage Register, 1754-1836, f.466.

¹⁰² TLSC, St Michael's PC, Baptism Register, 1720-1814, ff.20, 33; See also TLSC, St Michaels PC, Marriage Register, 1720-1837, f.309.

whilst also being known for their links to Southcottianism during that prominence.¹⁰³ A range of new evidence confirms the longevity of their involvement in the millenarian movement.

John Stanley's (1786-1855) occupation at his marriage in Stockport in 1806 was 'mechanic', but by the late-1810s he owned an iron-works on Oldham Road in Ashton producing machine-parts for textile production.¹⁰⁴ He came from a yeoman family well-established in the Dukinfield locality, south of Ashton, and associated with the Independent Dukinfield Old Chapel.¹⁰⁵ His wife Sarah, and mother Lexey, were also believers.¹⁰⁶ Samuel Swire was the joint-owner of a highly profitable cotton-spinning mill on Stamford Street, Ashton, in 1817.¹⁰⁷ Swire's father, also Samuel Swire, owned Ashton Mill from the 1780s; by 1814, the son had gone into partnership with two other members of Ashton's burgeoning 'cottonocracy', John Kenworthy and Richard Stanfield.¹⁰⁸ The Lees family owned and operated the Park Bridge iron-works founded in the 1780s, a sizeable industrial concern forging rollers and spindles for cotton-mills.¹⁰⁹ Hannah Lees is known to have taken over the running of Park Bridge in 1804, following the death of her husband Samuel Lees. 'Widow Lees', as she was known, was a Southcottian by 1813; and by 1816, when Lees was operating Park Bridge with her eldest

¹⁰³ Winifred Bowman, *England in Ashton-under-Lyne* (Ashton-under-Lyne, 1960), pp. 235-40.

¹⁰⁴ TLSC, St Mary's Parish Church, Stockport, Marriage Register, 29 Apr. 1806. Ian Haynes, *Cotton in Ashton* (Ashton-under-Lyne, 1987), p. 25.

¹⁰⁵ I am grateful to Gay-Jeanne Oliver, who married into the Stanley family, for her advice on this period of its history.

¹⁰⁶ BL Add. MS 47798/165; UT JSC 372.

¹⁰⁷ Haynes, *Cotton*, pp. 10 and 18.

¹⁰⁸ By 1825, Swire owned the new Bank Mills, as well as a Dukinfield colliery, only six years after large-scale coal production began in the district. Haynes, *Cotton*, p. 24; Michael Nevell, *Tameside 1700-1930* (Ashton-under-Lyne, 1993), p. 104.

¹⁰⁹ Samuel Lees was previously a partner in Stalybridge Carrbrook Mill. While Widow Lees proceeded to manage the expansion of the business after Samuel's death, it was also held in trust for the elder son, Edward, by James Heginbottom and John Wood, both prominent Ashton mill-owners. Michael Nevell and John Roberts, *The Park Bridge Ironworks and the Archaeology of the Wrought Iron Industry in North West England, 1600 to 1900* (Ashton-under-Lyne, 2003); Haynes, *Cotton*, p. 19.

son Edward, several of her by now of-age children were recorded as followers of Turner with her.¹¹⁰ During the late-1810s, the second son, Henry Lees, established his own machine-works, closer to the centre of Ashton, in partnership with John Stanley.¹¹¹

Within the Ashton Southcottian congregation then, even with such a small sample of their traced occupations, it is evident that there were individuals and families experiencing the early industrial development of the cotton town from radically different perspectives. While Samuel Swire held capital in power spinning-mills, and the Stanley and Lees families were engaged in the machine-making business to supply such mills, weavers such as James Mills and Joseph Grimshaw of Hurst were subject to a similar ‘putting-out’ system as Bradford hand-worker Southcottians. Though power-loom weaving was developed for cotton some decades before it was introduced to Yorkshire wool textiles, it is now recognised that up to 1820, hand-weaving still predominated in southern Lancashire.¹¹² The infamous poverty of cotton hand-weavers was determined more by troughs in the textile market and surplus labour driving down piece-rates before 1820; the age of the weavers’ iconic ‘obsolescence’, challenged by the coming of the machine, was from the 1820s onwards.¹¹³

Some suggestion, nonetheless, of the difficulties in circumstances experienced by one Southcottian weaving family, survives from this point of transition: a letter from the Ashton congregation to Turner in May 1820, included a moving request from James Mills and his wife Mary, that the prophet petition God about ‘the different troubles and

¹¹⁰ These were Edward Lees (1789-1846), Henry Lees (1792-1859), Sarah Lees (1790-1859) and Hannah Lees (1796-1818). Henry Lees’ wife, Anne (nee Travis) also appears on UT JSC 372. TLSC DDL/2/35.

¹¹¹ Nevell and Roberts, *Park Bridge Ironworks*, p. 24; TLSC DDL/2/31-35 Lees Family Papers; Bowman, *Ashton-under-Lyne*, p. 465.

¹¹² Duncan Bythell, *The Handloom Weavers: A Study in the English Cotton Industry During the Industrial Revolution* (London, 1969), p. 69.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 66-93.

afflictions that hath come upon them and their family'.¹¹⁴ Turner's recorded reply from God was the classic deferred hope of the millenarian, telling them to:

remember ... that distresses of the world will be amongst my children until my son Shiloh appears, then they will rejoice and the world will weap [*sic*] and let them also remember that my grace is sufficient for them in all troubles and distress that may come upon them.¹¹⁵

Stockport

The beginnings of Southcottian belief in Stockport, another cotton-dominated textile town, may be more firmly linked to the work of the prophet herself than is the case with other sample locations.¹¹⁶ During a northern visit in the winter of 1803, Southcott was invited to address the Methodist chapel in Stockport, which was divided, Southcott wrote, over 'those that believe in my writings and the near approach of Christ's Kingdom'.¹¹⁷ The chapel 'was throng'd with many hundreds if not a thousand' to witness Southcott's appearance. Disputes are known to have continued even among those subsequently accepting Southcott's prophecies, as believers' meetings in the town featured 'discord ... strife and contention'.¹¹⁸

After Southcott's death, 77 men and women were recorded accepting Turner's prophetic leadership in 1816.¹¹⁹ By 1820, the leading member of the committee of this

¹¹⁴ PS PN 243/41, 1 May 1820.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ashton and Stockport were part of the same Methodist circuit until 1811; the growth of Southcottianism in Ashton may well have had its origins in Stockport. Robert Glen, 'Anatomy of a Religious Revival: Stockport Methodists in the 1790s', *Manchester Region History Review*, 10 (1996), 7.

¹¹⁷ BL Add. MS 47794/14, 4 Dec. 1803.

¹¹⁸ BL Add. MS 47794/59, 5 Aug. 1805.

¹¹⁹ UT JSC MS 372.

congregation was John Wardle, a 'Patterns Ring Maker' in Small St.¹²⁰ Other occupations of members of this congregation are difficult to trace, but alternative evidence survives of their individual means, as well as the particular fate of certain believers. In April 1821, Wardle made specific mention of their collective difficulties raising a contribution to the movement in London: 'our friends are all Poor ...; [yet] though we are poor we are willing ... to collect our mites as often as the Lord Requires them'.¹²¹ A year later, 48 Stockport believers raised a further £1-13s-6d to send to London.¹²² The letter accompanying the contribution detailed the modest amounts each believer gave, from 'Little Joanna Wardle' giving 1d, to her father, John Wardle, and Samuel Leah and Mary Leah each giving the most at 2s 6d. The vast majority spared 6d.¹²³ Wardle apologised that 'the sum is so small' and felt necessary to state:

that our Body of friends is considerable less in number than it was (some as fallen away- and the following names as left the town for convenience of work – Jn Chatham, Mary Chatham, and Elizabeth Chatham, gone to Macclesfield – Henry Katter, John Hall and Sarah Hall – Gone to Huddersfield; Josh Kinsey and Ellen Kinsey, gone to Failsworth, and Josh Graystock – gone to Rochdail) and if there is any that as kept their hands back – because of the ... trials they have had to pass through – that I leave to themselves – but I know our friends is Generally Poor.¹²⁴

Even allowing for the difference in numbers, Ashton-under-Lyne's recorded contribution for London in 1821 'for £35 14s 6d' underlines the dramatic difference in the financial means of two groups of millenarians, seven miles apart.¹²⁵

¹²⁰ PS PN 243/37-38, 19 and 21 Apr. 1820; PS PN 238/103. Wardle's address and occupation is given on this manuscript letter. See also PS PN 240/6, 8 July 1822.

¹²¹ PS PN 238/103, 30 Apr. 1821.

¹²² This was despite Turner's death in September 1821.

¹²³ PS PN 240/6, 8 July 1822.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ PS PN 238/92, 21 Apr. 1821.

Pennine ‘Old Believers’

The final body of Southcottians traced were those believers resident or originating from within the same Pennine region as those above, yet who belonged to the alternative post-1814 national network of Southcottians opposed to Turner or any other prophet. As no registers of such Southcottians in any one place survive from the period, only a scattered sample has been identified, through the surviving correspondence exchanged between such ‘old believers’.¹²⁶ The occupations and circumstances of some of this apparently smaller and more disparate community of northern Southcottians have been established from remarks made in manuscript letters, and cross-referencing believers’ postal addresses with trade directories or other public records.

In the Ashton region, John and Mary Linney of North St, Audenshaw, corresponded extensively with Southcottians across the country, after 1815, frequently commenting on what the Turner followers in their neighbourhood were up to.¹²⁷ William Oldfield, a Stockport shopkeeper, did much the same, writing particularly often to Charles Whitehead of Holmfirth, in the Huddersfield district, to exchange news and prophetic views, on their former co-religionists.¹²⁸

Some twelve miles to the north of Whitehead, beyond his locale with its many Turner believers, was Halifax, a town within the Bradford worsteds region (figure 4), yet a location where ‘old believers’ remained in a notable ascendancy. Licensed Southcottian meeting spaces were once as numerous in and around Halifax as they were in the

¹²⁶ PS PN 246 and 252; BL Add. MSS 47794-477803, 57860 70933.

¹²⁷ BL Add. MSS 70933/9-42.

¹²⁸ BL Add. MS 47794/132, 26 Apr. 1816; MS 47798/89, 24 Feb. 1822.

Bradford area; but they all remained closed in 1815.¹²⁹ William Jowett, John Crossley, James Kidd and John Crowther were all prominent in Halifax Southcottianism while Southcott was still alive. Jowett is recorded as an influential believer in 1804, while Crossley was the author of several pamphlets in support of Southcott.¹³⁰ Jowett's ability to travel the country, evident from his letters, suggests he was a man of some means, but it has not been confirmed whether he owned or tenanted his land at Delves, east of Halifax. John Crowther was a joiner, in Cabbage Lane then Bull-Green, in central Halifax.¹³¹ John Crossley and James Kidd were both involved in the textile industry, but neither were hand-workers: Crossley kept a shop selling cloth;¹³² Kidd supervised the warehouses of the worsted firm of Buck and Kershaw.¹³³

Kidd was related to the Jowett family through his sister Sarah's marriage to Joseph Jowett, one of William's sons. Joseph and his brother Samuel both initially left the Halifax locality for Leeds during Southcott's lifetime; yet, while Samuel Jowett became a letter-press printer in the central Mill Hill district,¹³⁴ Joseph, by 1817, had moved his family to Birmingham to establish himself as an auctioneer.¹³⁵ Surviving letters passing between Birmingham and Halifax, from 1817 to the 1820s and later, illuminate some aspects of the circumstances of these Southcottians. Kidd was

¹²⁹ BIHR, Fac Bk 3, (1793-1816) ff.346, 404, 422, 610, 652.

¹³⁰ BL 47799/72-73; John Crossley, *A Vindication of Joanna Southcott's Writings; being a Reply to an Anonymous Pamphlet published against her at Halifax*, sold by ... J. Crowther, 39 Pellan-Lane, Halifax, and at W. Jowett's, Delves, near Northowram-Bar, (Halifax, 1805).

¹³¹ PN 246/12 and 33.

¹³² PN 246/37, 2 Oct. 1828, John Crossley to James Kidd. Crossley's enthusiasm for fathering distinctively-named sons (seven in all, including Barnabus, Barak and Matthias) permits his tracing to a 'small worsted dealer's' shop in Wakefield by the 1840s. TNA HO 107/1272/6 52/20 (1841 Census, England).

¹³³ PS PN 246/22 19 May 1818, Joseph Jowett to James Kidd. Jowett's letters to Kidd between 1818 and 1823 are addressed to him at 'Messrs Buck and Kirshaws, Merchants, Halifax'. On stuff manufacture and merchants in Halifax, see John Smail, *Merchants, Markets and Manufacturers: The English Wool Textile Industry in the Eighteenth Century* (Basingstoke, 1999), pp. 21-3, 66-9 and Hudson, *Genesis*.

¹³⁴ PS PN 246/34; Baines, *History, Directory and Gazetteer... 1822*, p. 63.

¹³⁵ PS PN 246/9, 11 Jan. 1811.

comfortably wealthy: the letters exchanged with his sister and brother-in-law, record that the loans Kidd provided for their Birmingham move amounted to several hundred pounds.¹³⁶ These Kidd – only in his late-twenties and early thirties at the time – was able to supply through his position of some responsibility in the Halifax worsted industry.¹³⁷ Later in life, Kidd was recorded living on an ‘income from dividends’, and died in 1868 leaving over £3000 in property.¹³⁸ Kidd also supplied Jowett’s auction business with cloth from his Halifax firm. Significantly, Jowett was also supplied by other Southcottians within the same correspondence network, including Thomas Bradbury, a Sheffield silversmith supplying ‘Sheffield goods’.¹³⁹ The nineteenth-century British enthusiasm for mixing business and religion was embraced by such Southcottians.¹⁴⁰

Conclusions

These five studies confirm, to the most detailed extent so far, that adherents of Southcottian beliefs were personally caught up in the dramatic developments of industrialism in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Yet while the evidence indicating a significant number of Southcottians around Bradford, Huddersfield and Ashton were indeed the textile hand-workers of Thompson’s narrative, it is significant

¹³⁶ PS PN 246/22-23, 27-31, Nov. 1818-Oct. 1822.

¹³⁷ Kidd’s birth year of 1791 is based on information provided in the 1841–1861 censuses. He died in 1868. The records of Buck and Kershaw have not been traced, but equivalent positions of management and accounting in other sizeable worsted firms – as with cotton firms in Lancashire – were known to offer substantial rewards to ‘capable’ and ‘well-qualified’ young men. George Ingle, *Yorkshire Cotton: The Yorkshire Cotton Industry 1780-1835* (Preston, 1997), p. 74-5.

¹³⁸ TNA HO 107/2298/749/5 (1851 Census). Frances Brown, *Joanna Southcott's Box of Sealed Prophecies* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 286.

¹³⁹ PS PN 246/22, 18 May 1818; *Sheffield General and Commercial Directory* (Sheffield, 1821), p. 15.

¹⁴⁰ Three other Sheffield Southcottians who may be identified within the same group of Southcottians were George Evans, who kept a grocers shop in Broad St, Charles Hobson, a metal-refiner in near-by Duke St, and Charles Bower, a cabinet maker in Paternoster Row. BL Add. MSS 70933/9-10, 16-17, 22 Jan. 1817 and 13 Oct. 1822; PS PN 246/34, [n.d.]; BL Add. MS 70933/11, 22 Feb. 1817.

that several of their fellow-religionists were also implicated in industrial change itself, investing their own capital in mechanised production or trading successfully in its products. Evidently, the acceptance or denial of millenarian Southcottian beliefs was not dependent on wealth or poverty: individuals and families of some wealth were drawn to the movement and remained convinced believers for considerable periods. The aristocratic backgrounds of several of Southcott's leading followers while she was alive, most notably the Revd Thomas Foley and Jane Townley, have previously been used to make this point; yet the involvement of the Stanley, Swire and Lees families in the Ashton congregation confirms that this remained the case in different divisions of the movement after Southcott's death.¹⁴¹ Samuel Swire in particular, came from an already successful family, being the son of the owner of Ashton Mill; while the Lees family ironworks at Park Bridge was valued at £800 as early as 1804.¹⁴² These families challenge any simple assumption that the more literate, educated or socially-prominent Southcottians automatically opted for the group of believers which concentrated on her prophetic writings, and not the aural claims of a new prophet.

It is important that the presence of individuals and families experiencing poverty among Southcottian communities is not denied. The testimonies of Southcottians in Ashton and Stockport recounting their difficulties, as well as the Bradford community's relief collection underline this. Hopkins' spirited rejection of Harrison's conclusions is, to some degree, validated by this evidence. The accompanying occupational data from these communities cannot, however, be employed to sustain Hopkins' – or indeed Thompson's

¹⁴¹ Harrison, *Second Coming*, pp. 112-17; Hopkins, *Woman*, pp. 88-93.

¹⁴² Haynes, *Cotton*, p. 10; Nevell and Roberts, *Park Bridge Ironworks*, p. 24.

– more general linking of chiliastic beliefs to poverty and interpretations of millenarianism as a response to points of deprivation.

Studies of northern early nineteenth-century textile regions produced since Thompson's work – particularly since the 1980s – have identified considerable contrasts in not only rates of industrial development, but also workers' experiences of industrialism, according to the specific textile material manufactured and geographical district.¹⁴³ Essentially, they have found that hand-workers in different parts of the West Riding and in Lancashire underwent significant variations in their experience of trade-cycles, wage patterns, and rates of technological change. An Ashton hand-loom weaver's experience of employment in the first decades of the nineteenth century was therefore different from a Bradford weaver's, which was in turn different from that of a Huddersfield clothier. It is no longer valid to refer to *the* 'depressed' or 'declining' hand-worker across the span of this period, as Green does as recently as 2005.¹⁴⁴ The iconic 'demise of the domestic system' of cottage-based textile manufacture with the rise of the factory, took place at such varied paces between industries and towns, that the chronological parameters of the whole 'proto-industrial' phase associated with this mode of production are notoriously difficult to define.¹⁴⁵ The introduction of machines to certain stages of production varied between specific textiles, sometimes by decades. Periods of boom in trade were also experienced differently, according to the demand for

¹⁴³ See especially, Hudson (ed.), *Regions and Industries*; Maxine Berg, *The Age of Manufactures, 1700-1820: Industry, Innovation, and Work in Britain*, 2nd edn (London, 1994).

¹⁴⁴ Green, *Wroe*, p. 29.

¹⁴⁵ Walton, 'Proto-industrialisation in Lancashire', p. 43; Hudson, 'Proto-industrialisation', 34-61.

specific fabrics, and, of course, the hand-producers' own relation to risk, capital and the profits available in such times.¹⁴⁶

Such revisionist work, when coupled to a further insight of the congregation histories above – namely the evidence for the longevity of millenarian convictions in neighbourhoods and communities across decades – calls into significant question the connections drawn between specific time-periods of economic depression and the popularity of millenarianism. The evidence for consistent communities of belief in the Pennine region – from Brothers followers in 1801 near Bradford and new Southcottians in Ashton in 1813 remaining millenarians in 1820 – contradicts the idea of millenarian beliefs being embraced on only a temporary basis, as a response to immediate circumstances, to be discarded when such conditions changed. For if the latter were the case, then which social scenario, which circumstance in local trade, which particular economic moment over the course of the first two decades of the century, was it that precipitated the conviction that the millennium was imminent? If there were answers available to this question, they would almost certainly vary between communities, even between families and individuals, to the point that no meaningful conclusion could be drawn. A more persuasive conception of millenarian beliefs is that they represented a way of viewing the world, held by persons across extended periods, unchallenged by perceived improvements or failures in the economic conditions they lived through.¹⁴⁷

Millenarianism cannot be mapped in waves of enthusiasm matched to economic circumstances, but is made sense of in the long-view, in consistent individuals and

¹⁴⁶ Maxine Berg, 'Factories, Workshops and Industrial Organisation', in R. Floud and D. McCloskey (eds.), *The Economic History of Britain since 1700: Volume 1, 1700-1860*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 123-50.

¹⁴⁷ Harrison approaches this position, but does not adopt it fully, in his concluding discussion to *Second Coming*, p. 226.

communities of belief, matching their received religious convictions to the events they lived through.

Yet if millenarian beliefs did not oscillate with economic conditions, did they oscillate – or relate in any other way – with the strength or weakness of political radicalism? The new, specific evidence of textile hand-workers among Pennine Southcottians may in fact extent be interpreted as upholding Thompson’s original view of such millenarians’ occupational identities, even if their social experience was not inevitably as he assumed. Southcottians were of the same occupation, and lived in the same locations, as many who supported radical political movements in the 1815-1820 period. The question therefore remains whether such millenarian textile hand-workers come to be involved in radicalism during this notable period of political activity, as Thompson’s argument assumed. This issue is now addressed in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3

POST-WAR POLITICS

In Britain, the years 1815 to 1820 witnessed a notable upsurge in radical political activity, and in some histories it remains ‘the heroic age of popular Radicalism’.¹ The views and responses of Southcottians to such activity in this distinct period is of clear importance to understandings of their relationship to radicalism. Were the links forged between such millenarians and radicals in the early 1830s – the next recognised era of radical upsurge – a continuation or carry-over of sympathies within the movement expressed earlier? Or was there a marked difference in attitudes among such millenarians before 1820, more contiguous with the public direction of Southcott herself, not to ‘trouble themselves about politics or parties ... to avoid contention or strife’?²

It is well recognised that forms of radicalism emergent in the post-war period were influential precedents for later popular political campaigns from the late-1820s, especially agitations around the Reform Bill. Many notable radical figures of the later period – platform orators and unstamped publishers – cut their campaigning teeth between 1815 and 1820, including Henry Hunt, William Benbow, and Richard Carlile, while William Cobbett was a veteran of even earlier.³ Given the familiar ‘quiet years’ of radicalism of the 1820s followed this – a decade of few overt campaigns or agitations, but for occasional strikes in northern textile districts – then precedents for Southcottian

¹ Edward Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, revised edn (Harmondsworth, 1968), p. 660. Iorwerth Prothero, *Artisans and Politics in Early Nineteenth-Century London: John Gast and His Times* (London, 1979), pp. 73-155.

² University of Texas, Austin (UT) Joanna Southcott Collection (JSC) 415/44.

³ John Belchem, *‘Orator’ Hunt: Henry Hunt and English Working-Class Radicalism* (Oxford, 1985); Iorwerth Prothero, ‘William Benbow and the concept of the “general strike”’, *Past and Present*, no. 63 (1974), 132–71; Joel Wiener, *Radicalism and Freethought in Nineteenth-Century Britain: The Life of Richard Carlile* (Westport, 1983).

sympathies with radicalism may be sought here.⁴ However, this chapter argues that no active sympathy is evident. Rather, Southcottians retained an attitude to politics, from Waterloo to ‘Peterloo’ and after, consistent with that identified during Southcott’s lifetime. This establishes that the Southcottians who came to relate to forms of the political radicalism of the 1830s did so on the basis of distinct developments within their millenarian movement over those same quiet 1820s.

Yet, what Southcottians themselves thought of politics in this post-war period is not the limit of their relationship to contemporary radicalism: the perceptions of outsiders – most notably the Government – is an alternative side to this subject. In several cases, Southcottian millenarians remained suspect for those in authority during 1815-1820; their suspicions being aroused and maintained by some Southcottians’ erratic, potentially-unruly behaviour, and the proximity of such activities – chronologically, geographically and in their apparent aims – to those political radicals perceived to be bent on disturbance and revolution. Significantly, several of the most extreme radical figures from this period, the ‘Spencean Philanthropists’, whose plans to overthrow the Government and nationalise the land were influenced by the ideas of Thomas Spence (1750-1814), adopted a rhetoric which included millennial terminology.⁵ Historians have since defined Spenceans and their plans as ‘postmillennial,’ as they expected to achieve the biblical vision of the millennium by human action.⁶ Contemporaries who saw themselves as servants of the British State did not always see this as distinct from Southcottian passivity, so that Southcottians and Spenceans could be tarred with the same brush. This

⁴ Thompson, *Making*, p. 781.

⁵ Malcolm Chase, *The People's Farm: English Radical Agrarianism 1775-1840* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 78-120.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

chapter therefore explores such associative perceptions of these two movements also, and clarifies their theological differences in their conceptions of human and divine agency.

Post-war Radicalism

The end of a quarter-century of war in Europe brought significant economic disruption to Britain. Not that the latter years while the conflict still persisted had been smooth in social or financial terms: poor harvests, increased consumer taxes to finance war debt, and a strangling of trade with the Continent and elsewhere by French forces marked the three years before Waterloo, producing inflation, bankruptcies and unemployment. Demobilisation, the immediate fall-off in military orders for arms, uniforms and ships, and provincial bank failures, combined to wipe out swiftly any peace dividend. The responses of those in power during 1815-1816, from poor law overseers denying adequate relief, to Parliament passing corn laws perceived to serve only landowners' profits, generated significant discontent in almost every part of the country.

The chronology of nineteenth-century radicals themselves (echoed by their twentieth-century historians) holds that the initial, widespread expression of this discontent was riots. Then, through the influence of the radical press, most notably Cobbett's *Political Register*, many were 'directed ... to the true cause of their sufferings – misgovernment; and to its proper corrective – parliamentary reform', such that 'instead of riots and destruction of property, Hampden clubs were now established' to revive the calls for more responsible and representative government last heard in the 1790s.⁷ In addition to radical clubs and newspapers, the 'mass platform' – or large public meetings

⁷ Samuel Bamford, *Passages in the Life of a Radical* (Oxford, 1984), p. 13; Thompson, *Making*, pp. 660-5.

called to demonstrate support for petitions of Parliament for the restoration of rights and redress of grievances – was a third major measure and expression of radicalism in this period. Various half-baked revolutionary plans and attempted insurrections were a fourth.⁸

Radicalism in the post-war years experienced two well-recognised ‘peaks’: the first in 1816-1817, the second in 1819-1820.⁹ The winter of 1816 and early 1817 witnessed the first mass-meetings in London’s Spa Fields, other large public demonstrations for reform at Glasgow and Sheffield, and a gathering of Hampden Club delegates from either side of the Pennines, the Midlands and London, at the Crown and Anchor Inn in the capital, with the express purpose of organising the petitioning of Parliament for its reform. These events concerned the Government, but when the Prince Regent’s coach was attacked on 28 January, at the State Opening of Parliament, a repressive response ensued. Laws used to control radical activity in the 1790s, including the restriction of meetings, suspension of *Habeas Corpus* and the appointing of Committees of Secrecy, were quickly reintroduced; leading radicals were imprisoned.¹⁰ The halting of a planned walk to London by several hundred Lancashire weavers (‘the Blanketeers’) at Stockport in March, and the failed risings across Yorkshire and the east Midlands in June, marked the down-slope on the other side of the first peak in radical enthusiasm.¹¹

⁸ Belchem, ‘*Orator*’ *Hunt*, pp. 42-78.

⁹ Prothero, *Artisans and Politics*, p. 75.

¹⁰ Thompson, *Making*, pp. 699-700.

¹¹ The risings are commonly identified with those who rose from Pentrich in Derbyshire, and the encouragements of a government *agent provocateur* ‘Oliver the Spy’. Edward Royle, *Revolutionary Britannia: Reflections on the Threat of Revolution in Britain, 1789-1848* (Manchester, 2000), pp. 48-51.

A brief up-turn in the economy from mid-1817, brought on by a better harvest and a revival of the textile trade in Lancashire, Yorkshire and the Midlands, temporarily detracted attention from political campaigns. During 1818, trade-based agitations escalated, as Pennine spinners and weavers attempted to secure wage increases through strikes, often supported by the remains of local Hampden clubs. Yet, as the textile and other trades fell-off once again in 1819, and new public petitioning organisations were formed, especially in the North, radicalism reached its second peak, marked by a further series of mass-meetings and petitions, ended in and by Peterloo and its repressive aftermath. Public riots, rumours of groups drilling with arms, and brief attempted rebellions at Burnley and Huddersfield in Autumn 1819, together with the vehement criticism of Government actions voiced in the radical press, resulted in the passing of ‘the Six Acts’ of December 1819, regulating crowds and publications severely. In early 1820, further risings and a revolution were intended by a group of London Spenceans, led by Arthur Thistlewood, conspiring to assassinate the cabinet. Infiltrated by a Government agent, the London group were arrested in Cato Street in February 1820; subsequent, near-simultaneous disturbances at Strathaven, south of Glasgow, and in weaving townships near Huddersfield and Barnsley, each suspected to be linked, were also contained.¹²

Southcottians retaining their millenarian beliefs, through these events and times, were very much aware of them. Correspondence passing between believers in both post-Southcott national groupings provide insights into their perceptions of this experience as well as contemporary conditions. In January 1817, the Sheffield old believer George Evans corresponded with John Linney near Manchester, commenting on the ‘alarming distress’ felt in his town, elsewhere in Britain and in France, caused by the price of

¹² Royle, *Revolutionary Britannia*, pp. 57-8.

corn.¹³ ‘Thus it appears the Lord is bringing the Nations fast in The Valley of Jehoshaphat’, Evans reflected, concluding: ‘but in the midst of all this let us rejoice knowing and believing that our Redemption draweth nigh’.¹⁴ Several months before, Samuel Eyre in Bristol had also written to Halifax Southcottians expressly reporting on ‘the number of mechanics &c. out of employ and almost in a half starving condition’.¹⁵ This, together with ‘the various commotions w[hi]ch have appeared among the people; with the recent earthquakes and the awful prospect upon the Harvest’, Eyre linked more specifically to events predicted in Southcott’s writings, as they caused him to ‘believe that now is the time of the substance of [their] fulfilment’.¹⁶

For Joseph Jowett of Birmingham, it was the specific legislative actions of the British Government of this period, more than conditions, which consistently signalled the fulfilment of Southcott’s prophecies. In March 1817, within days of the passing of the first repressive laws to counter radicalism, Jowett told Jane Townley, ‘I think the communication given in 1795 upon the suspension of the Habeas Corpus act is very important at the Present time, and under the present circumstances’.¹⁷ In 1818, he wrote again: ‘I think we may expect that the new Corn Bill will have a great effect upon people’s minds, and no doubt it will help materially to ripen the People to what is said of them’ in a further prophecy.¹⁸ Once more, in the aftermath of the Peterloo disturbances, Jowett linked the passing of the Six Acts to yet another of Southcott’s writings:

¹³ British Library (BL) Add. MSS 70933/9-10, 22 Jan. 1817.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Panacea Society (PS) PN 252/34, 10 Sep. 1816.

¹⁶ Ibid.; emphasis in the original.

¹⁷ PS PN 246/20, 3 Mar. 1817.

¹⁸ PS PN 246/24, 3 Dec. 1818.

...it has been the general idea that there will be a revolution, but it is now said that these new laws will settle things and we shall have a good trade in a fortnight, so that I suppose the Reformers will now think more and say less according to the communication on the Hay Rick.¹⁹

The ‘communication on the Hay Rick’ was an unpublished prophecy of Southcott’s from August 1797, circulated in copied manuscript form among believers, and fully titled the ‘Communication given to Joanna on Mr Nixe’s Hay Rick being on fire, compared to the Priests and the Nation’.²⁰ In a typical exercise for Southcott, where her prophecies drew signs and analogies from her own local experience and projected their meaning onto a national and international canvas, this communication had foretold how, just as the Devon farmer Nixe’s hay rick had caught fire twice and been destroyed, even when dampened once and left, so would the English nation ‘fall by the fire’ when threats seemed dampened and resolved. For Jowett, and fellow ‘old believers’ continually speculating on how their dead prophet’s predictions might be being fulfilled, it was thus both political events and social or economic conditions which were imbued with ultimate spiritual significance, so portentous were their times.

For many northern Turner Southcottians, political meetings and other events of a radical hue were experienced with more immediacy, as they happened in the urban neighbourhoods and outer townships where they lived and worked. They nonetheless provoked similar theological reflections on their meaning, as well as significant queries as to their response. In early April 1820, Benjamin North, a Huddersfield Clothier, wrote to London believers to describe the recent attempted rising in his neighbourhood:

¹⁹ PS PN 246/27, 12 Dec. 1819. Emphasis in the original.

²⁰ ‘Communication given to Joanna on Mr Nixe’s Hay Rick being on fire, compared to the Priests and the Nation, which will fall by the fire of each other, as the Hay Rick was consumed by fire’. PS PN 102/17. I am grateful to Gordon Allan for his identification of this reference.

on Friday night last or rather on Saturday morning the people called Radicals assembled in bodies round about the town and fired signals to each other which hath caused a great ferment in the town and neighbourhood, the Police are vigilan[t], military on alert and arrests taking place...²¹

North's only comment on these events was his convinced belief that this was now 'likely to augment the distress which is already risen to a flood and rapidly fulfilling the word of the Lord'.²² His designation of those involved as 'the people called Radicals' conveys the distinct impression of North and his fellow believers' distance from such actions.

Correspondence passed between Turner and other Southcottian clothiers and weavers in the Huddersfield district, a year earlier, further indicates a concern among such millenarians to avoid involvement in activity associated with radicalism. In 1818-19, a group meeting east of Huddersfield wrote to Turner, to report the recent formation of a union: 'one of the believers is threatened, if he will not join, he shall not work; and others expect to be in the same situation'. Turner's reply in this instance was one he gave at several points in this period: his followers should 'have nothing to do with the contentions of the nation'.²³ According to Turner's prophetic voice, it was his followers' duty to 'let the world pass away, and the things thereof, and not murmur, but look forward to what I have promised'.²⁴

While 'old believer' Southcottians might be expected to have sustained the antipathy to radical politics expressed in Southcott's original prophecies in the post-Southcott and post-war era, given their reverence for her writings, Turner's message

²¹ PS PN 238/14, 3 Apr. 1820.

²² Ibid.,

²³ George Turner, *The Assurance of the Kingdom* (London, 1820) ii. 196.

²⁴ George Turner, *The Assurance of the Kingdom* (London, 1819) i. 115.

demonstrates his seeking to be as apolitical as his female predecessor. Thus, when Thomas Foley wrote in August 1819, following the Peterloo disturbances, that ‘followers of Joanna Southcott have nothing to do with politics in any shape or way whatever’, and now only awaited the coming of ‘the millennium ... the Kingdom of Righteousness’, he was really summarising the position of both kinds of surviving Southcottian – his fellow ‘old believers’ and the apostate Turner followers.²⁵ However, to those holding political power, and those that served such power, this common position was not so apparent. To them George Turner and his Southcottian followers were deeply suspect.

Government Perceptions

The same geographical and occupational proximity which led some Southcottians to be eyewitnesses to radical events, and to be affected by the divisions in communities brought on by radical interests in this period, generated distinct suspicions of such millenarians and their activities. Instances of such suspicion were notably exacerbated by further proximities in time and expressed aims or outcomes.

1817

During the rising social distress of 1816, Turner had reassured his followers and the public that Shiloh was soon to return in physical, messianic majesty. The subsequent exercise to register Turner’s 4000-strong following – all those who ‘unite to obey the Lord ... waiting his appearing and his son Shiloh to reign over us on earth’ – was carried

²⁵ BL Add. MS 47795/86, quoted in J.F.C. Harrison, *The Second Coming: Popular Millenarianism 1780-1850* (London, 1979), p. 114.

out in time for this apocalyptic event.²⁶ One of Turner's predictions was widely publicised in mid-January 1817, and prophesied that on the 28 January events in the book of Revelation would be actualised, with earthquakes, the sun and moon darkening, and stars falling from the sky.²⁷ All this would herald the coming of Shiloh to vindicate the continued faith of those expecting him since Southcott's day. Their reward would be the over-turning of all earthly conditions in their favour:

on the 28th ... The Angel of the Lord shall sink all by the earthquake. The whole United Kingdom is to be divided to the People of the Roll. Those who are not worth a penny now must be lords of the land. No rents must be paid. No postage for letters. No turnpikes. No taxes. Porter a gallon for one half-penny. Ale the same.²⁸

The 28 January proved eventful, but not as Turner had hoped. This was the day a crowd attacked the Prince Regent's coach, the incident which provoked the Government's anti-reform backlash.²⁹ The correlation between Turner's public prophecy, its radical-sounding predictions, and actual events, left the prophet subject to state suspicion; and he was subsequently arrested in Leeds on suspicion of treason.³⁰ He was dealt with as his former prophetic leader Richard Brothers had been under Pitt's original legislation in 1795: Turner was declared insane and confined to Osbaldwick lunatic asylum near York.³¹ The preparations made by many Turner Southcottians before the predicted day in

²⁶ UT JSC 372. See Chapter 1.

²⁷ Rev 6-8. Harrison, *Second Coming*, p. 120.

²⁸ Turner's 'Proclamation', most likely issued in printed broadsides and dated 18 Jan. 1817, is quoted in Harrison, *Second Coming*, p. 120 and G.R. Balleine, *Past Finding Out: The Tragic Story of Joanna Southcott and Her Successors* (London, 1956), p. 77.

²⁹ Thompson, *Making*, pp. 699-700.

³⁰ Harrison, *Second Coming*, p. 120.

³¹ PS PN 243/9, 5 Feb. 1818; PS PN 240/10. Here Turner remained, receiving new prophecies and maintaining regular correspondence contacts with his followers until his release in July 1820. J.A.R. and M.E. Bickford, *The Private Lunatic Asylums of the East Riding* (Beverley, 1976), p. 8.

January 1817 also evoked elements of Brothers' career, and drew particular attention to themselves.³²

In a number of locations, believers were reported ceasing their work or employment and selling off possessions. By the week before the 28th, in Sheffield, a 'number upwards of 400' had 'given up work[, and] some of them sold of[f] part of their goods'; in Newark, a newspaper reported 'a manufacturer's shop is entirely deserted and the business of many small dealers suspended'.³³ At Ashton-under-Lyne, a local post-master wrote, 'a number of manufacturers and mechanics who call themselves Johannites' had 'turned their workmen away'.³⁴ Such measures were related to a distinct expectation of departure from their existing places: Southcottians in Sheffield were 'to take nothing with them only what they have on their backs'.³⁵ Their intended destination was the same as Brothers' Bradford 'Jerusalemites' in 1801.³⁶

At Ashton, the believers were reported to have 'given up all Business ... to take their journey into Syria there to behold the New Jerusalem'.³⁷ Later in 1817, a chapbook collated a number of these reports of the recent 'proceedings of the followers of the late Joanna Southcott', mocking their 'folly' in selling possessions, and their 'intended Departure for the City of Jerusalem' in the Holy Land.³⁸ This merging of Southcottian Shiloh expectations with the ideas of Brothers, as with the idea of themselves being

³² Harrison noted the 're-enacting of the Brothers case' in Turner's confinement, but not the behaviour of followers. Harrison, *Second Coming*, p. 120.

³³ BL Add. MSS 70933/9-10, 22 Jan. 1817; *Lincoln, Stamford and Rutland Mercury*, 24 Jan. 1817; PS PN 252/36, 29 Jan. 1817.

³⁴ The National Archives (TNA) HO 42/158/82-83, 29 Jan. 1817, James Butterworth to Lord Sidmouth,. See also, PS PN 252/36, Jan. 29 1817.

³⁵ BL Add. MSS 70933/9-10, 22 Jan. 1817.

³⁶ See Chapter 2, p. 84.

³⁷ TNA HO 42/158/82-83.

³⁸ Anon., *An Interesting Account of the proceedings of the followers of the late Joanna Southcott, shewing the folly of their intended Departure for the City of Jerusalem* (London, 1817).

Israelites discussed in Chapter 2, was directed by Turner himself. On the Sunday before the momentous 28th, Turner preached in Tozer's Southwark Chapel, and 'spoke of the kingdom been [*sic*] established, said he should stay a few weeks with them, and then he would go to Jerusalem'.³⁹

While the original Sheffield and Nottinghamshire descriptions were made by other Southcottians and a newspaper respectively, and merely noted the curiosity of the behaviour, the report of Turner's followers in Ashton was explicitly intended to draw the attention of the Government. The Ashton and Oldham postmaster, James Butterworth, composed his report of recent Southcottian activities in his district, for the Home Secretary, Lord Sidmouth.⁴⁰ The minor official believed:

my Lord Government should be aware of these men, some of those that have left and are leaving ... are Men of Fortune, Master Mechanics etc. and tho' they may leave all their tools and implements of Trade here, are intending ... perhaps to kick up a Dust here for they are all opposition men – I advise you my Lord to have an eye on these men, there is something meditated against the welfare of our nation – God guard our prince and every well wisher against their Designs, for Designs they have no doubt ... I suspect the Jews must be in this secret. – But it is only my opinion, but let Government look to attention – They are in some plot depend upon it.⁴¹

Butterworth was sufficiently conscious of the response such an outlandish report was likely to provoke in a minister of State to add the post-script: 'I at first could not believe it, as perhaps you may not, but it is a real Fact my Lord, I do assure you'.⁴² Sidmouth, whose career was shaped by a deep personal suspicion of both religious enthusiasm and

³⁹ PS PN 252/36, 29 Jan. 1817, Samuel Jowett to William Wadman. Elements of this sermon were reproduced in Turner, *Wonderful Prophecies... Part I*, pp. 6-9..

⁴⁰ TNA HO 42/158/82-83. James Butterworth (1771-1837) was a notable local historian and poet (writing under the pseudonym 'Paul Bobbin'). W.E.A. Axon and John Langton, 'James Butterworth' *Dictionary of National Biography (DNB)* [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/4231>]

⁴¹ TNA HO 42/158/82-3.

⁴² TNA HO 42/158/83.

political radicalism and an assumption that the two were bed-fellows – that ‘to be a Methodist is to be a Jacobin in the extreme’ – was clearly concerned enough by Butterworth’s report to order follow-up enquiries.⁴³ He turned to Butterworth’s employer, the General Post Office Secretary Sir Francis Freeling, to look into both the loyalties of the postmaster and the reality of his claims.⁴⁴ A Manchester clergyman, W.H. Whitelock, subsequently reassured Freeling – and through him Sidmouth – that Butterworth was but ‘a poor ignorant fellow, who would not interfere at all in Politics’.⁴⁵ His letter continued: ‘As for that part of the letter respecting the Johannites as they are termed – my opinion is decided that there is nothing political in their proceedings – they are a poor deluded sect and the folly they are guilty of is extreme.’⁴⁶ Whitelock confirmed the involvement of, among others, the wealthy Lees family, who had ‘abandoned a concern ... making Rollers’, but considered their expectation of ‘a signal for their journeying to Jerusalem’ one example of ‘the absurdity of these people’.⁴⁷

Whitelock’s reassurance that there was ‘nothing political in their proceedings’ was intended to assuage Sidmouth’s principal concern. Yet Butterworth’s comment that ‘they are all opposition men’ may still have been viewed as significant by the Home Secretary. By this, Butterworth may be assumed to have meant that merchant Southcottians such as Samuel Swire and the young Lees brothers had Whig sympathies – in common with most Ashton mill-owners and wealthier industrialists – and supported the cause of Parliamentary reform for the enfranchisement of their growing town.

⁴³ Quoted in McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, p. 51.

⁴⁴ TNA HO 33/2/2-3, 28 Feb. 1817-4 Mar. 1817, Sir Francis Freeling to Lord Sidmouth. Sidmouth corresponded frequently with Freeling in this period to discuss provincial disturbances.

⁴⁵ TNA HO 42/158/84-84, 8 Feb. 1817, W.H. Whitelock to Sir Francis Freeling.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

Confirmation of this is strongly suggested by events fifteen years later, when, in the election which followed the 1832 Reform Act granting Ashton its first representation, Swire was a noted supporter of the Whig candidate. Indeed, during this later election, Swire was specifically accused of practicing exclusive dealing against supporters of the candidate for universal suffrage, Colonel Williams (who subsequently won the ballot).⁴⁸

Despite this, it was in the months following this exchange of Home Office letters in January and February 1817 that George Turner was arrested for treason, and committed to an asylum. While there, the nature of the links he maintained with his followers were monitored: a copy of an official report submitted by the asylum overseer, Preston Hornby, in June 1818, makes specific note of the ‘great number of letters’ arriving at the asylum ‘perporting [*sic*] to be written by Persons in London and in different parts of the Country’ who counted themselves his followers.⁴⁹ Such information was probably a contributing factor in the authorities’ refusal to release Turner from his asylum until mid-1820, despite his followers’ continued protests, in a further echo of Brothers’ case two decades before.

One aspect of the earlier case not repeated, however, in the post-war period, was the fate of the confined prophet’s followers. No traced Turner Southcottian appears to have been arrested either with him or during the period he was incarcerated, unlike several of Brothers’ Yorkshire supporters.⁵⁰ Turner’s confinement was the limit to the steps taken by the Government between 1817 and 1820 to counter the threat his network of supporters was perceived to hold.

⁴⁸ *Manchester and Salford Advertiser*, 5 Jan. 1833. N. Cotton, ‘Popular Movements in Ashton-under-Lyke and Stalybridge before 1832’ (Birmingham Univ. M.Litt. Thesis, 1977), pp. 152-7.

⁴⁹ PS PN 240/10, 30 June 1818, ‘Testimony of Preston Hornby in the Matter of George Turner’.

⁵⁰ Brothers, *Description of Jerusalem* (London, 1801), pp. 165-6.

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Turner's provincial isolation, and dependence on communication with followers through letter from autumn 1817, allowed some groups, particularly those meeting in established London chapels, to convene their own independent meetings and accept the claims to inspiration or prophecy of some among their own number.⁵¹ One such group was Samuel Sibley's 'House of Faith, or Philadelphian Church', meeting to the east of the City of London.⁵² In January 1819, Sibley and a number of his congregation caused a riot by parading through the streets of the City dressed in white cockade hats, wearing yellow-ribbon stars on their chests, and waving blue flags and a trumpet.⁵³ Sibley reportedly:

sounded the trumpet, and proclaimed the second coming of the Shiloh, the Prince of Peace, on earth; and his wife cried aloud, 'Wo! wo! to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the coming of the Shiloh!' This cry was repeated several times, and joined in with a loud voice by the others of the company.⁵⁴

This display drew a large crowd which 'at length proceeded to pelting them with mud and every sort of missile'.⁵⁵ Constables had soon intervened and conveyed the group to the Compter. To the Guildhall magistrates, Sibley justified the group's actions by their having been 'commanded by a voice' received by one of their number, 'to announce that the Prince of Peace was come upon earth ... This proclamation he was to make three times in the midst of the great city, by the sound of the trumpet'. In carrying out such an instruction, Sibley insisted, 'he and his companions were obeying the commands of God'.

⁵¹ PS PN 252/24, 6 June 1817.

⁵² Samuel Sibley, *A Copy of the Articles of Faith, as Acknowledged and Believed by the Children of the Faithful, Belonging to the House of Faith, or, Philadelphian Church: Well Known by the Name of the Followers of the Divine Mission of Joanna Southcott* (London, 1819).

⁵³ *The Newgate Calendar: containing lives of the most daring and notorious characters that ever lived* (London, 1819). Reproduced in *Edinburgh Annual Register for 1819, Part 4* (Edinburgh, 1823), xii. 274-6.

⁵⁴ *Edinburgh Annual Register... Part 4*, xii. 274-6

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

After two days, and repeated appearances before them, the magistrates accepted Sibley and the others' assurances they would not repeat their ceremony, and released them.⁵⁶

The incident may have been more an issue of public order than anything to do with political radicalism. Yet, a year later, during the heightened tensions following Peterloo, such groups of Southcottians became subjects of surveillance. On 8 January 1820, the one-time radical turned informer, John Shegog (or Shegoe), filed a report that 'a few fanatics are endeavouring to alarm the weak and credulous by preaching and pronouncing judgements: they are mostly the followers of Johanna Southcott and Thomas Spence and preach to a few in Lambeth, St Lukes, and the Borough'.⁵⁷ The following month, the Spencean-linked Cato Street conspiracy was uncovered. Among the Home Office intelligence reports gathered for Sidmouth in its aftermath in early March, recording interviews with individuals who knew those involved in the plot, including Thistlewood, a further report from Shegog appears. This gives an account of his visiting Sibley's chapel in St Luke's – 'a meeting of fanatics ... that I think it necessary to notice'.⁵⁸

They are beginning to declare they are commissioned from above to execute judgement upon the Archbishop of Canterbury, and other heads of the Protestant Church, and upon the Lord Chancellor who holds the scales of justice; and that preparatively they are to pour [sic] out the vials of wrath mentioned in the 16 Chap of the Book of Revelations, upon the earth etc. etc. and according to the prophesy [sic] in the 149 Psalm beginning at the 6 verse that they are appointed to execute the Judgement written, and they have a painting lately put up in their place of worship figurative of this commission – wch they say they are appointed to execute.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ *Edinburgh Annual Register... Part 4*, xii. 274-6

⁵⁷ TNA HO 40/15/1, 8 Jan. 1820. For full-titles of these sources, see Bibliography.

⁵⁸ TNA HO 44/5/85, 6 Mar. 1820.

⁵⁹ TNA HO 44/5/85, 6 Mar. 1820. Emphasis in the original.

Shegog noted the numbers were small on the occasion he visited – ‘10 or 12 men’ – but deliberately ‘got into conversation with them to ascertain their object’, and took the names of their leading preachers: ‘Sibley and Ward’.⁶⁰

It is highly likely that this second preacher was John Ward, later to take the name Zion. An autobiographical passage indicates that Ward spent these years after his conversion to Southcottianism in 1814 moving amongst the various London claimants ‘visited by the Spirit of God to prophesy’, and sometimes preaching beside those, such as Sibley, who sought to revive Southcott’s movement.⁶¹ The presence of Ward in such a space, the apparent tone and subject matter of the Southcottian meeting, and the fact that it was noted by a Government informant who, just two months before, had specifically grouped, in the same sentence, ‘the followers of Johanna Southcott and Thomas Spence’, calls for some discussion. For if Southcottians in the Pennines had little to do with radicalism, yet were suspected by outsiders; were similar suspicions at work in the alternative radical and millenarian milieu of the capital? Or does Ward’s preaching in 1820 corroborate Iain McCalman’s interpretation of the ready mixing of millenarian and radical culture, such that post-war London Southcottianism and contemporary political radicalism in fact related in ways contiguous with a decade later, personified in Ward himself?⁶²

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Zion Ward, *Judgement Seat of Christ*, 4 July 1831, p. 72.

⁶² McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, pp. 62-3.

Spenceans and Southcottians

The Spenceans, or the ‘Society of Spencean Philanthropists’, were a significant component of post-war political radicalism in London, most particularly its ‘ultra’ or more revolutionary dimension.⁶³ Spenceans were not only closely linked to Cato Street, but had also been involved in several prior attempted insurrections since 1815.⁶⁴

Important revisionist studies by Malcolm Chase and Iain McCalman in the late-1980s have each contributed to new understandings of the influence of both Spencean ideas and cultural practices on the English radical tradition.⁶⁵ Significantly, both these studies granted new attention and weight to the religious characters of both Thomas Spence and Spenceans, and more specifically, their millenarianism.

Spence, whose life span exactly mirrored Joanna Southcott’s, was a Newcastle school-master who moved to London around 1788, eventually establishing his own book-stall, then shop.⁶⁶ While still in Newcastle, Spence had begun formulating proposals for reforming property arrangements to secure a more just distribution of land. These he eventually developed into his ‘plan’ for the end of all ‘private property in Land’, through its nationalisation and restoration to ‘the people’.⁶⁷ During the 1790s, as Spence became closely involved in London radicalism, his published communications of such ideas, in pamphlets and broadsides, assumed an ‘overtly millennial character’: they frequently compared the just state of society to be achieved by the adoption of his land-

⁶³ T.M. Parssinen, ‘The Revolutionary Party in London, 1816-1820’, *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 45 (1972), 266-82; and Prothero, *Artisans and Politics*, pp. 88-91.

⁶⁴ Spenceans are also associated with the historically-contentious subject of the ‘revolutionary underground’ persisting during the war. McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, pp. 7-25.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*; Chase, *People’s Farm*.

⁶⁶ For biographical details on Spence, see Chase, *People’s Farm*, pp. 21-2.

⁶⁷ Thomas Spence, *The Restorer of Society to its Natural State* (London, 1801), p. 11.

nationalisation plan, to ‘the millennium, New Jerusalem, or future Golden Age’.⁶⁸ Such language has divided historical interpretations of Spence. Given that he articulated recognisably deist beliefs elsewhere in his writings, Spence’s use of such rhetoric has been read by some historians as merely metaphorical: he drew on the linguistic inheritance of his Presbyterian upbringing to express the profound change entailed in his revolutionary (and Enlightenment-influenced) ideas.⁶⁹ This interpretation was persuasively dismissed by both Chase and McCalman. For Chase, ‘Spence’s millenarianism went deeper than this’; he was no ‘passive observer of the growth in millenarian prophecy’ in the 1790s, but inhabited much the same milieu as Richard Brothers, from which he ‘absorbed’ much of its ‘tone and temper’.⁷⁰ For McCalman, ‘Spence, like so many religious and political plebeians of his time, was a bricoleur who constructed his ideology from disparate elements’, of which the biblical promise of the millennium was one.⁷¹

Spence’s use of the biblical idea of ‘jubilee’ was the key concept within his eschatological thought.⁷² From his reading of Scripture, Spence adopted the ancient Israelite idea for the periodic redistributing of land as the model and mark of a just or ‘natural’ society – an exemplar of a revolution ordained by God yet carried out by humans themselves.⁷³ Spence initially perceived his own role within the process of first the jubilee of land restoration, then the millennial condition, to be that of a teacher: his task was to spread knowledge of the coming transformation, and to gather followers who

⁶⁸ Chase, *People’s Farm*, pp. 47-58; Thomas Spence, *The Important Trial of Thomas Spence* (London, 1803 and 1807), p. 35.

⁶⁹ See especially, T.M. Parssinen, ‘Thomas Spence and the Origins of English Land Nationalisation’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 34 (1973), 139.

⁷⁰ Chase, *People’s Farm*, pp. 50-3.

⁷¹ McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, p. 65.

⁷² Chase, *People’s Farm*, p. 55.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

would aid in this ‘spreading the gospel’.⁷⁴ While the Napoleonic Wars still raged, Spence and figures recognisable as ‘Spenceans’ allied themselves to radical groups seeking the violent over-throw of political power as a means of realising the jubilee.⁷⁵ This distinct appetite for revolution was maintained by Spence’s followers in the first five years after his death.

For Chase, a significant distinction lay between such Spenceans and other plebeian contemporaries awaiting the millennium, most notably Southcottians.⁷⁶ The specific inter-relating of the jubilee, the millennium and Christ’s return in Spence’s writings – where ‘a millennium secured by human action precedes the Second Coming’ – led Chase to define Spence as ‘not a millenarian at all, but a millennialist and more specifically a post-millennialist’.⁷⁷ Spence’s millennium would not be realised in the manner of a premillennialist’s preferred ‘cataclysmic divine intervention’, but was ‘dependent entirely upon human agency’.⁷⁸ In the post-war period, Spenceans increased their rhetorical reference to the New Testament especially, casting Christ as a reformer, a proponent of jubilee, though not divine.⁷⁹ For Chase, such a reading of the Bible was a significant influence on Spenceans’ willingness to take immediate political action between 1815 and 1820:

their biblicism did not lead them to adopt a quietist posture, waiting upon divine intervention to expedite reform. On the contrary, the vigorous historicity of their view of Moses, [and] Christ, ... led them to affirm strongly the role of human agency in securing the rule of God...⁸⁰

⁷⁴ Spence, ‘Address to All Mankind’ quoted in McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, pp. 64-5.

⁷⁵ Chase, *People’s Farm*, pp. 70-7.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 52. Here Chase’s definitions followed those of his doctoral supervisor, J.F.C. Harrison, in distinguishing between more intellectually-sophisticated ‘millennialists’ and popular ‘millenarians’.

⁷⁸ Chase, *People’s Farm*, pp. 52 and 56.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 81-2.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 83-5.

Chase nonetheless insisted that Spenceans adhered to ‘no mystical faith’; their society ‘can in no sense be deemed millenarian’. Thus, intelligence reports linking Spenceans and Southcottians were incidental; they may have adopted similar tones or phrases, but Spenceans’ radical involvement singularly disproved their having anything to with a ‘pre-millennialist stance of passive resignation’.⁸¹

McCalman acknowledged Chase’s definition of Spencean eschatology as ‘post-millennialist’, yet his wider study emphasised the extent to which Spence and his followers inhabited a ‘common culture’ with ‘pre-millennialists’ such as Brothers and Southcott, and their metropolitan followings.⁸² The commonalities of this culture included their respective works often being printed and promoted by the same people, and the display and discourse of back-street chapel spaces, the play on traditional motifs and popular beliefs, often from the Bible, to offer critiques of political and ecclesiastical power, and, most vitally, a tendency to the ‘prophetic’ outlook – the embracing of a visionary, enthusiastic hope amidst an urban context. McCalman’s innovative cultural history notably name-checked Southcottians more readily as members of the ‘radical underworld’ it surveyed, willingly drawing parallels between the personal histories of ‘millenarian Spenceans’ like the ex-Methodist Robert Wedderburn and a Southcottian such as Zion Ward.⁸³ For McCalman, therefore, Chase’s specific distinction between Spencean ‘post-millennialists’ and Southcottians was less valid. An important observation of his thesis concerned the way in which ‘millenarianism, political radicalism and even freethought’ intertwined within the London plebeian culture of the early nineteenth century, allowing ideas of a religious or secular hue to coexist, even coalesce,

⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 52-3 and 90.

⁸² McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, pp. 65-7.

⁸³ Ibid., pp. 62-3, 202.

contributing to a broader popular challenge to authority, establishment and respectability.⁸⁴

McCalman's identification of the Spencean use of 'the chapel as political cell' in the 1818-20 period, sets the Home Office surveillance of Sibley's Southcottian chapel in crucial context. Spencean radicals began opening their own chapels in 1818 when the Government repressed the tavern debating clubs they had used predominantly since 1815.⁸⁵ The rhetoric of such chapels was anti-intellectual, 'coarse, violent and colloquial'; preachers and debaters traded in blasphemy, profanities and out-right scepticism. Blasphemy and seditious statements were often coupled with anticlericalism – parsons and bishops were potent symbols of the corrupt establishment to be overthrown.⁸⁶ All such anti-establishment expressions were liable to be recorded by Government informants in attendance.⁸⁷ On this basis, Sibley and Ward's preaching in their chapel in March 1820 demonstrated a similarity between such religious millenarians' meetings and Spencean 'blasphemous chapels'. Their specific rhetoric of threatened 'judgements' against such authority figures as the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Lord Chancellor, and citing of Scripture, echoed the anticlericalism of nearby Spencean venues.

It was this echoing which surely lay behind the informant John Shegog thinking 'it necessary to notice' the Southcottian chapel to his Home Office superior in March 1820. In the previous two months, each of the more prominent Spencean chapels had been closed, as leading radicals were arrested and congregations dissipated, following the

⁸⁴ McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, pp. 65-72.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 128; on tavern debating clubs, pp. 113-27.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 140-45.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 146-7.

enforcement of the Six Acts, and the fall-out from Cato St.⁸⁸ Yet, there was little apparent follow-up on Shegog's report; there is no evidence that Sibley and Ward's meeting was broken up or prosecuted in response. In this light, it is difficult to conclude that such Southcottians were any more closely connected to political radicalism than their similarity in rhetoric. That such a similarity was recognised specifically on the basis of anticlerical, anti-establishment sentiment, is significant on one level to the narrative of subsequent Southcottian interactions with radicalism: Zion Ward would revive such views in his later message, and these became a notable point of commonality with early 1830s radicalism. Yet, while McCalman's theory of a shared culture may explain why Southcottians were *suspected* of radicalism, it does not adequately recognise the distance still present, in 1820, between such Southcottians and the more organised political movements they would engage with a decade later. This distance was one of beliefs and attitudes to agency – the basis of Chase's distinction between Southcottians and Spenceans – though the categories employed in Chase's work require replacing.

In the Introduction to this thesis, a case was made for alternatives to the pre- and postmillennial categories, and their synonymity with attitudes to divine and human agency in the realisation of the millennium. Instead, alternative categories were proposed marking differences between beliefs about the millennium concerning their source or basis – whether from scriptural interpretation or modern revelation – and the nature of expected change – whether the millennial change is essentially 'evolutionary' or 'disruptive'. As was previously posited, conceptions of human and divine agency among

⁸⁸ McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, p. 150.

millenarians were shaped by combinations of these modes of thought and expectation, not the traditional distinction marked by the time-frame of the messiah's arrival.

For Chase, the distinction between Spenceans and millenarians such as Southcottians could be located in the pre- and postmillennial categories, with attitudes to human agency in the realising of the millennium correlated directly with each. The Spencean emphasis on human action was an outcome of their postmillennialist view, inherently setting them apart from any premillennialist and their tendency to 'passive resignation'. With these categories put to one side, the millennial beliefs of Spencean radicals may be alternatively defined as interpretative/evolutionary, being drawn from exegeses of the Bible by both Spence and his subsequent followers, and involving a progressive sequence of events – the securing of the jubilee allowing the commencement of the millennium independent of any messiah. The ways in which Spenceans conceived of their human agency within their belief, expressed either through teaching others of the coming change or through plotting a political revolution, may be understood to have reflected both how they knew the millennium was coming, and the process by which they thought the change would occur. As Chase acknowledged, it was not only the time-span of their eschatology, but also 'their biblicism' which 'led them to affirm strongly the role of human agency in securing the rule of God'.⁸⁹

The conception of the millennium still in evidence among Southcottians in this same pre-1820 era, meanwhile, was overwhelmingly revelatory/disruptive. The repeated citing of Southcott's prophecies, adherence to the directions of a figure such as Turner, and the general perception of events as 'rapidly fulfilling the word of the Lord', each demonstrate how believers' anticipation of the millennium was framed by reference to a

⁸⁹ Chase, *People's Farm*, pp. 83-5.

modern revelation of its nearness. That these beliefs centred not only upon decline or disaster – worsening social or political conditions – but also on how such conditions would be radically altered, specifically by the coming of Shiloh in the case of Turner followers, makes clear that their expected change inherently concerned disruption. Southcottians’ attitudes to either their own agency or that of God, again, related to both categories; and each appears to have promoted, in this period, an expectation of God’s action and not their own. From Turner’s direction to have ‘nothing to do with the contentions of the nation ... but look forward to what I have promised’, and other Southcottians’ exercise of searching former prophecies for their fulfilment, passivity appears to have been the direction of revelation.⁹⁰ Even within reports of Southcottian behaviours which suggest some partial sense of agency – where groups, most notably in Ashton, sold up property with an apparent intention of leaving for a new Jerusalem – there remained an inherent dependence on external, divine action. They relied on signals for leaving bound up with the arrival of the messiah himself, just as Turner’s radical-sounding programme – for no rents and no taxes – was still a disruptive eschatology to be realised by either Shiloh or an unnamed ‘Angel of the Lord’. It was neither the work of him nor Southcottians themselves.

Southcottians may have inhabited many of the same spaces, and experienced many of the same conditions as those that embraced radical solutions in the post-war period, but they overwhelmingly retained an abiding passive and apolitical response. As in Southcott’s time, they continued to expect dramatic change through divine intervention. In the North, Southcottians were witnesses to radical, insurrectionary activities, and had their own

⁹⁰ Turner, *Assurance of the Kingdom*, i. 115.

actions misinterpreted as radical; in London, Southcottians were linked to Spenceans, due to their common rhetoric. Yet significant differences and distance were maintained between such groups. The major distinction between Southcottians and those with millennial beliefs that did embrace radicalism – Spenceans – was that they had not, by 1820, developed within their belief in God’s agency, room for their own. For some within the movement, such a development took place between 1820 and 1830, and it is to this period, with its new prophets, new Shiloh and new believers, that this thesis turns in Part Two.

PART 2

1820-1830

Chapter 4

BUILDING JERUSALEM

The legend of Prophet Wroe and his nineteenth-century mill town followers remains a cherished part of Pennine folklore. Numerous works of antiquarian and local history in Lancashire and Yorkshire have made reference to the prophet, John Wroe, and his bearded followers who kept the Laws of Moses in towns like Bradford, Wakefield, Manchester and Ashton-under-Lyne, from the 1820s well into the Victorian age.¹ Ashton in particular is most closely associated with Wroe and his 'Israelite' followers, as during the 1820s, they are said to have believed the nondescript settlement in the shadow of the Pennines to be the New Jerusalem itself. 'Gatehouses' were built at the corners of the town, and hundreds were known to process through the streets in white robes, expecting the messianic age among the actual 'dark satanic mills' where they worked. The romantic resonance of such scenes with the familiar phrases of William Blake's 'Jerusalem' – the poem and hymn – have aided the story's longevity in the popular memory.² Yet, it is also the surrounding rumours of sexual impropriety and other scandal which have proved the most attractive material for historical fiction and more recent studies.³

¹ A.B. Reach, *Manchester and the Textile Districts in 1849*, ed. C. Aspin (Helmshore, 1972), p. 72; William Scruton, *Pen and Pencil Pictures of Old Bradford*, (Bradford, 1889), pp. 244-6; William Cudworth, *Rambles round Horton: historical, topographical, and descriptive* (Bradford, 1886), p. 79; W. Glover, *History of Ashton-under-Lyne* (Ashton-under-Lyne, 1889), p. 315; William Chadwick, *Reminiscences of a Chief Constable* (Manchester, 1900); A.J. Howcroft, *Tales of a Pennine People* (Oldham, 1923), pp. 89-91; Winifred Bowman, *England in Ashton-under-Lyne* (Ashton-under-Lyne, 1960), pp. 235-40.

² Preface to the poem 'Milton', William Blake, *Blake: Complete Writings*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (Oxford, 1972), pp. 480-1.

³ Edward Green, *Prophet John Wroe: virgins, scandals and visions* (Stroud, 2005); Jane Rogers, *Mr Wroe's Virgins* (London, 1991); 'Mr Wroe's Virgins' BBC Productions 1993, dir. Danny Boyle.

That Wroe's following had its roots in northern Southcottianism in the early 1820s is well-established: Wroe produced several volumes of public prophetic writings and an edited journal, called *The Divine Communications*, which made this link clear.⁴ In addition, he was a figure mentioned in letters in Southcottian archives, and one of the popular names for his Lancashire adherents – 'Johannas' – further indicated such origins.⁵ An Ashton historian, Winifred Bowman attempted to distinguish between the 'exemplary' early history of Southcottians in Ashton up to 1820, and the period under Wroe's leadership, when they followed his strict discipline of the Mosaic law, his curious direction to his male followers to grow beards, and introduction of a distinctive uniform. For Bowman, these 'extravagances of behaviour ... resulted in discredit being brought on the quiet and unspectacular' Southcottians.⁶ Harrison's assessment of Wroe was more measured, acknowledging him to have been 'the most successful of all the [post-Southcott] prophets'.⁷ The reasons for this success, Harrison debated in a discussion of the social and economic conditions of towns such as Ashton and Bradford and the context of sectarian religion in both.⁸ His resulting definition of Wroe's 'Israelite' sect as an alternative form of nonconformity in an already strongly dissenting town, and an authoritarian religious regime offering order in the chaotic social context of an industrialising mill town, remains the standard interpretation of this section of

⁴ The earliest extant edition of Wroe's public prophecies is *Divine Communications and prophecies given to John Wroe, during ten years. From the beginning of the year 1823 to the end of 1832...* (Wakefield, 1834). This was followed by *An Abridgment of John Wroe's Life and Travels* (Wakefield, 1837). Between 1859 and 1900, expanded editions of the earlier work up to 1832 were published as *The Life and Journal of John Wroe, with Divine Communications revealed to him,...* Volume 1 (Gravesend, 1859) with two further volumes, covering up to Wroe's death in 1863. The most common edition of *Divine Communications* available publicly in the UK is the 1900 edition. Quotes in this thesis, unless otherwise stated, are from the 1834 edition. Existing histories of Wroe, readily link him to Southcottianism: J.F.C. Harrison, *The Second Coming: Popular Millenarianism 1780-1850* (London, 1979), pp. 138-52; Green, *Wroe*, pp. 17-32.

⁵ British Library (BL) Add. MSS 57860/231-2; Reach, *Manchester and the Textile Districts*, p. 72.

⁶ Bowman, *Ashton-under-Lyne*, p. 236.

⁷ Harrison, *Second Coming*, p. 138.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 148-52.

Southcottianism, and is comprehensively reiterated in Green's populist biography of Wroe.⁹

It was the conspicuousness of the Southcottians who accepted Wroe as a prophet in the 1820s that particularly led Bowman to contrast their religious direction so strongly with Southcottian history, thus far. The Wroeites' appearance, their public processions and ceremonies, their ambitious building projects in Ashton, and their turn in the late-1820s to community shop-keeping, were so significant a development beyond the movement's prior calls on their adherents' time and energies, such as prophecy reading, chapel meetings, and simply *waiting* for the millennium. Harrison recognised the novelty of Wroe's 'this-worldly regime for his followers, who were not totally withdrawn from society', yet also observed that Wroe 'was not concerned to elaborate a programme of social and political reform'.¹⁰ His assessment thus fell short of challenging Thompson's original definition of Southcottianism in general as a millenarianism which 'did not inspire men to effective social action, and scarcely engaged with the real world'.¹¹

This chapter re-examines the developments in the Southcottian movement between 1820 and 1830 shaped by Wroe's prophetic leadership. From a re-assessment of the specific millenarian community that Wroe founded in Ashton-under-Lyne in this decade, it puts forward a substantially new interpretation of its significance. The alternative religious and social practices, the different patterns of community organisation, and the altered theological understandings of the millennium which emerged among Southcottians under Wroe's influence, were of crucial importance to the eventual engagement of some millenarian adherents with radical political movements in

⁹ Green, *Wroe*, pp. 17-29, 69-76.

¹⁰ Harrison, *Second Coming*, p. 151;

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 151; Thompson, *Making*, p. 424. See Introduction p. 4.

the early 1830s. Between 1820 and 1830, Wroeite Southcottians gained a radically different view of how their activities and actions in the present related to the coming millennium. This enabled them to conceive of a new relationship between their own, human agency, and the agency of God in the arrival of the millennial state of things.

Much of this re-assessment is based on evidence from nineteenth-century sources on Wroe and his 'Israelite' tradition of Southcottianism not previously studied. Existing studies of Wroe cite various editions of Wroe's *Divine Communications*, sometimes called his *Life and Journal* – a publication intended for public consumption.¹² This is the first academic study to make use of Wroe's *Private Communications* – the alternative edition of his prophecies produced for members only, and available through the Panacea Society Bedford archive.¹³ This work includes a significant number of new prophecies, and notably explicates Wroe's theological ideas and millennial vision more clearly than the *Divine Communications*.

Wroe's Visions

In early April 1820, while still incarcerated in his asylum, George Turner received a letter from his Bradford followers, 'making inquiries about Wroe's visions'.¹⁴ Such a query was not unusual. Turner's surviving correspondence from this period reveals that his believers often sought his opinion – or rather the opinion of 'the Lord' through Turner –

¹² Harrison quotes from the 1837 *Abridgment*; Green quotes extensively from the second edition: Wroe, *Divine Communications* (3 vols., 1900). Harrison, *Second Coming*, p. 253; Green, *Wroe*, pp. 120-2

¹³ [PS PN 561] John Wroe, *Private Communications given to John Wroe* (Wakefield, 1845).

¹⁴ Panacea Society (PS) PN 243/24, 29, 3 Apr. 1820.

either of their own ‘dreams and visions’, or the claims to inspiration of acquaintances.¹⁵

The ‘Wroe’ concerned was not a member of the Bradford Southcottian body, but a neighbour of several believers including Abraham Holmes at Tong, a township south-east of Bradford.

During the previous winter, John Wroe, a thirty-seven year old woolcomber with a wife and two children, had experienced a series of vivid dreams during an illness.¹⁶ Some of these dreams were of what Wroe took to be the divine Father and Son; others were of beasts, armies, a battle and a city being destroyed.¹⁷ In one vision, an angel guided him past books he could not read. The angel told him they were the nineteenth and fifteenth chapter of Revelation.¹⁸ In later dreams he saw ‘Moses and Aaron’ and images ‘alluding to the thousand years of rest’.¹⁹ Wroe reported his experiences to his family and neighbours. As he was nearly illiterate, he engaged his close neighbour, Abraham Holmes, to write down what he had seen. When Wroe experienced further visions in subsequent months, during periods of temporary blindness, crowds began to gather at his cottage to hear him speak of what he had seen. Holmes continued to record his descriptions.²⁰ Among Wroe’s audience were several Turner followers, including William and Samuel Muff, the latter having known Wroe since childhood.²¹ In early

¹⁵ In 1819 and 1820, for example, Martha Swindell from Macclesfield wrote to Turner to describe the visions she had experienced, (PS PN 240/11, 1 July 1819), the Totnes committee enquired about ‘[Daniel] Warren’s dream’, (PS PN 243/29, 24 Apr. 1820), and Crewkerne believer John Hull described his ‘dreams and visions... [and] should heartily wish to know whether it is from the Lord’ (PS PN 243/58, 26 May 1820).

¹⁶ On Wroe’s biographical details see Green, *Wroe*.

¹⁷ John Wroe, *The Vision of an Angel, as manifested to John Wroe, of Tong, near Bradford*, (Bradford, 1820), pp. 6-9, 13. For the full title of this work, see Bibliography.

¹⁸ Wroe, *Vision of an Angel*, pp. 11-12.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 16-18.

²⁰ Wroe, *Divine Communications*, p. 5; *idem*, *Private Communications*, pp. 3-12;

²¹ Wroe, *Divine Communications*, p. 9.

1820, Holmes' account of Wroe's first visions was published as a chapbook, *The Vision of an Angel*, and gained Wroe a reputation as a 'seer' across the North.

To their original enquiry, Turner gave the Bradford committee a standard reply: 'I have already said that my children must not receive any visions to rely on ... [F]orsaking me the Lord and trusting to visions instead of obeying my commands ... will deceive them'.²² With this, he hoped the matter would be ended. For as Harrison has commented, 'the problem of rivals is very troublesome for most millenarian prophets', due to their authority being so comprehensively invested in personal revelations, while they invariably attract followers 'who similarly claim to receive direct messages from the Spirit'.²³ A method of sanction or, more often, denial of the authority of such rival revelations was typically employed.

Despite their prophet's opposition, Bradford Turnerites continued to be intrigued by Wroe, and the mission to which he claimed his dreams were directing him. Several of Wroe's visions had featured subjects apparently related to Jews, Judaism and Israel. Upon praying that 'the Lord ... shew me in visions or dreams, what religious sect I was to join', Wroe had received the enigmatic answer of 'Rabbi, Rabbi, Rabbi'.²⁴ In a subsequent visitation from an angel, he had then been directed to 'go unto the Lord's people Israel and thou shalt sign with them to the laws and statutes which the Lord gave unto Moses'.²⁵ In response, Wroe's journal in the *Divine Communications* records him selling up 'all things which I had belonging to the manufactory', and spending several months travelling across the North, visiting synagogues in Manchester and Liverpool,

²² PS PN 243/24, 3 Apr. 1820.

²³ Harrison, *Second Coming*, p. 135.

²⁴ Wroe, *Vision of an Angel*, p. 19.

²⁵ Wroe, *Private Communications*, p. 12.

and debating with Rabbis the significance of his dreams and the direction he heard to ‘go thou to the Jews’.²⁶ Yet, he was not received in the manner he had hoped, and returned home.

In Bradford, Wroe found his visions concerning ‘the Lord’s people Israel’ still generating excitement in the Southcottian chapel, as a section of the congregation began to speculate that this might in fact mean them. Many Bradford millenarians still thought of themselves as ‘hidden Hebrews’, as they had since two decades before when they acknowledged Brothers’ prophecies. In 1817, Turner had revived this doctrine during the Shiloh and Jerusalem expectation; and now, in 1820, Turner’s own communications contained yet more references to his followers as ‘Israel’, introduced small elements of the Old Testament Law, and gave his blessing to believers enquiring after the original Hebrew tribe.²⁷ A number of Wroe’s Southcottian neighbours refused to rule out that these revelations concerning ‘Israel’ represented an important new message to themselves.

From his release from his asylum in July 1820, George Turner made repeated efforts to quell support for Wroe in Bradford. In August 1820 he met Wroe in person, and once again issued ‘a command that the Lord’s children should receive no visitation to be led and directed by but his’. At the same time, he banned Wroe from speaking of his visions ‘in the presence of the believers’.²⁸ Wroe nonetheless began to attend meetings in September 1820, ‘signed’ to his belief in Turner’s visitation, and was occasionally granted permission to speak. Few if any among the Bradford congregation were persuaded that Wroe’s revelations should take any kind of precedence over Turner’s

²⁶ Wroe, *Divine Communications*, pp. 9-10.

²⁷ PS PN 240/20; PS PN 239/30; PS PN 243/81. See Chapter 1.

²⁸ Wroe, *Divine Communications*, p. 12.

while the older, established prophet was still alive. But when Turner died in September 1821, and the accepted source of prophecy was silenced (as in December 1814), the way lay open for a new claimant to the prophetic succession.

The gradual progress of Wroe's subsequent bid for the Southcottian prophetic leadership – as he came first to be accepted by the Bradford congregation by September 1822, then eventually by most surviving northern Turner groups by 1824 – is a story well-rehearsed in existing studies, drawn from the account given in Wroe's *Divine Communications*.²⁹ Turner had instituted a system of committees of eight to twelve members in each congregation, who maintained contact with neighbouring and national groups, in structures reminiscent of Wesleyan Methodism.³⁰ The appointing of the committee was notably democratic in form, as was the settling of differences within each body, as Turner directed that, 'if there should be any difference of opinion then all my children must vote and the greatest number of votes decides it'.³¹ Wroe's steady securing of allies on the Bradford committee, then dramatic move to challenge the whole meeting whether they were for him or against, and subsequent invitation to more and more Turner groups 'to send one or two of their committee to Bradford' to judge the validity of his claims in person, are viewed as a lesson in the workings of prophetic power politics.³² Wroe followed up most committee interviews, with a visit to their home congregation, working within the committee system, to demonstrate how his charismatic authority lay in his person, rather than his literary persona or productions. The actual manifestation of

²⁹ Harrison, *Second Coming*, pp. 138-9; Green, *Wroe*, pp. 33-53.

³⁰ Harrison, *Second Coming*, pp. 120-21; for more on Turner and Methodism see Deborah Madden, 'Israel's Scattered Seed: Restoration and the 'place' of Zion in the Prophecies of Richard Brothers, George Turner and John Wroe' (*forthcoming*).

³¹ PS PN 243/34, 26 Apr. 1820; George Turner, *The Assurance of the Kingdom* (London, 1820), ii. 146.

³² Wroe, *Divine Communications*, p. 17.

this charm scholars have struggled to identify. Descriptions of Wroe are unpromising, as he was small, by most accounts ugly and hunchbacked.³³ He may have suffered from a speech impediment, and was unable to speak with fluency.³⁴ Yet, in locations such as Ashton-under-Lyne, after meeting committee representatives then travelling to speak in chapels and meeting places in person, Wroe was apparently able to convince ‘nearly the whole of the believers ... [that God] had chosen him as an instrument through whom to guide and direct his children, after the death of his other servants’.³⁵

Within existing histories reiterating this account, two particular episodes – two journeys – occurring in this same period of Wroe’s ascent to Southcottian leadership have never been fully made sense of. During 1823, in the spring and in early winter, Wroe embarked on two trips to the continent, first by sea to Gibraltar and back, then overland to Vienna and Trieste.³⁶ Harrison deemed them a counter-intuitive move made before Wroe had properly consolidated his position of authority among Southcottians.³⁷ For Green, ‘the visits were seemingly pointless ... [yet] were nevertheless the sort of activity which befitted a prophet’.³⁸ The true intention of Wroe’s journeys at this stage, and the reason behind the specific routes he took, may now be recovered from both evidence in Wroe’s *Private Communications*, and a closer attention to the beliefs prevalent among contemporary Southcottians to whom the content of Wroe’s original visions appealed.

³³ Green, *Wroe*, p. 1.

³⁴ Wroe, *Private Communications*, pp. 17, 23, 35-6.

³⁵ Wroe, *Divine Communications*, p. 21; The dead servants included William Shaw, a London believer, whose manuscript prophecy a Nottingham committee member noted ‘was san[c]tioned by Mr Turner’, who was heralded as a new prophet by a number of sizeable bodies in the Midlands, Somerset and Lancashire, including Ashton in 1822. PS PN 238/106-113, 1821-15 July 1822. Quoted in PS PN 238/110, 7 July 1822. Shaw’s sudden death in July 1822, cut short his succession. It was after this that Mary Boon began publishing her prophecies in Devon, and secured adherents principally among the Turner congregations in the South-west. See Chapter 5.

³⁶ Wroe, *Divine Communications*, pp. 26-45.

³⁷ Harrison, *Second Coming*, p. 139.

³⁸ Green, *Wroe*, pp. 47-8.

These were the beliefs about 'Israel', believers' Israelite tribal origins, and most particularly, the idea of 'returning' to Jerusalem and the Holy Land, as part of the imminent realising of the millennium. From this, a much fuller understanding of the basis of Wroe's appeal to Southcottians in the early 1820s becomes apparent. Wroe did not require some extraordinarily persuasive (yet inexplicable) charismatic power, first to win over his Southcottian followers, then subsequently to impose a vast array of new doctrines and disciplines – the Mosaic Law and new ideas about the millennium. Rather, Wroe's visionary direction to 'go unto the Lord's people Israel' was the key to his rise and rule.

In April 1823, Wroe sailed with a Southcottian companion from Liverpool to Gibraltar. After a few weeks, he returned to England. In October and November, Wroe left with a different companion (who also acted as an amanuensis to record the voice he now claimed to hear), for Calais, Strasbourg, Vienna and Trieste. Yet these were only half journeys: on both trips he intended to reach the Holy Land. Scholars have not noticed that these were the conventional routes of the time to the Holy Land – one by sea, the other, predominantly by land. The alternative, private edition of Wroe's prophecies confirms his intention to reach Jerusalem: 'Ye shall go to Jerusalem, and declare my words there' was one message Wroe received; another described Shiloh leading his people 'unto that place where I am now sending thee ... Jerusalem'.³⁹ Wroe was ill on his first crossing of the Bay of Biscay, and needed to recover on arrival in Gibraltar. This explains why he did not immediately continue his journey. After a few weeks on the Rock, Wroe was directed: 'Now search my scriptures, and I will ... give thee the

³⁹ Wroe, *Private Communications*, p. 25.

explanation. I told thee thou should go to Jerusalem, but I did not tell thee when.’⁴⁰ He returned to England soon after. His journey to Trieste brought on a similar failure of nerve and halted progress, and he returned without reaching his goal.

Wroe was not a man of substantial private means, yet these tours had to be paid for. His source of funds was the place from which he set off and concluded both of his international journeys: Ashton-under-Lyne. Among those accepting Wroe’s prophetic claims in Ashton were the three leading industrialist families of John Stanley, Samuel Swire and the Lees brothers. Edward and Henry Lees, who by 1822 were operating separate machine-making businesses, sent their younger brother William Lees to accompany Wroe on his second trip. These families, who were so caught up in the anticipation of an imminent departure for the Holy Land in early 1817 when Turner had prophesied the return of Shiloh, now put up the money for Wroe to reconnoitre the very routes they previously intended to travel themselves. Wroe was thus the prophetic figure who offered to fulfil long-awaited expectations; Wroe declared himself a new leader of Israel, and cast his horizon as far as the literal promised land.

Israel in England

Before Wroe embarked on his first attempted journey to the Holy Land, while waiting for a ship at Liverpool, he reported receiving a series of communications. These he arranged to be sent straight back to Ashton. ‘Tell my Committee at Ashton’, one communication declared; ‘that I have searched them out from amongst all my committees ... [and] have

⁴⁰ Wroe, *Private Communications*, p. 28.

chosen for my Standard, that all the earth may know that I have a Standard'.⁴¹ Evoking scenes of the gathering of the tribes of Israel in the Old Testament book of Numbers, this communication marked the beginning of the place of Ashton's singular importance in Wroe's developing leadership of the Southcottian movement.⁴² A second communication received on the same occasion, and evoking the personalities of the same period of Israelite history, appears of equal significance to the shape of things to come. This concerned the authority with which Wroe spoke: 'I command thee as I commanded Moses', Wroe was told; 'I speak unto thee as I spoke unto my servant Moses'.⁴³ With this, Wroe defined himself as a successor to Moses, with the same authority – the authority of hearing the Word of the Lord – as the Old Testament prophet leader. Moses had gathered God's people out of enslavement, established a covenant with God and presented the Laws of God to the people; Wroe would do the same. 'I command thee to tell my children, when I give thee my Laws, for them to observe my Laws', Wroe was told. 'Did not I tell them by my words I spoke by my last Prophet in the Bible to discern the Laws of Moses? Now these are the Laws I am going to give thee which I bid them to observe.'⁴⁴

With these communications, the seeds of a change in direction, in theological understandings of the millennium and practices preparing for it, were sown among northern Southcottians before Wroe had undertaken his aborted travels to Europe and the Mediterranean. The failure of these journeys closed the door on one particular conception that some Southcottians held of the commencement of the millennium involving travel to

⁴¹ Wroe, *Private Communications*, p. 20.

⁴² Numbers 2. The idea of a 'Standard' is also present in later Hebrew history, cf. Jeremiah 50-51.

⁴³ Wroe, *Private Communications*, p. 19

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

the Holy Land.⁴⁵ This specific doctrine, like other elements of Southcottian belief, had entailed perpetual waiting: waiting for the sign that would mark the moment to leave; waiting for the messianic figure, Shiloh, to appear to lead His people to their destination. Upon Wroe's return, this waiting would not end, but the energy and enthusiasm pent up within its anticipation would find a significant release in the ways that Wroe redefined the experience of waiting. In just a few years, Wroe redirected his followers' idea of the approaching millennium, and their relationship to it, through establishing a view of Ashton as a temporal 'shadow' of the New Jerusalem to come. The Southcottian vision would, under Wroe, become one of an organised, separate community, set apart in custom, dress and worship. These practices were part of a new way to await the millennium, one which contained a distinct relationship with the social world which would be transformed in its making.

The coming of the Law

Several elements of the Old Testament Law were familiar to Southcottian groups previously associated with George Turner.⁴⁶ As Wroe failed to win any followers from other networks of surviving Southcottians in the 1820s, then his initial prophetic references to the Laws of Moses would have been received with little surprise or qualm. Yet after his return from Europe the second time, in December 1823, Wroe took to issuing communication after communication for over a year, directing the full keeping of

⁴⁵ On other nineteenth-century millenarians actually making it to the Holy Land, see Eitan Bar-Yosef, *The Holy Land in English Culture 1799-1917: Palestine and the Question of Orientalism* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 182-246.

⁴⁶ Gordon Allan, 'Southcottian Sects from 1790 to the Present Day', in Kenneth Newport and Crawford Gribben (eds.), *Expecting the End: Millennialism in Social and Historical Context* (Waco, 2006), p. 221.

the Leviticus and Deuteronomy regulations. These he proclaimed in every Southcottian location he visited, touring across Yorkshire, Lancashire, and south to Kent.⁴⁷

The adoption of each practice of the Law was a gradual process, as aspects were clarified or highlighted in successive prophecies. Continual instructions on which meats and other foods were permissible were given between January and September 1824, as were the articles allowed in believers' homes (specific directions to remove all 'graven images' were given in August 1824).⁴⁸ By September, Wroe had issued instructions going beyond Turner's limited direction on blue clothing, to insist not only that his followers avoid mixed textile materials, but also keep a specific levitical direction for priests, to wear linen next to the skin.⁴⁹ A further regulation drawn from another set of instructions for a specific group among the ancient Israelites was a direction to grow beards. In August 1824, a communication declared that no razors should be used until the descent of Shiloh – an adaptation of the Nazarite vow against the cutting of hair.⁵⁰ This custom would, in time, draw perhaps the most attention to Wroe's sect, as beards were rare, even comic until the mid-century.⁵¹ Such would the regional reputation of Israelite 'Beardies' become, that, carrying out his feted observations of the Manchester working-class, Friedrich Engels was once mistaken for an Israelite due to his Prussian beard.⁵²

⁴⁷ *Private Communications* and *Divine Communications* record the location where Wroe received each prophecy, and often where he had it read aloud to an audience.

⁴⁸ Wroe, *Private Communications*, pp. 52-92.

⁴⁹ Leviticus 6:10; Wroe, *Private Communications*, pp. 155, 172, 178-9. This particular directive was deeply controversial, as was an instruction to remove all cotton materials from believers' homes. Wroe was forced to make the concession that cotton was allowed to be worn on working days, and linen on the Sabbath. A ban on cotton in the 'one-horse' cotton town of Ashton evidently brought on a battle between faith and all reason.

⁵⁰ Wroe, *Private Communications*, p. 88. Numbers 6:1-27. This vow also entailed the individual 'separate himself from wine and strong drink'. James Smith provides later evidence suggesting that spirits were forbidden. James Smith, *The Coming Man* (2 vols., London, 1873) i. 280.

⁵¹ The Victorian fashion for beards and facial hair was not initiated until army officers returned from the Crimean war in the mid-1850s.

⁵² E.B. Bax, *Reminiscences and Reflections* (New York, 1920), p. 50.

During 1824-25, more public notice was drawn to Wroe's Southcottians as a consequence of a more general Hebrew rite – male circumcision. In April 1824, Wroe was circumcised 'in the midst of the people', in a ceremony in front of the gathered congregation of his Ashton followers.⁵³ Prior to this, it was ruled that every male believer must undergo the same rite, and every boy born into the congregation also.⁵⁴ For five months, this directive was followed, apparently without incident, among congregations committed to Wroe in Bradford, Gravesend, Ashton and elsewhere. In September, however, Daniel, the new born child of Harriet and Robert Grimshaw (an Ashton coal miner), died two days after undergoing the operation.⁵⁵ The initial inquest, then the trial of the circumciser, Henry Lees, for manslaughter, attracted notice in several newspapers as an apparent example of the 'extraordinary fanaticism' still displayed by 'the disciples of the late Johanna Southcote'.⁵⁶

Several significant details relating to the numbers, appearance and beliefs of the Southcottians caught up in this case are given in these press reports. That Southcottians had 'lately increased to a very considerable extent in this county' was noted in Lancashire papers. It was further noted that a significant number 'of the followers of the sect were also in court and attracted much attention by their ... uniform of blue cloth of Quaker cut, with bright buttons'.⁵⁷ The beards of most of the men drew further comment, even in the initial inquest, when Robert Grimshaw's father, Joseph, a Southcottian since 1813, was specifically questioned about his beard. His answer to why he wore it, gave a simplified

⁵³ Wroe, *Divine Communications*, p. 57.

⁵⁴ Wroe, *Private Communications*, pp. 56-7.

⁵⁵ Circumcisions were undertaken at Gravesend, Bradford and Ashton. *Manchester Guardian*, 2 Oct. 1824.

⁵⁶ *Manchester Guardian*, 2 Oct. 1824; *The Times*, 17 Mar. 1825; *Lancaster Gazette*, 19 Mar. 1825.

⁵⁷ *Manchester Guardian*, 2 Oct. 1824.

sense of his Israelite heritage: ‘to look like our forefathers of old, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob’.⁵⁸

Ashton – the Standard of Israel

The reports of increased Southcottian numbers in Lancashire in 1824 and 1825 were predominantly the result, not of new converts to millenarianism (as existing studies have largely assumed), but migration. Wroe’s original definition of Ashton-under-Lyne as his Standard, given in 1823, took on a new significance with his return from Europe. It became the standard to which the people would be gathered. During his second period on the continent, Wroe had prophesied, ‘I will gather these two staffs of people into one place in England, which shall be a hundred and forty-four thousand’.⁵⁹ A subsequent communication announced a new name for his followers: ‘they shall be no more Israel, but Israelites; the sons of the living God ... To England will I gather you; and all the earth shall know that I have chosen thee.’⁶⁰ While the figure of Shiloh had long been understood to be the person unto whom ‘shall the gathering of the people be’, Ashton became the location set aside for a gathering in preparation for Shiloh.

The extent of the Southcottian migration to the Ashton corner of south-east Lancashire is now apparent through detailed sifting of a range of evidence, including the names in earlier Southcottian sources cross-compared with Wroe’s published communications and other Israelite documents. In pure numbers, it involved several hundred people: in 1816, the Ashton body of Turner followers was recorded as 201 adult believers; in 1829 an official census of dissenting congregations in Ashton counted 548

⁵⁸ Ibid.; on Joseph Grimshaw see Chapter 2, p. 98.

⁵⁹ Wroe, *Private Communications*, p. 40.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 76.

‘Israelites ... or Southcottonians [*sic*]’.⁶¹ A few traceable individuals who made up this striking increase are worth noting in brief.

A significant body of believers moved to Ashton from the sizeable Turnerite congregation at Gravesend in Kent. Among them were John and Ann Garland, a newly-wed couple in their twenties, and John’s mother, also called Ann Garland, a Southcottian who ‘had personally known Joanna, and often visited her in London at her residence’.⁶² John Garland, who had a farming background, would operate a butcher’s in Ashton, supplying kosher meat.⁶³ Others from Gravesend included porter-dealer William and Jane Masterman and their daughters Sarah and Jane; and the Taylor and Clunne families.⁶⁴ Cordelia Clunne, the teenage daughter of Ann and Thomas Pryce Clunne, would marry into the wealthy Park Bridge Lees family in 1828.⁶⁵ Another Ashton marriage, registered the year before, records a shorter distance moved, but a perhaps more suggestive story. Milcah Elsworth, the spinster of Thornton near Bradford with two illegitimate sons, moved to Ashton and married Joseph Lees, a widower in 1827.⁶⁶ Several others moved from Bradford to Ashton, while William Skin and William and

⁶¹ Lancashire Record Office QDV/9/249, Dissenters’ Returns 1829. This number was smaller than Wesleyan or New Connexion Methodists in the town, but significantly larger than any Baptist or Primitive Methodist group. The same census records 10 ‘Israelites or Johannites’ in Bury, and 264 in Manchester. QDV/9/261, 297.

⁶² The Garlands and their relationship with James Smith are discussed in Chapter 6, p. 212. The description is from James Smith, *The Coming Man* (London, 1873), i. 280.

⁶³ Wroe, *Divine Communications*, p. 83; *Pigot and Co.’s National Commercial Directory for 1828-9* (London, 1828), p. 48.

⁶⁴ University of Texas, Austin (UT), Joanna Southcott Collection (JSC) 372. For their presence in Ashton see Wroe, *Private Communications*, p. 268; idem, *Divine Communications*, pp. 100, 122-3, 250-1.

⁶⁵ Tameside Local Studies Centre (TLSC) DDL/2/35 Lees Papers.

⁶⁶ See Chapter 2, p. 89. TLSC, St Michael’s Parish Church, Ashton-under-Lyne, Marriage Register, 27 May 1827. Joseph Lees’ wife Susannah died four months before. TLSC, St Michael’s PC, Burials 1822-1840 f.283. Their wedding was witnessed by two prominent members of the Israelite congregation, Robert Blackwell and Thomas Heap. Wroe, *Divine Communications*, pp. 67, 268-75. It is unclear whether Joseph Lees was related to the Park Bridge Lees family.

Nancy Knowlson were among a number to migrate from Stainforth, near Doncaster.⁶⁷

The furthest traceable distance migrated by existing Southcottians was from Plymouth, among whom was Aaron Woollacott, a shoemaker, whose personal ‘desire ... that he may come unto Ashton’ is mentioned in *Private Communications*.⁶⁸

The town in which these religious migrants arrived in 1824-25 was a place of dramatic change and contrast. Their numbers represented a small yet significant section of a yet larger body of contemporary incomers swelling Ashton’s population from just over 9000 in 1821 to 14,000 in 1831.⁶⁹ In the years of their arrival, Ashton was undergoing unprecedented upheaval and physical expansion. The local land-owner, the Earl of Stamford, keen to enhance his income from rents, was encouraging industrial investment, mill- and house-building. On his instruction, a grid plan was laid out to mark the shape and extent of an ambitious future for the town.⁷⁰ Between 1805 and 1822, only four new mills had been built in Ashton, as the volatilities of the cotton market made investors and entrepreneurs wary. From 1823-25, however, twelve entirely new mills were founded in Ashton, and many existing buildings extended, during a cotton boom.⁷¹ Related industries grew with this expansion, much of it tied to the new application of steam power to the spinning process.⁷² Many new coal mines were sunk in the district, and iron-works and machine-makers enjoyed a considerable rise in demand. Street after street of terraced cottages were thrown up to house the many workers taken on by each of these industries. Imposing villas for the enriched mill-, mine- and foundry-owners were

⁶⁷ UT JSC 372. Wroe, *Divine Communications*, p. 258.

⁶⁸ UT JSC 372. Wroe, *Private Communications*, p. 228. Among Wroe followers that remained in Plymouth, several shipwrights with beards became the object of newspaper comment, mistaken for ‘Russian boors’, and ‘the objects of merriment to their companions’: *Plymouth Journal*, [Sep] 1825.

⁶⁹ Neville Kirk, *The Growth of Working Class Reformism in Mid-Victorian England* (London, 1985), p. 42.

⁷⁰ Michael Nevell, *Tameside 1700-1930* (Ashton-under-Lyne, 1993), pp. 146-7.

⁷¹ Ian Haynes, *Cotton in Ashton* (Ashton-under-Lyne, 1987), p. 22.

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 8-31.

erected on the town edge with rather more care and circumspection. New commercial spaces – shops and inns – quickly followed, to supply the growing populace with their staples; a bustling street life grew up around traders, deliveries, and crowds for entertainment.⁷³ Within the grid, new religious buildings were also founded throughout the decade.⁷⁴

Each of these developments affected, and yet was also affected by, Ashton Southcottians, individually and collectively. Among those industrialists to gain most from the mid-decade cotton boom were the Stanley, Swire and Lees families. John Stanley and Samuel Swire built two of the largest new mills in the town – Stanley Mills and Bank Mills respectively.⁷⁵ Stanley Mills was established on a site close to Stanley's existing iron-works in Oldham Road, which was also expanded during this time, in partnership with Henry Lees. Swire's mill interests were complemented by a new, substantial interest in Dukinfield coal-mining. The Lees family's Park Bridge ironworks also had a 'new mill' and 'more turning rooms by the water' by 1825.⁷⁶ While Edward Lees resided in the substantial villa, Dean House, above the works north of Ashton, other members of the family relocated to the salubrious Henry Square in Ashton itself.⁷⁷ By 1828, Samuel Swire had moved his family into an impressive residence, to the west of Bank Mills, with a Doric-columned frontage. The Stanley family villa was more centrally-located, in Park Parade.⁷⁸

⁷³ Nevell, *Tameside*, pp. 113-14.

⁷⁴ These included a Commissioners' Church – St Peter's, Methodist and Independent chapels. E.A. Rose, *Methodism in Ashton-under-Lyne* (2 vols., Ashton-under-Lyne, 1969).

⁷⁵ Haynes, *Cotton*, pp. 24-5.

⁷⁶ Michael Nevell and John Roberts, *The Park Bridge Ironworks and the Archaeology of the Wrought Iron Industry in North West England, 1600 to 1900* (Ashton-under-Lyne, 2003), p. 25.

⁷⁷ O. Ashmore, *The Industrial Archaeology of North-West England* (Manchester, 1982), p. 77.

⁷⁸ Green, *Wroe*, pp. 84-5.

John Stanley most likely secured control of a block of land in the location of his house, as, in neighbouring Church Street in 1825, he was able to supply the site for the Israelite's new place of worship – the Sanctuary.⁷⁹ This building was a considerable undertaking, and Stanley personally met the cost – variously estimated at between £7000 and £9500.⁸⁰ Wroe's prophetic communications during 1825 featured numerous references to the Sanctuary, directing elements of its design – 'they shall be lighted in the top of the building' – and its obedience of strictures on the mixing of materials.⁸¹ These included stone for the exterior, St Domingo mahogany for much of the interior, oak seating, and silver or bronze for many fittings. Surviving sketches of the Sanctuary reveal it to have had two heavy-panelled doors, topped by stone-lintels, on its Church Street facade, with no windows. Upon entering, the visitor would have either climbed the stairs to each side of the hallway to a four-sided gallery, or walked forwards into a central ground-floor space, with curving rows of pews on four sides, facing into a double-height open space. Above were two glass domes in the ceiling; beneath the floor was an immersion pool. Two pulpits faced each other, entered from the ground floor, but with steps up to a preaching platform level with the gallery.⁸²

⁷⁹ Stanley's ownership of the land will have circumvented the considerable efforts of the Earl of Stamford to prevent any dissenting chapels on his land during this period. Green, *Wroe*, p. 72. Tobin has suggested that permission was granted for the Sanctuary, and not other chapels, because the Earl of Stamford's steward was sympathetic to Southcottianism, perhaps through an acquaintance with Thomas Foley (the Earl also owning Ambercote Manor, close to Stourbridge): P.J. Tobin, 'The Southcottians in England 1782-1895' (Manchester Univ. M.A. Thesis, 1978), pp. 170-1. Yet, John Stanley had a history of providing a venue for Southcottian meetings in Ashton: from 1814, believers had met in buildings on or close to his iron-works near Charlestown. His outright control of the land was therefore the more probable reason for the Sanctuary's location.

⁸⁰ The lower amount is attested by one-time Ashton Southcottian James Smith in a letter to his brother, 18 June 1835, in W.A. Smith, *Shepherd Smith: the story of a mind* (London, 1892), p. 139. Works of Ashton local history tend to allege the higher figure, Howcroft, *Pennine People*, p. 78; Green, *Wroe*, p. 82.

⁸¹ Wroe, *Private Communications*, pp. 147, 167, 178-9.

⁸² Images of the Sanctuary, which was later a theatre, survive in Glover, *Ashton-under-Lyne*, p. 310; Howcroft, *Pennine People*, p. 77; and an 1852 Ordnance Survey map of Ashton.

The processions of believers ‘in uniform’ through the streets of Ashton to the Sanctuary for each service drew much contemporary attention and comment. While the men wore their blue, single-breasted coats, generally with a white hat, the women appeared completely in white, with many also wearing white embroidered veils.⁸³ Processions were known to be led by the congregation’s sizable orchestra playing a variety of wind instruments. Hymns on millennial themes – long popular among Southcottian groups in private – were also sung publicly.⁸⁴ In the Sanctuary itself, two services were held each Sunday, typically combining hymn-singing, Bible readings, a sermon, and prayers – including the chanting of the Lord’s Prayer in Hebrew.⁸⁵ Published forms of service largely followed the Church of England’s Book of Common Prayer, with slight but significant amendments.⁸⁶ Services were led by a designated ‘Priest’ – a leading male member of the community – who preached the sermon; the ‘Lesson of the Day’ was to be ‘read by a Female’, and the designated passages were disproportionately drawn from the Books of Revelation and Genesis.⁸⁷ When Wroe participated in a service, he did so as ‘the Prophet’ rather than a priest, and spoke ‘the Word of the Lord’ from his own pulpit.

⁸³ This account of their public dress was given by the radical Richard Carlile in *Lion*, 18 Jan. 1828, p. 78. Carlile’s relation to Southcottians is discussed extensively in Chapters 7-9 of this thesis.

⁸⁴ Wroe, *Divine Communications*, pp. 57, 277; PS PN 621, *Songs of Moses and the Lamb, to be used by the Society of Christian Israelites...* (Gravesend, 1853).

⁸⁵ PS PN 568, *A Form of Service for the afternoon of the day called Sunday as used by the People Called Israelites*, (Ashton-under-Lyne, 1829).

⁸⁶ Amendments to the Evening Prayer service included the re-phrasing of the absolution after Confession, to pray: ‘O Lord Jesu Christ, who at thy first coming didst send thy messenger to prepare thy way before thee; grant that thy word and spirit may now so prepare and make ready the way for thy second appearing and thy kingdom, that we may be found an acceptable people, to reign with thee on earth one thousand years, and afterwards in thy kingdom of glory above for ever.’ *Form of Service*, p. 2

⁸⁷ *Form of Service*, pp. 13-22, 101-13.

The Sanctuary was opened in July 1825.⁸⁸ Later the same year, Wroe's *Private Communications* indicate, there was an intention to 'build twelve houses, that it may bear the likeness of your houses in the millennium'.⁸⁹ These would be detached houses, 'for no man's house of the twelve tribes of Israel shall touch another, they shall all be distinct'. There followed several further references to the 'twelve houses', in subsequent prophecies, intimating that these were intended for the elders of each tribe.⁹⁰ This particular building project never made it off Wroe's visionary drawing board. Yet the prophet was evidently loath to give up on the community's millennial property portfolio. In 1828, Wroe prophesied once more that 'every tribe shall have a palace, and there they shall dwell. I shewed thee the likeness of the buildings, which I told thee should be built at Ashton'.⁹¹ This, the communication went on, was the 'House at Shepley near unto Ashton'; this was to be 'the way and the guide for every house, for the whole house of Israel'.⁹² Quite what was so 'millennial' about this Georgian villa close to Dukinfield Hall is unclear. Yet as it was further declared, 'there shall be lodges at the four quarters, one lodge north, another south, another west, another east' of the city, this was made the Southern Lodge, or gatehouse.⁹³ Three more houses were built in 1828 as copies of this building, each positioned a mile from the centre of Ashton on a principal road, and were commonly called gatehouses.⁹⁴

⁸⁸ Wroe, *Divine Communications*, p. 89. Not Christmas Day 1825, as Green suggests in *Wroe*, p. 80.

⁸⁹ Wroe, *Private Communications*, p. 187.

⁹⁰ Wroe, *Private Communications*, pp. 214, 229.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 504.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 506.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 506. Though demolished, its location is still recognised by modern-day Dukinfield's Gate Street, formerly Southgate Street.

⁹⁴ Part of the eastern gatehouse survives today, rescued from demolition during redevelopment in 2004. On this building see: <http://www.oddwhim.co.uk/oddwhim>. The recently installed blue plaque repeats the 'New Jerusalem' myth.

In the central, grid-iron streets of 1820s Ashton, several further buildings were associated with the Southcottians, but they did not construct them. These were their contribution to the commercial life of the town – the ‘Israelites’ shops’ – supplying members of the sect with kosher provisions, as well as the general public. John Garland’s butcher’s in Stamford Street was not the only shop run by a recent migrant. In Church Street, a community ‘Shop Company’ was established, largely based around William Knowlson’s drapery store and William Skin’s ‘grocer & provision dealers’.⁹⁵ These shops were recognised by contemporary visitors to Ashton as a means by which differences in wealth across the religious community were countered, the society gaining a reputation for ‘providing for ... their own poor’ and ‘acting upon the Quaker-principle of dealing into each other’s hands’.⁹⁶ When the London radical, Richard Carlile, visited the town in 1828, he directly compared the shops to contemporary innovations by followers of Robert Owen in the capital:

The Israelites of Ashton-under-Line have anticipated the Cooperative Trading Fund association of Red Lion-square, in keeping a shop, to supply, with a good article, and at a moderate profit, their community, with most of the necessaries of life.⁹⁷

The drapery store supplied the correct linen and cotton clothes and ceremonial wear for all believers, yet also provided for ‘their own poor’ through employing hard-pressed hand-weavers among the community (a further resemblance to Owenite trading).

⁹⁵ Robert Blackwell, originally from Stockport, was the registered keeper of this shop in 1828. *Pigot’s National Commercial Directory for 1828-9*, pp. 48-50; Its link to William Knowlson is established in *Extracts and Letters and other Writings of the Israelite Preachers* (Wakefield, 1831), p. 9. On Blackwell and the shops, see letters from Dr James Napier to James Smith, 11 Jan. and 29 Mar. 1831, quoted in Smith, *Shepherd Smith*, pp. 69-70. See also, Wroe, *Private Communications*, pp. 670, 713.

⁹⁶ *Lion*, 18 Jan. 1828, p. 78; *Lion*, 31 July 1829, p. 138.

⁹⁷ *Lion*, 25 Jan. 1828, p. 103. Carlile’s relation to Southcottians is discussed extensively in Chapters 7-9 of this thesis.

Foreshadowing Jerusalem

The arrangements and practices which turned Southcottians into Ashton Israelites during the 1820s were a direct outcome of a distinct understanding of the millennium discernable in Wroe's prophecies. Some elements of the Israelites' public behaviour in Ashton have been recovered by historians before, from a range of external sources, as well as descriptions in Wroe's publicly-available journal. Yet, with little knowledge of the actual beliefs underpinning such apparently extreme practices in the midst of Lancashire laissez-faire industrialism, scholars have typically attributed them to cultic delusion and collective desperation. The sociological explanation has spoken loudest where the theological is silent. Now, with the availability of Wroe's *Private Communications*, the systematic set of beliefs within which such practices were grounded may be recovered. This reveals a distinct and significant progression in ways of thinking about the coming millennium from prior prophets. For while Southcott and Turner had emphasised their revealed knowledge of the millennium's imminence, so telling their followers to get ready for God's intervention in the form of Shiloh, Wroe's prophecies were predominantly concerned with how things *would actually be* in the millennium, once the messiah arrived. Wroe's revelations were of the conditions of the millennium itself, more than its coming.

The divine voice that Wroe claimed to hear revealed to him that the millennial age would be a synthesis of the ages of the Old and New Testaments, of Judaism and Christianity. In a series of communications, this explanation was given through what may be understood as a dispensational and dialectic reading of the biblical meta-narrative. The

Old Testament age of Moses' covenant represented the *thesis* of the Law; the New Testament age of the Gospel was its *antithesis*. It followed that the third age of the millennium would involve a *synthesis* of the two.⁹⁸ Wroe's followers perceived themselves, with their ancestors, to be an embodiment of this progressive development in human history – a story of God's redemptive relationship with His people. In the past, they had been Israelites keeping the Jewish Law, for the redemption of the body; then they had believed the Christian Gospel, for salvation of their souls; now they hoped, in the millennium, to dwell with the messiah, believing his Gospel, yet also keeping the Mosaic Law. One redeemed the body, the other saved the soul, so securing immortality – or life for the thousand years of the millennium.⁹⁹ For this reason they came to call themselves 'Christian Israelites'.¹⁰⁰

The full adoption of the Law during 1824 appeared to be justified initially in the idea of Southcottians acting and appearing as those they believed to be their ancestors: Joseph Grimshaw grew his beard 'to look like our forefathers of old'. Yet, as Wroe's revealed knowledge of the third, millennial age came to dominate such Southcottians' views from 1825 onwards, the Law and every other practice, activity and purpose, were conceived in a new way. Wroe's revelations allowed the millennium to be not only predicted but effectively previewed. Ashton was chosen as a place to realise a physical likeness of things in the millennium. The clothes worn, the food eaten and living

⁹⁸ Wroe, *Private Communications*, pp. 117, 373-7, 458-9.

⁹⁹ 'I will cause my children Israel to prepare; then it shall be seen who are seeking common salvation, and who are seeking both salvation and redemption.' Wroe, *Private Communications*, p. 21.

¹⁰⁰ The 'Christian Israelite Church' survives, with several hundred members, principally in Australia. <http://www.cichurch.asn.au>.

arrangements adopted in Ashton were intended to be, as Wroe's prophetic voice declared, 'as they shall be in the millennium'.¹⁰¹

The concept lying behind this shift in view may be understood to originate in a way of thinking already present in Southcottian theology, namely typology – the interpretation of prophecies and the Bible through 'types and shadows'. Many of Southcott's original prophecies had featured readings of scriptural stories as 'types' of what was occurring in her own time - its war, peace and famine; she also interpreted external events as foreshadowings of the millennium itself.¹⁰² Wroe and his followers appropriated such ideas to their own activities: arrangements in the present could be 'types' or models of what was to come; they could foreshadow the millennium *themselves*, and mark its coming.¹⁰³

The twelve houses which Wroe prophesied in 1825 but were not built, were specifically defined as bearing 'the likeness of your houses in the millennium'.¹⁰⁴ The completed Sanctuary, in its obeying the Levitical strictures on materials, was similarly intended to demonstrate how buildings would be in the millennium. Arrangements within existing homes would preview the millennium as far as possible: in December 1825, Samuel Swire was directed to prepare 'two rooms ... furnished according as ye could like in the millennium'.¹⁰⁵ As no community of goods transpired within the community of Ashton, and differences in wealth were maintained, Swire and the other industrialists'

¹⁰¹ Wroe, *Private Communications*, p. 192.

¹⁰² On 'types and shadows' in the Southcott's theological conception of the millennium, see Allan, 'Southcottian Sects', pp. 218-9. On typological theology more generally, see Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of the Biblical Narrative* (New Haven, 1974); George Landow, *Victorian types, Victorian shadows: biblical typology in Victorian literature, art, and thought* (Boston, MA, 1980).

¹⁰³ Zion Ward's own, independent alterations to Southcottian millennial theology also featured an extension of typological ideas, appropriated to himself. See Chapter 5, pp. 178-9.

¹⁰⁴ Wroe, *Private Communications*, p. 187.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 230. A similar direction was given for the preparation of a room for Wroe, himself in 1826. p. 267.

families were directed to practise ways of living promised but not yet available to all believers. Some kept servants now, 'to shew what shall follow', when all were expected to have servants in the millennium.¹⁰⁶ And being an Englishman's millennium, especial details were directed for the taking of hot beverages:

The Spirit has made known unto me these things ... I walked to and fro in your rooms, in vision ... There shall be tea and coffee drinking during the whole day of rest: there shall be no iron tea trays: till the day of rest ye shall have paper ones, and after that silver and gold. And all those rooms that I require shall have two full sets of china, one gilt with gold and another with silver. And all your houses – the tea trays shall be silver and gold when Satan's Kingdom is destroyed.¹⁰⁷

In January 1828, Wroe experienced a further vision. 'Many things being transfigured before me,' Wroe reported to his amanuensis; 'the twelve gates, and their plantings, and their form, and groves ... which shall be at Jerusalem, when the walls are built'.

The Lord spake these words unto me, his Spirit being poured upon me, by speaking in an inward voice ... but must I not bring a type, a likeness to the world – and shew them, as I have shewed them the likeness of the Scriptures? I will have the gates as a shadow, for I will shew them to the whole world.¹⁰⁸

From this time, the second wave of building work – of the lodges or gatehouses – commenced. In this way, it may be understood that Ashton was never envisaged as the actual New Jerusalem, as some historians have rather romantically believed.¹⁰⁹ Neither Wroe nor his followers believed the millennium had arrived. Rather, living in Ashton was

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 192.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., pp. 309-10.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 445.

¹⁰⁹ Green, *Wroe*, pp. 69-90; Glover, *Ashton-under-Lyne*, p. 315. Wroe's prophecies in places use 'Jerusalem' as a synonym for Ashton: 'He that will not come unto my Sabbath at Jerusalem, and has just means to come, I will not honour him with my Sabbath; for I leave every man to his free will at other places, whether he keep my Sabbath or not; ...for I do not give a command unto any place but to keep the usual Sabbath, but at Ashton'; Wroe, *Private Communications*, p. 370-1.

understood to be a shadow of what was to come, a likeness of Jerusalem, and a symbolic statement of how that Holy City would be in the eyes of those who believed they would see it for real. As Southcottian Israelites walked the streets of Ashton, they wore the clothes that they believed would be worn in the millennium; in the Sanctuary, they experienced the music, the hymns and the spoken sounds of millennial worship; in their trade with one another and employment, they allowed each believer a taste of millennial society.

Agency and Millenarian Ashton

The recovery of this theological basis for the practices developed in Ashton has significant implications for understanding the relationship such millenarians saw between their own actions and those of God, in the realising of the millennium. The contrast between Wroe's directions to his followers, and those of preceding prophets – relating his vision of how the millennium would be to their actions in the present, rather than telling them simply to wait for a sign or messiah – establishes the power available in a revealed vision of God's intention for the world. The inference of many of these millenarians' prior history is that imagining and waiting for the day to come when Shiloh would arrive, or they would leave for their supposed ancestral yet alien landscape of the Holy Land, gave way to a will to action in the present.

Acknowledging such a will to action allows such millenarians and their sense of individual and collective agency to be better understood. For the willingness of these Pennine believers to improve their experience of early industrial conditions – to practise

ways of living, sharing and providing ‘as in the millennium’ – goes against existing historical interpretations of such religion. On one level, it contradicts those views of millenarians in this age as passive victims, surrendering to some psychic fantasy, without engagement with the real world. To feed, clothe and employ the poor, was no fantasy, but a material answer, even if grounded in a millennial vision. This refutes Thompson’s general view of Southcottianism as not inspiring ‘effective social action’ to an extent not realised in Harrison’s assessment, or studies since.¹¹⁰ Yet, it also challenges, on a more conceptual level, assumptions within Thompson’s argument concerning attitudes to agency, and the rigid distinction between human agents of dramatic change, and expectations of a divine agent.

To view the world through a millenarian framework – where the divine agent is perceived to be readying for a great work of change in the world – is ultimately to live in preparation for that change. Preparation could mean sitting back and doing nothing; or it could mean pre-empting, even proving the change’s imminence in some sense, through acting in ways that signalled its coming. The inspiration of a prophet was perceived as a means of knowing not only when a change would come, but of how, and what would occur after. For a person to live in the conviction that their God had a plan, that they knew that plan, and, further more, they knew this plan was about to be acted upon, was potentially to live, not with a restricted sense of personal agency, but rather to combine one’s agency, one’s freedom to act, to that understood to be divine.

Such a definition of agency may contradict the ways many political historians and anthropologists have understood the free agent and the individual subject as interchangeable. Yet it draws on aspects of how other scholars, in the field of religion,

¹¹⁰ Harrison, *Second Coming*, p. 151; Green, *Wroe*, pp. 23-9.

have recently come to conceptualise agency, most notably Phyllis Mack. Mack's studies of Quakerism and early Methodism offer an alternative conception of agency with significant implications for contemporary millenarians. She posits a definition of agency among such religious groups as not 'the freedom to do what one wants but as the freedom to want and do what is right'. This is a paradox of self-negation seeking a self-interest corresponding with divine desire, where 'the sanctified Christian wants what God wants' so to become 'God's agent in the world'.¹¹¹ Even without mirroring Mack's exploration of Methodist self-analysis, self-discipline and dream experiences among millenarians, her definition aids an appreciation for how members of a millenarian community's meta-level understanding of God's agency could leave room for their own activity within this. The individual millenarian believer could come to a sense of agency through their prophet's revelation of not only God's imminent action, but of how things would be after that action. With his revelation, they not only wanted 'what God wants', but ultimately believed they *knew* what God wanted.

Here was a sense of human agency gained from a millennial expectation grounded in a revealed knowledge of change, not the interpretative epistemology typically associated with millennial ideas gauged with human agency. Wroe's Southcottians remained ready for a divine agent to work a great change in the world, and lived in preparation for that change. Yet the change in their ideas meant they had *de facto* moved away from an expectation of 'disruptive' change, towards an evolutionary hope: in the life of their community they brought the millennium closer.

¹¹¹ Phyllis Mack, *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment: gender and emotion in early Methodism* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 9-10.

Their choice to live in ways which they believed were ‘as in the millennium’ was inherently a choice concerning God’s agency *and* their own. Their response to revealed knowledge of not only God’s intention to act, but the practical outcome of that action – of how conditions would be in the millennium – was to act themselves in ways that signposted such conditions, as far as possible, in the contingency of the human present. Expecting the millennium may have been a result of the historical conditions believers lived through – war, instability, social and economic disruption. Yet their forms of religious practice – what they built, sung, wore, and ate – were also a temporal ‘this-worldly’ response to such conditions, not an escape, but an engagement. After awaiting the millennium in the arrival of a messianic child, after long preparing to leave for the Holy Land, an individualised concern for personal salvation gave way to a will to contextualised action in an 1820s mill town. Their God’s expected answer to such conditions was pre-empted by several hundred people themselves, over coming the physical, and not just the spiritual, challenges of the early industrial Pennines.

Chapter 5

FINDING SHILOH

The messianic figure of Shiloh continued to haunt the dreams of surviving Southcottians across the 1820s. After Turner's death, the spectacle of thousands of believers awaiting a predicted day of the messiah's arrival declined: Wroe made no such specific prophecies, and even downplayed expectations of Southcott's child suddenly appearing 'from heaven'.¹ While the community practices adopted in Ashton and elsewhere were perceived in part as preparations for Shiloh's coming, they served to divert their participants' attention from intensive speculation on dates. Beyond the groups affiliated to Wroe, however, interest in the return of Shiloh remained potent; there was, after all, little else to think about. In the varied chapels spread across London, led by lone preachers or minor prophetic claimants, hymns continued to rouse Southcottians' hopes of '...Shiloh/ he shall reign the King/ of everlasting peace'.² Believers gathering at Samuel Sibley's 'House of Faith' in the East End considered it one of their *Articles of Faith* to 'prepare themselves to receive Shiloh, their natural Spiritual High Priest'.³ Across the correspondence network of old believers, a popular speculation concerned whether the ultimate fulfilment of Southcott's prophecies would be her return with 'the child'.⁴

¹ Edward Green, *Prophet John Wroe: virgins, scandals and visions* (Stroud, 2005), pp. 77-9.

² Quoted in James Hopkins, *A Woman to Deliver Her People: Joanna Southcott and English Millenarianism in an Era of Revolution* (Austin, 1982), p. 217.

³ Samuel Sibley, *A Copy of the Articles of Faith...* (London, 1819), p. 10. In 1819, Catherine Sibley experienced visions 'of her having had Shiloh in her arms'. PS PN 240/11.

⁴ Panacea Society (PS) PN 252/37 25 Apr. 1817; British Library (BL) Add. MSS 70933/9-47.

The experience of waiting for both Shiloh and the millennium, year after uneventful year, perhaps inevitably blurred the received distinctions and connections between the two concepts in the minds of believers. Did the messiah equal the millennium, such that the moment Shiloh arrived so did the millennium? Or was the messiah the means of the realisation of the millennium – the agent of its progressive arrival? Southcott had originally taught that Shiloh would be the divine figure through whose action the millennium would be realised; his reign as King, accepted by the Jews, would, in some unspecified way, bring about the conditions of the millennial state.⁵ When Turner had predicted the child Shiloh's arrival on certain dates in 1816 and after, he had, however, personally intimated that dramatic change would come about immediately.⁶ The groups of his followers who had prepared to leave for Jerusalem in 1817, nevertheless appeared to conceive of Shiloh more as a form of ruler in the Southcott mould, one who would lead them to the Holy Land to realise the millennium there.⁷ In the condition of waiting, such points of difference were moot: the sense of the 'yet to come' was all-pervasive; surviving Southcottians outside Ashton ultimately thought there was little they could do until an external agent changed everything.

But how would this thinking change, and these differences be resolved, if an agent indeed arrived or announced themselves? How was the millennium to be conceived if an individual was accepted as being the Southcottian messiah yet in conditions palpably not of a millennial order? How would the agency of this human individual be conceptualised within the divine agency required to realise the millennium? Answers to

⁵ Gordon Allan, 'Southcottian Sects from 1790 to the Present Day', in Kenneth Newport and Crawford Gribben (eds.), *Expecting the End: Millennialism in Social and Historical Context* (Waco, 2006), p. 219.

⁶ See Chapter 1, p. 46.

⁷ See Chapter 3, p. 120.

these questions are presented by developments within the national Southcottian movement in the final years of the 1820s. In 1828, a Shiloh claimant emerged, and over the following two years persuaded numerous groups of surviving Southcottians of his messianic status. By the early 1830s he had been accepted by nearly 2000 believers as the Shiloh they were waiting for.⁸ This claimant was John Ward, the London shoemaker converted to Southcottianism in late-1814, and one-time preacher at Sibley's chapel.

This chapter considers how Ward came to convince so many Southcottians that he was the Shiloh. In examining Ward's justification of himself as the messiah, and the response of his followers, it explores how the apparent arrival of Shiloh reshaped some Southcottians' beliefs about the millennium, and particularly the process of its realisation. By being Shiloh, Ward presented a living challenge to believers' existing conceptions of divine agency and the millennium. As the messiah, he was perceived to be a manifestation of divine intervention in the world, and yet he had arrived, and the millennium apparently had not. In such a state of things, some Southcottians gained a new sense of their potential human contribution to the completion of the divine millennial plan.

Becoming Shiloh

John Ward was born in 1781, to plebeian Protestant parents in southern Ireland.⁹ Moved by his family to Bristol then London for apprenticeships in shoemaking and shipbuilding,

⁸ These numbers were discussed in Chapter 1, pp. 48-9.

⁹ Biographical details on Ward's early life are drawn from C.B. Holinsworth, *Memoir of Zion Ward* (Birmingham, 1881) and an autobiographical passage in Ward's 1831 weekly journal, *The Judgment Seat, of Christ*, 4 July-9 Aug. 1831, pp. 65-121.

in his mid-teens, Ward volunteered for the navy as a shipwright and saw action in Nelson's squadron at the Battle of Copenhagen.¹⁰ Paid off at Sheerness in September 1802, he returned to London, resumed shoemaking, and married a woman called Mary.¹¹ In succeeding years, he joined several Protestant dissenting sects gathering in the diverse chapels and side-street assembly rooms of Lambeth, Southwark and poorer parts of the City, including Baptists, Methodists and Sandemanians.¹² A surviving passage of autobiographical writing provides a flavour of Ward's religious background in strict Calvinism, leaving him with an 'intense fear of eternal damnation ... from reading curses and threatenings in the Bible' from childhood.¹³ The Bible was nonetheless the object and instrument he constantly turned to for any sense of hope. Among the London sects he joined – each defined by their Bible-centrism, Ward reported finding some temporary comfort, but 'no peace'.¹⁴

Ward presented his first encounter with Southcott's writings in late-1814 as significant to his relationship with the Bible: Southcott's *Fifth Book of Wonders*, 'brought unspeakable comfort to my mind, giving me such a lift that I never had before'. When he now 'read the Scriptures', the 'light' he 'received from Joanna's writings gave me to see something – the beauty of them'.¹⁵ Between 1815 and the mid-1820s, Ward lived and believed on the margins of London's sizeable surviving Southcottian community. For

¹⁰ The National Archives (TNA) ADM 36/14678-9 HMS Blanche, Ship's Muster, 1 Dec. 1800-31 Oct. 1801; 1 Nov. 1801-22 Sep. 1802.

¹¹ TNA ADM 35/240 HMS Blanche, Ship's Pay Book, 9 July 1797-14 Oct. 1805. Ward, *Judgment Seat*, pp. 66-9.

¹² Ward, *Judgment Seat*, p. 69; The Sandemanians were the English form of the Scottish eighteenth-century Glassite sect. Sandemanian faith asserted the literal truth of the Bible, and sought to approach it through reason alone. Faith was an intellectual matter – the acknowledgement of religious truths contained in Scripture, distinct from a hope of redemption or exercise of the will. J.F. Stanley, 'The Glassite-Sandemanian movement in the eighteenth-century British Atlantic world' (Oxford Univ. D.Phil. Thesis, 2004).

¹³ Holinsworth, *Memoir of Zion Ward*, p. 3.

¹⁴ Ward, *Judgment Seat*, p. 69.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 69-70.

several years, ‘few of Joanna’s followers knew me,’ he later wrote, ‘as I was not a believer in her lifetime, and the few that did know me, we could not agree in many points’.¹⁶ Ward was involved with specific bodies for only brief periods of time, including Sibley’s East-End chapel in 1820, where his declarations attracted the attention of government informers.¹⁷

Ward was a man responsive to the chance encounter with religious text or spoken word, receptive to alternative theological ideas where he came across them hawked in the streets or pronounced from pulpit, stage or soap-box. His original involvement with the Baptists had come when, walking past a chapel in Lant Street in the Borough, he heard hymn-singing and the words of the preacher, Jeremiah Garrett.¹⁸ His first copy of Southcott’s prophecies ‘fell into my hands’ in the street.¹⁹ In the world Ward inhabited – the bustling thorough-fares, dimly-lit workshops and tight alleyways then stretching from the City, over London- and Blackfriars-bridges through Southwark, to Newington and Walworth – a seeker such as Ward would have had countless religious stimuli: hand-bills of the word of new prophets, chap-books and pamphlets of visions, dreams or the ‘signs of the times’, the open doors of back-street chapels proclaiming newer, truer forms of Christianity. What Ward reveals of his religious life across the two decades, after leaving the Navy, points to his restive religious sentiment, his tendency to ‘pick up and read’ or stop to hear, wherever new interpretations, most especially of the Bible – the book, the

¹⁶ Ward, *Judgment Seat*, p. 70.

¹⁷ See Chapter 3, pp. 125-6.

¹⁸ Ward, *Judgment Seat*, p. 69. Ward’s involvement with Garrett casts some doubt on his claim to have been entirely ignorant of Southcott before 1814. Garrett published a prominent attack on Southcott in 1805, entitled *Demonocracy Detected*, to which Southcott produced a riposte. The Lant Street chapel was close to at least two south London Southcottian chapels. Jeremiah Garrett, *Demonocracy Detected – Visionary Enthusiasm Corrected* (London, 1805); Joanna Southcott, *Answer to Garrett’s Book* (London, 1805).

¹⁹ Ward, *Judgment Seat*, p. 69.

material object at the centre of his view of the world – were claimed and caught his ear or eye.

In around 1825, Ward encountered the printed prophecies of Mary ‘Joanna’ Boon – the Devon-based claimant to Southcott’s prophetic succession – circulating in his south London locale. It is not clear when Boon, the wife of a shoemaker, John Boon, first began to claim prophetic insights. In 1821-22, in the aftermath of Turner’s death, she issued a pamphlet announcing her continuation of Southcott’s original mission, by speaking with the voice of Joanna’s spirit.²⁰ She notably reasserted elements of Southcott’s message which had stressed the importance of God ‘come to appear in woman’, and the role of a ‘handmaid’ of the Lord.²¹ Her words were taken down by disciples in her home village of Staverton in the Dart Valley, published in nearby Totnes, and spread amongst the Devon congregations of Turner followers then looking for a succeeding prophet. Boon’s reputation only gradually reached beyond Devon, but by 1825, her few London followers gathered regularly in a room in Walworth.²²

Ward reportedly ‘proved’ Boon’s communications, ‘comparing them with the Scriptures, and concluded that they were from the God of Truth’. He considered her to have ‘manifested the return of Joanna, or rather the return of the same spirit, in order to raise up the cause’.²³ As he was literate and had some preaching experience from his period as a Methodist, Ward was tasked with reading aloud Boon’s latest prophecies in the Walworth chapel. This role beneath Boon was a notable dimension of Ward’s realising his own messianic identity. 1825 took on profound significance for Ward; he

²⁰ Mary Boon, *Communications given by Divine Authority to Mary Joanna, (the Lord is here) and commanded to be printed for the information of all people* (Totnes, 1822).

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

²² John Field [Boon’s amanuensis], *Zion’s Recorder and Truth’s Advocate* (London, 1825).

²³ Ward, *Judgment Seat*, pp. 72-3.

would come to count this as his year-zero, followed by the ‘first year of the new creation’ as he would call it – the process of his becoming the messiah. Boon’s adopted epithet of ‘the Lord is here’, Ward took to indicate a divine presence in her writings. His experience of vocalising this presence, together with a series of traumatic religious experiences, doubts and dreams, led him, over a three year period, to the belief that he himself was receiving commands from God.²⁴ Gradually, he became convinced that ‘the hand of God was upon me, for some great and important end ... so strangely was the visitation upon me’.²⁵ In early 1828, he gave up shoemaking, such was his growing sense of calling ‘to obey him who had chosen me’; ‘I got strength at last to give up the entanglements of this life ... and told my wife, that my temporal work was done.’²⁶

Mrs Ward was unimpressed. With two small children, her husband’s shirking – divinely-directed or not – put the family in danger of starvation. In a formidable display of tough-love, Mary had him hauled before magistrates, and committed to Newington Workhouse.²⁷ Here Ward, still refusing to work, kept up his intense reading relationship with both the Bible and Southcott’s writings. He then reportedly experienced a series of dreams of a woman ‘arrayed in terrific majesty’, he took to be Southcott conferring her authority on him.²⁸ Through further obsessive study of Southcott’s writings, he reached ‘perfect inward satisfaction and conviction as to his call and mission’.²⁹ This involved a new realisation of his very identity: he had become Shiloh.

²⁴ Ward, *Judgment Seat*, p. 106.

²⁵ Zion Ward, ‘Letter from Zion to the believers in the Divine Mission of Joanna’ (1828) in *Letters, Epistles, and Revelations, of Jesus Christ, addressed to the Believers in the Glorious reign of Messiah* (London, 1831), p. 14. See also Ward, ‘Epistle to John Wroe’s Followers, or Modern Jews’ (1829) in *Zion’s Works*, vi. 10.

²⁶ Ward, ‘Letter from Zion’, p. 14.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 14; Holinsworth, *Memoir of Zion Ward*, p. 4.

²⁸ Ward, ‘Letter from Zion’, pp. 11-12.

²⁹ Holinsworth, *Memoir of Zion Ward*, p. 4.

In a series of early writings – produced from November 1828, and through much of 1829, Ward announced his new identity to other Southcottians, and sought to explain it. In the first – a letter ‘to the believers in the Divine Mission of Joanna,’ written whilst still in the workhouse – Ward gave an account of his recent dreams of Southcott. This vision, and the communications received from the apparition, were Ward’s initial authority for his claims: Southcott’s appearance represented her return, her rising again ‘according to the truth of her own writings’. In her words she had explained to Ward – and given him the words to pass on to her faithful – how she was not returning with the child, but that he, Ward, was the completion of her visitation.³⁰ The visionary Southcott was ‘continually opening my understanding, to understand the Scriptures and her writings, which will all be clearly opened and every mystery explained’, Ward wrote.³¹

The mystery of Southcott’s prophecies made clear to Ward was that Shiloh was a spirit, always intended to descend on one individual, imparting the knowledge and peace which would make the millennium possible. In another dream he heard a voice ‘which I knew to be the Lord’s voice’, announce ‘that Shiloh, the spirit of truth that was to guide the people into all truth, is come’.³²

‘God is a God of order’, Ward wrote; the ‘order’ which God had brought to the original creation of the world – beginning with one man – would be mirrored in the completion of the world, in its end. ‘To fulfil the Scriptures, and all other prophecies that have been given to [all] who prophesied of the end,’ God must work through one man, and this was to be ‘the spiritual man-child brought forth by Joanna Southcott’.³³ The

³⁰ Ward, ‘Letter from Zion’, pp. 12-13.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 14.

³³ Zion Ward, *The Vision of Judgment; or, the Return of Joanna from her trance* (London, 1829), p. 4.

man-child coming to rest on one individual – ‘one heart, one soul, one mind’ – stood as a type, the shadow of its coming to rest on all: ‘for Shiloh, the spirit of truth, will be found rising up in men, women, and children; in every city, town and village, working in all, one heart, one soul, one mind, just as it was in the shadow’.³⁴ Ward understood himself to have become Shiloh, through the descent of the spirit upon him. He was therefore the first to be changed into a new creation; in time, he would be a channel for this spiritual man-child’s spread amongst humanity.

‘The Scriptures, in union with Joanna’s writings, and her writings in union with the Bible, declare plainly, that such a one must arise in this day’, Ward asserted.³⁵ A crucial dimension to his concept of being Shiloh, was Ward’s being not only a completion of Southcott’s prophecies, but a fulfilment of the Scriptures also. This Ward had felt impressed upon his mind during the period he referred to as ‘the twelvemonth’s Visitation ... that was from one November (1827) to the other (1828)’.³⁶ As the millennium presaged an ending of all disputes between Christians, so ‘in the end, one must appear ..., empowered with wisdom to show the true meaning of the Word of God that is on record, which all men have been divided in their opinions upon’.³⁷ The frequent references in Southcott’s writings to how the Bible would be ‘made clear’ or ‘explained’ through her mission and through Shiloh’s coming, confirmed this: ‘when the child is born, men will see their bibles clear’, she had prophesied.³⁸ Ward’s recent trials, his intensive readings of both the Bible and Southcott’s prophecies, his doubts and visions,

³⁴ Ward, *Vision of Judgment*, p. 4. These ideas featured significant echoes of traditions of thought associated with mid-seventeenth century groups, including the Ranters, but the figure of Abiezer Coppe in particular. Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*, (Harmondsworth, 1975), pp. 203-13.

³⁵ Ward, *Vision of Judgment*, p. 4.

³⁶ Ward, ‘Epistle to John Wroe’s Followers’, p. 10.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

³⁸ Zion Ward (hereafter ZW) to Thomas Pierce, 29 July 1829, in *Letters, Epistles, and Revelations*, p. 24; Joanna Southcott, *The Continuation of Prophecies* (London, 1803), p. 10.

had been a form of birth-pain for the bringing forth of this new knowledge and divine wisdom.

...the truth of the Scriptures could never be brought to light until some man was worked upon to go to the bottom of every truth: and that he might be a witness of the truth of the Scriptures, and of the Woman's writings; he must first be plunged into a state of sufferings, for the word must be first fulfilled in one man, before the light of it can come either unto himself, or the people.³⁹

It was Ward's 'state of sufferings' coupled in his mind with the idea of 'the Scriptures' needing to be 'fulfilled in one man' that ultimately led him to his central argument as to 'the true meaning of the Word of God' – the knowledge revealed to announce the millennium. This was that *he*, Ward was its true meaning; the whole truth of Scripture was revealed by its whole fulfilment in one person. Ward was therefore not only Shiloh, but also the Christ and many other figures in the Bible, even places such as 'Zion' – from where 'the word shall go forth'. This latter name he liked so much he adopted it, becoming 'Zion Ward', a personified fulfilment of a visionary place, as well as being Shiloh and the Christ.⁴⁰ 'The Scriptures were given by inspiration of God, but from Genesis to Revelation they are not History, but figures of what is to come', was how Ward would précis this point.⁴¹

For two notable scholars of Ward, his experiences between 1826 and 1828, then adoption of a reading of the Bible as essentially an allegory of himself, have strongly suggested an encounter, in this period, with the freethought writings of Richard Carlile,

³⁹ Ward, *Vision of Judgment*, p. 11.

⁴⁰ ZW to John Brentnall, 17 June 1829, in *Letters, Epistles, and Revelations*, p. 9.

⁴¹ PS PN 604, Zion Ward, 'The Creed of the Shilohites' [n.d.], p. 7.

or those of his associate, the theatrical de-frocked clergyman, Robert Taylor.⁴² During precisely the time that Ward reported experiencing his many dreams, doubts about his calling, and the trauma of the workhouse, Taylor was giving lectures at his Christian Evidence Society, presenting a mystical, astrological reading of the Bible.⁴³ 1827 was also the year when Carlile's publications, previously known for their ridicule of the Bible's inconsistencies, switched to echo Taylor's ideas, declaring the Scriptures to be a fiction, yet containing an allegorical myth where Christ was the principle of Reason.⁴⁴ William Oliver and Edward Royle each speculated that Ward came across Carlile and Taylor's 'allegorical and mystical interpretations of the Bible' in 1827. The doubt Carlile and Taylor shed on Ward's existing Bible-centred beliefs supposedly threw him into a 'religious mania', only resolved when he utilised their ideas within a messianic claim, making himself the mystical fulfilment, the allegorical answer of the entire Bible.⁴⁵ Oliver and Royle notably projected the progress of Ward's subsequent radical career from this encounter.⁴⁶

Yet, Ward's allegorical reading of the Bible need not have been dependent on an adoption of, even a familiarity with, Carlile or Taylor's thought at this stage. Ward's mode of claiming to be the messiah was wholly in keeping with the logic of Southcott's own theological thought. As Allan has pointed out, Ward's teaching that Scripture was

⁴² Oliver, *Prophets and Millennialists*, pp. 159-63; Edward Royle, 'Ward, John 'Zion' (1781-1837)', in Joseph Baylen and Norbert Gossman (eds.), *Biographical Dictionary of Modern British Radicals Vol.2: 1830-1870* (Hassocks, 1984), pp. 534-6.

⁴³ On Taylor see Chapter 7.

⁴⁴ Richard Carlile, *The Gospel according to Richard Carlile, shewing the true parentage, birth, and life, of our allegorical Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ* (London, 1827). Joel Wiener, *Radicalism and Freethought in Nineteenth-Century Britain: The Life of Richard Carlile* (Westport, 1983), pp. 145-52.

⁴⁵ Royle, 'Ward, John 'Zion'', p. 534.

⁴⁶ Other studies of Ward have noted the link with Carlile, but not speculated in the same way about an early encounter. Harrison thought it 'probable that Ward was influenced by Carlile and Taylor', suggesting that Ward 'was unlikely to have arrived at his doctrine of the allegory of scripture entirely unaided', but did not speculate when (*Second Coming*, pp. 156-7). See also, T.C.F. Stunt 'Ward, John [called Zion Ward] (1781-1837)', *DNB* [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/28693>].

entirely allegorical was ‘an extension to what Southcott herself had proposed’ in her typological approach to the Bible.⁴⁷ Southcott’s tendency to read even historical parts of the Bible as ‘types’ and foreshadowings of the future need only have been taken to its extreme to arrive at the very position Ward adopted: that the Bible was *entirely* types and shadows, entirely prophecies of things to come, and that he, Ward was *the* thing to come. As Southcott had been inspired to record the message of God with all its types and shadows of persons and events, Ward argued, so had the writers of the original scriptures (whoever they were) also transcribed a divinely-inspired message, which though presented in historical form, was nonetheless prophecy.⁴⁸ ‘For all the Scriptures, though they are written as *history* of past events, are, in truth, prophecies of the future, and this is what you have now to learn’, Ward wrote to fellow Southcottians in 1829.⁴⁹

It was his life experience of the prior three years that Ward believed the clearest evidence of his messianic, Scripture-fulfilling role and identity. ‘The Lord has been working for three years past in secret, bringing forth his new creation, the New-created Being’, Ward wrote. He had ‘proofs within myself which exceeded all written testimonials wrote upon paper’.⁵⁰ Ward had been on a mental journey since his acceptance of Mary Boon, and God’s apparent communicative relationship with the world through her. This had led him to believe, doubt, then believe again in his own spiritual visitation, in the voices he heard, and the vision of Southcott instilling her prophetic authority in him. In this journey, Ward saw the working out of the very

⁴⁷ Allan, ‘Southcottian Sects’, p. 220.

⁴⁸ The contemporary yet alternative adapting of Southcottian typological ideas by John Wroe was discussed in Chapter 4, p. 162.

⁴⁹ Ward ‘Epistle to John Wroe’s Followers’, p. 1.

⁵⁰ Ward ‘Letter from Zion’ p. 13; ZW to John Brentnall, 17 June 1829, in *Letters, Epistles, and Revelations*, p. 10.

narrative of Scripture, the course of humanity's fall and redemption, even the personalities of both Christ and Satan.⁵¹ Ward employed a bewildering array of allegorical readings of Scripture to substantiate his case, across his writings of 1829: the three years' experience stood for the three days it took to raise Jesus; the opening of Genesis was not the creation of the material world, but a type of Ward's passing from darkness to light (the day being divided from night only on the fourth day).⁵² The millennium would come in the ending of Satan's power in the world, therefore, he, Ward had to become Satan for a period (through doubting God's work in him) to then be made Shiloh, the victor over Satan.⁵³ Southcott's resurrection in a vision to him, was in a sense his own resurrection and the final fulfilment of the promise of Shiloh.⁵⁴

Accepting Shiloh

The manner of the acceptance of Ward's claims by other Southcottians substantiates the argument that his messianic identity was forged wholly within the Southcottian system of belief. At the end of November 1828, Ward escaped from the workhouse, and spent the next eighteen months circulating letters and printed pamphlets almost exclusively among surviving Southcottian groups.⁵⁵ The bodies of believers who would accept him were

⁵¹ This is summarised most clearly in Holinsworth's *Memoir of Zion Ward*, pp. 5-6.

⁵² ZW to John Brentnall, 17 June 1829, ZW to Thomas Pierce, 29 July 1829, in *Letters, Epistles, and Revelations*, pp. 10-11, 25.

⁵³ ZW to Thomas Pierce, 13 Aug. 1829 in *Letters, Epistles, and Revelations*, p. 42; Holinsworth, *Memoir of Zion Ward*, p. 5.

⁵⁴ Edward Thompson had it about right when he termed Ward's arguments a 'surrealist solipsism'. *The Making of the English Working Class*, revised edn (Harmondsworth, 1968), p. 879.

⁵⁵ In August 1829, Ward approached a surviving follower of Richard Brothers, asserting that his interpretation would 'prove the truth of all prophecy, including the Divine Mission of Brothers'. ZW to John Finlayson, 5 Aug. 1829, in *Letters, Epistles, and Revelations*, p. 33. Ward's release brought no reconciliation with his wife; they remained estranged for the rest of his life.

predominantly groups who had not followed any prophet since Southcott, and remained committed to discovering how Southcott's prophecies were to be fulfilled in their present time. They were largely based in south London, Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Birmingham and Kent, and were persuaded by Ward's explanation of his claim from his reported vision of Southcott, but especially from his particular exegesis of Southcott's and the Bible's prophecies.

The first person that Ward convinced of his messianic identity, upon leaving the workhouse, was a Walworth Southcottian, Charles William Twort, a fishmonger.⁵⁶ Twort may have had curious ideas as to his own divinity, but opted to become Ward's leading follower instead. He took the name James (i.e. the brother of Jesus), and accompanied the Shiloh from then on, as a form of messiah's 'side-kick'.⁵⁷ Twort also provided some initial funds for Ward to print his earliest pamphlets.⁵⁸ For the first few months of 1829, however, the pair failed to convince more than a handful of south London Southcottian acquaintances of Ward's claims in person.

Success was eventually gained through the wider provincial circulation of pamphlets, particularly Ward's 'Letter from Zion to the believers in the Divine Mission of Joanna', and *The Vision of Judgment; or, the Return of Joanna from her trance. A* congregation at Chesterfield in Derbyshire was an early group to request more information as to 'the truth of the report ... [of] the appearance of the glorious Shiloh, the fulfilment of the Scriptures of truth, and of the woman's writings'.⁵⁹ Ward's pamphlets

⁵⁶ Ward's release on 30 Nov. 1828 and arrival at Twort's house is recalled in ZW to Thomas Pierce, 8 Sep. 1830, *Zion's Works* vol.14, p. 136. Twort was born 27 July 1794, in Aylesford, south of Chatham in Kent. His profession is given in *Birmingham Journal*, 24 Apr. 1830, p. 3.

⁵⁷ James Smith gives an account of Twort in *The Coming Man*, ii. 217-23.

⁵⁸ Ward, 'Letter from Zion'; idem., *Vision of Judgment*; idem., *The Vision of Judgment;(continued) or the Trial and Reward of Faith* (London, 1829); idem., *The Christian Corrector Corrected* (London, 1829).

⁵⁹ ZW to John Brentnall, 17 June 1829, in *Letters, Epistles, and Revelations*, p. 9.

also circulated with increasing excitement amongst a group of believers ‘in the holy mission of Joanna at Nottingham’.⁶⁰ It was a leader of this latter group, Thomas Pierce, a cotton-spinner, who reassured London Southcottians of their being ‘steady Believers in the sacred Mission of dear spiritual Mother with yourselves for many years’ and their not having followed ‘any other visitation’.⁶¹ Both Pierce’s Nottingham group, and the Chesterfield congregation, were old believers, and regularly exchanged letters with the Revd Thomas Foley.⁶² They had previously been influenced by the Worcestershire clergyman, looking ‘up to him for direction, what to receive, or what to reject, as a visitation or revelation from God’.⁶³

When Pierce consulted Foley as to his views on Ward’s particular claims to visitation, the blunt reply was returned, ‘I do not believe one tittle of it’.⁶⁴ Despite this dismissal, the Nottingham group resolved to find out more, composing a brief, cautious letter at the end of July 1829. ‘We admire the publications’, they wrote; ‘we are honest enquirers respecting this authority, and are anxious for further information’.⁶⁵ Ward replied within two days, answering particular points about the dating of his writings and further explanations for how the coming of truth in first his then every believing heart was indeed, ‘the birth of the child as it is written in the blessed Joanna’s writings’.⁶⁶ The Nottingham group’s subsequent collective acceptance of Ward during August initiated a

⁶⁰ Thomas Pierce to Charles Twort, 27 July 1829, in *Letters, Epistles, and Revelations*, p. 22.

⁶¹ Thomas Pierce to Richard Stephens, 14 Oct. 1829, in *Letters, Epistles, and Revelations*, p. 78; Thomas Pierce (born c.1778): 1841 Census, St Mary’s, Nottingham. TNA HO 107/870/14/2/25 p. 8. See Chapter 1, pp. 48-9.

⁶² The Nottingham group were visited by James Mills, a Manchester Southcottian. For Mill’s position in Foley’s network of correspondents, see BL Add. MSS 70933/21-47.

⁶³ Zion Ward, *The Living Oracle; or, the Star of Bethlehem: written in answer to a letter of the Rev. T.P. Foley, addressed to Mr T. Pierce of Nottingham* (Nottingham, 1830), p. 11.

⁶⁴ Thomas Foley to Thomas Pierce, July 1829, reproduced in Ward, *Living Oracle*, p. 9.

⁶⁵ Thomas Pierce to Charles Twort, 27 July 1829, in *Letters, Epistles, and Revelations*, pp. 22-3.

⁶⁶ ZW to Thomas Pierce, 29 July 1829, in *Letters, Epistles, and Revelations*, pp. 23-5.

flurry of correspondence from various directions, some enquiring for further information on the Shiloh.⁶⁷ One letter was received from ‘friends in the holy mission of dear mother’ in London, to which Pierce drew up an extensive reply explaining how and why they had chosen to accept Ward.

Pierce detailed how, receiving Ward’s pamphlet and letters, they had subjected them to ‘the most minute and diligent investigation as to its doctrines, explanations, Authority, &c.’. They collectively concluded that they contained ‘information of the highest importance to all people, especially to Believers in the sacred Mission of dear spiritual Mother, whose mysterious writings are in the most satisfactory manner explained’.⁶⁸ While disagreement had continually existed among Southcottians, ‘respecting Mother’s return, which some expect in the Body, others in the Spirit’, the Nottingham group now ‘fully believe she has returned in the Spirit ... and has condemned the man of Sin,’ and in this produced ‘Shiloh, the new-created Being, the Prince of Peace, or Joanna’s Son’.⁶⁹ The group were convinced of Ward’s revelation that ‘a human Being shall in the end be endowed with the Spirit of Wisdom to comprehend the full meaning of all prophesy [*sic*] in the Scriptures and dear Joanna’s works’. They further accepted ‘the spirit which such a human being is to be endowed with, to be nothing less than the Spirit of Christ ... and every human being must be clothed with his Spirit at the appointed time’. They thus hoped:

that both you and every Believer, not only in the Metropolis, but in every town and village, may shortly be clothed with this Spirit, as it will hide our nakedness; it is a city of refuge from the impending storm; it will fit us to be partakers of the Kingdom of Christ, and make us useful members prior

⁶⁷ ZW to Joseph Woodiwiss, 26 Oct. 1829, in *Letters, Epistles, and Revelations*, p. 99.

⁶⁸ Thomas Pierce to Richard Stephens, 14 Oct. 1829, in *Letters, Epistles, and Revelations*, p. 78.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

to the glorious epoch, when Truth, Righteousness, and Peace shall cover the earth, which has now begun and [is] making rapid progress.⁷⁰

The letter concluded with a plethora of references to passages in Southcott's works.⁷¹

Ward made every effort to persuade believers in other Southcottian traditions – those that had earlier subscribed to George Turner's prophecies, or now followed Wroe – that he was their Shiloh also. In early 1829, Ward composed an 'Epistle to John Wroe's Followers, or Modern Jews'; in July, he travelled with Twort to visit a body of Wroites at Chatham in Kent.⁷² Here, he met with limited success, drawing a small proportion away. Among two smaller former Turnerite congregations at Mansfield in north Nottinghamshire, and Barnsley in Yorkshire, Ward was more accepted.⁷³ Yet, the more common enquirers into Ward and his claims came from Southcottians who had retained an exclusively reverential view of Southcott's prophetic visitation; his writings caused the greater disturbance among the network of Southcottians who had, with the Nottingham group, 'neither ... turned to the right or left to follow any other visitation'.⁷⁴ Within such groups, Ward's claims were comparatively more amenable than any prior claimant to Southcott's mantle. Ward was, after all, presenting himself not as a prophet, but the physical fulfilment of Southcott's (and the Bible's) prophecies. The core of such Southcottians' distinct beliefs lay in precisely this area – the fulfilment of prophecy, not its continuation. Ward was offering his understanding of his own identity as such a point of completion.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 79.

⁷¹ Ibid., pp. 79-80.

⁷² ZW to John Brentnall, 28 July 1829, in *Letters, Epistles, and Revelations*, p. 21; Ward, 'Epistle to John Wroe's Followers', pp. 1-89.

⁷³ ZW to John Brentnall, 14 Nov. 1829, in *Zion's Works*, xiv. 7. ZW to Joseph Woodiwiss, 26 Oct. 1829, in *Letters, Epistles, and Revelations*, pp. 98-100.

⁷⁴ Thomas Pierce to Richard Stephens, 14 Oct. 1829, in *Letters, Epistles, and Revelations*, p. 78.

It was after a number of Midlands groups had already declared themselves convinced of Ward's claims that he received his first enquiry from Charles Bradley, the Birmingham tobacco merchant. Bradley's first letter to Ward, written in early December 1829, detailed something of the sense of despair and anguish he had felt in the years since Southcott's death, finding himself many times 'without hope and without God in the world'.⁷⁵ Bradley had evidently heard of Ward's claims from other Southcottians, and requested copies of Ward's writings, with willingness tinged with weariness: he had waited so long to believe 'that the Lord is here', that he was not sure how to respond to the accounts he now heard. In his reply, and subsequent frequent letters, Ward sought to overcome each doubt or query Bradley raised, perceptibly playing on Bradley's desperation to believe that the years of waiting were over, with a reassuring tone: 'he is here, dear and Beloved Brother, to end your long and sad complaints ... your God is come, and will not keep silence'.⁷⁶

Bradley and his wife Hannah were originally from Ashbourne in Derbyshire, and were Southcottians by 1812.⁷⁷ The family did well from the tobacco trade, and were probably among that 'part of the believers in the divine mission of Joanna Southcott, at Birmingham' who contributed to a silver cup and salver prepared for the expected Shiloh in 1814.⁷⁸

Bradley retained a position of authority among Birmingham believers for the following fifteen years; Joseph Jowett described him as 'the man the friends here ...

⁷⁵ ZW to Charles Bradley, 15 Dec. 1829, in *Letters, Epistles, and Revelations*, , p. 105.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

⁷⁷ Derbyshire Record Office D2155 A/PI 1/1, Ashbourne Parish Church Register (1785). The earliest known contact between Bradley and Joanna Southcott is May 1812. PS PN 246/10 Jane Townley, 'Copy of a letter from Joanna Southcott to Mr Bradley', 28 May 1812. For a fascinating, though brief survey of the Bradley family's later history, see J.E.M. Latham, 'The Bradley's of Birmingham: the unorthodox family of 'Michael Field'', *History Workshop Journal*, 55:1 (2003), 189-91.

⁷⁸ Hopkins, *Woman*, p. 203.

[regard] uncommon well'.⁷⁹ Over this period, Bradley was united with such figures as Jowett and Foley in believing in the supremacy of Southcott's writings. However, surviving letters indicate Bradley disagreeing with Foley over interpretations of Southcott's written prophecies, and the best means to maintain public attention to Southcott's mission.⁸⁰ Bradley was therefore of sufficient independence of mind to accept Ward's claims on his own terms – with no deferral to Foley's opinion.⁸¹ He was convinced by Ward's original reply, and with his conversion a significant number of Birmingham Southcottians also accepted the new Shiloh.

Assisting Shiloh

When writing to Ward to declare his allegiance to him on 17 December 1829, Bradley enclosed the substantial sum of five pounds.⁸² This was to be put towards publishing more substantial pamphlets, bills and advertising, and to explain and publicise Ward's claims. The sum was the first of many donations Bradley would make to Ward in the following years. Yet while such generosity was in some sense consistent with the sentiment which had inspired the cup and salver gift for Shiloh back in 1814, the implication of its purpose was radically different. For in donating his personal wealth not

⁷⁹ PS PN 246/18, 6 Jan. 1815.

⁸⁰ BL Add. MS 47798/120. Bradley and Foley argued in particular over a box of Southcott's sealed writings retained in Foley's possession – the later well-known 'Joanna Southcott's Box'. When Bradley attempted in 1825 to 'use every exertion to cause [the] government to demand' the box, 'that they may be searched into, that the Truth might be established', he 'call'd forth the anger and unmerited reproach' of Foley.

⁸¹ By late-1829, Foley's rejection of Ward had become a significant 'stumbling block in the way of many of the old Believers in Joanna's Mission'. In early 1830, Ward's new pamphlet, *The Living Oracle*, was directed specifically at answering Foley's objections and criticisms. ZW to 'the Brethren', 19 Oct. 1829, in *Letters, Epistles, and Revelations*, p. 84.

⁸² ZW to Charles Bradley, 26 Dec. 1829, in *Letters, Epistles, and Revelations*, p. 118. This would have been about two months' wages for the average working man in 1830.

just to a person claiming to be Shiloh, but essentially to the promotion of that person, Bradley demonstrated a reconfigured relationship between his own resources, as well as his own choice of action, and the realisation of that which he had awaited for so long – the changed state of things of the messianic age. For here *was* the messiah, so Bradley believed – surely the promised ‘power from on high’ he had been assured of fifteen years before, as his thumb had rested on the lines in Luke.⁸³ And yet this messiah, this agent of the divine purpose, now required Bradley’s commitment and cash; this Shiloh asked his followers not just to follow, but to contribute.⁸⁴

The complex – at times, confused – concept of Ward’s messianic nature, entailing him being both a vessel of a divine spirit, and a divinely-created new being, produced a complicated understanding of quite how the millennium would now be realised. The extraordinary ability of millenarians to systemise eclectic prophetic writings into a single body of highly personal beliefs is no guarantee that their resultant doctrines are themselves systematic. The predominant belief adopted by Ward’s new followers, on the evidence of their correspondence in 1829, was nonetheless that in acknowledging God to have been at work in Ward, altering his nature, and endowing him with knowledge of divine truths, they expected themselves to share in this same process. As Ward had written of ‘Shiloh, the spirit of truth,’ eventually ‘rising up in men, women, and children, in every city, town and village, working in all,’ as it had in him, so Ward’s Nottingham followers had hoped that ‘every town and village, may shortly be clothed with this

⁸³ See Introduction, p. 1.

⁸⁴ Although Twort had provided funds for Ward before this, we do not have the same evidence of the longevity – and changing nature – of his Southcottian beliefs, as with Bradley.

Spirit'.⁸⁵ It was this that they saw would 'fit us to be partakers of the Kingdom of Christ'; this would 'make us useful members prior to the glorious epoch, when Truth, Righteousness, and Peace shall cover the earth'. In Ward, an agent was perceived to be at work; and it was considered important to welcome this agent, and facilitate its progress.

The first response of Southcottians learning of, then accepting, Ward's identity was to share this knowledge with fellow believers in writing and in personal visits. Localised groups then sought to meet together in gatherings evocative of a religious service. The directions for such meetings received from Ward were distinctly loose and un-prescriptive. 'The Lord prescribes no forms or modes of worship for his people now,' Ward answered enquiries; 'he is come to do away all forms'.⁸⁶ For Ward, 'ceremonies' were burdens which signified 'bondage' – the opposite of the freedom which his writings showed him increasingly equating with the millennium.⁸⁷ In his most detailed instructions, Ward suggested his followers meet on a Sunday, though this was again not a directive: 'not that you are in bondage unto any day ... but Sunday is most convenient'.⁸⁸ 'Meet together in the morning, about eleven o'clock in your own house for the present, until a public place be provided; meet together without any form at all', he told his Nottingham following:

You may sing a hymn, just as you please, but under no bondage; and as a loving family, meet together happily and in love, rejoicing before the Lord, who, be assured, will be with you. Read a portion of the word which we send, and which we point out from the woman's writings and from the Scriptures, for about an hour and a half; let the people sit orderly to hear;

⁸⁵ Ward, *Vision of Judgment*, p. 4; Thomas Pierce to Richard Stephens, 14 Oct. 1829, in *Letters, Epistles, and Revelations*, p. 79.

⁸⁶ ZW to John Brentnall, 14 July 1829, in *Letters, Epistles, and Revelations*, p. 19.

⁸⁷ Ward's ideas of millennial freedom are discussed further in Chapter 8. See Thompson, *Making*, p. 883; Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1983), pp. 166-7.

⁸⁸ ZW to John Hague, 6 Aug. 1829, in *Letters, Epistles, and Revelations*, p. 39.

and as your mind is enlightened through Zion, make your remarks to strengthen the minds of your brethren; say but little, and let it be according to the truth ... Continue together the whole of the day without separating, if convenient to take refreshment together for the body, but do as is most convenient for your own comfort ... continue to read, edifying each other in love, reading and conversing together of the goodness of God. Sit, walk, or stand, just as you please; be easy and free.⁸⁹

Ward's new followers responded well to such instructions for a period, but towards the end of 1829, provincial groups exerted increasing pressure on the messiah to present himself in person, so to impart his knowledge and divine insight to them and others. For much of 1829, Ward had eschewed an itinerant and public mission, remaining in Walworth to present his case in letters and in print, but this now changed. Between November 1829 and April 1830, successive chapels and meeting rooms were opened by Ward's followers to meet in, in London, Nottingham, Chesterfield, then Birmingham. These offered the opportunity not only for Ward's following to 'meet together happily', but for their messiah to introduce himself in person to the public. Crucial to Ward's ability to travel and be present among his following were the new funds his followers were willing to put up for him. In Nottingham, a chapel was newly fitted out for Ward's arrival 'at a great expense'; and it was here that Ward made his first appearances, in November and December, preaching on his allegorical interpretation of the Bible, and how it pointed to the presence of the messianic spirit within him.⁹⁰

Although Ward reported preaching to 'a crowded audience' in Nottingham, it is not clear how many were a wider public, unfamiliar with Southcottian prophecy or its

⁸⁹ ZW to Thomas Pierce, 13 Aug. 1829, in *Letters, Epistles, and Revelations*, pp. 45-6.

⁹⁰ ZW to London followers, 4 Dec. 1829, in *Letters, Epistles, and Revelations*, p. 104.

traditions.⁹¹ Ward nonetheless attempted to reach beyond his Southcottian hearers, by playing on the authority invested in the voice of the lowly and uneducated by the Bible and elements of conventional Christian belief. The discursive anti-intellectualism of popular religious views contrasting ‘human wisdom’ and ‘spiritual inspiration’, and the ready scriptural exemplars of God’s choice of ‘the lowly’ as instruments and mouth-pieces of his works or truth, were utilized frequently in his early addresses.⁹²

By January 1830, Ward had addressed similar gathered groups at Mansfield, Sheffield, Barnsley and Chesterfield.⁹³ At the latter, arrangements were made to secure a larger meeting space; believers in a further number of locations volunteered to stock copies of Ward’s pamphlets.⁹⁴ Ward’s following was now adopting the beginnings of a new working model for their millenarianism – one expressed in public meetings, and the open avowal of the arrival of their messiah. The strongest supporter of this model, and the one with the deepest pockets, was Charles Bradley. After making the funds available for a full print run for a (93-page) book, as well as new printings of previous (16-page) pamphlets, Bradley was eager to generate publicity for Ward’s arrival in Birmingham.⁹⁵ As Ward wrote to a Nottingham believer, ‘Brother B’s motto, as well as ours, is “Go forward!” – he is full of zeal’.⁹⁶ In March, 25,000 bills were printed for distribution in Birmingham and other towns; in April, Bradley paid £450 for a chapel in Lawrence

⁹¹ Ward’s account of the evening is given in a letter to his London followers, 4 Dec. 1829, in *Letters, Epistles, and Revelations*, p. 103.

⁹² Ward cited the opening chapters of 1 Corinthians especially to validate his claim to extraordinariness in his ordinariness, with its argument for how the Christian God chose ‘the foolish things of the world to confound the wise’, and ‘the weak things of the world to confound the... mighty’.

⁹³ ZW to Thomas Pierce, 4 Jan. 1830, *Zion’s Works*, xiv. 12, 16.

⁹⁴ ZW to Thomas Kirk, 12 Jan. 1830, *Zion’s Works*, xiv. 19.

⁹⁵ ZW to Nottingham believers, 17 Jan. 1830, *Zion’s Works*, xiv. 27-9. Ward, *The Living Oracle*.

⁹⁶ ZW to Thomas Pierce, 11 Mar. 1830, *Zion’s Works*, xiv. 55.

Street, for Ward to preach in when he visited.⁹⁷ Writing to a Nottinghamshire believer at the time, Ward boasted of Bradley: ‘what he has done altogether for the support of the cause is not far short of 600 pounds’.⁹⁸

In calling it ‘the cause’, Ward set his identity, his promotion, his activity, in perspective. For the Southcottians who accepted him, Shiloh was now a cause to support and work for, a cause to assist in spreading. Having previously anticipated the Shiloh’s arrival as a moment of divine intervention in the world which would make all things new, Southcottians now saw a Shiloh who promised that the change had begun, but still had some way to go. Ward’s arrival led his Nottingham believers to declare that ‘the glorious epoch’ had ‘now begun’, but in a present, progressive sense. They assumed the epoch to be ‘making rapid progress’.⁹⁹ If God was understood to be at work in changing Ward into Shiloh, then that intervention was conceived to be a continuing one: God had acted, and apparently remained acting in the figure of Ward. This understanding entailed a drastic reduction in the previously imagined extent of divine agency in the realisation of the millennium, and a consequent expansion of the part of human agency. Here, after all, was a messiah, an agent of millennial change, who claimed that the divine spirit within him would spread to others, if those others responded to and assisted him.

The figure of Ward and his followers provide perhaps the clearest examples in the Southcottian millenarian tradition of the inadequacy of the categories of pre- and postmillennialism as a gauge of attitudes to agency. Their beliefs about the millennium transcend any chronological interpretation defined by the arrival of the messiah. Such

⁹⁷ ZW to Charles Bradley, 26 Dec. 1829, in *Letters, Epistles, and Revelations*, p. 118; ZW to Thomas Pierce, 15 Apr. 1830, *Zion’s Works*, xiv. 71.

⁹⁸ BL Add. MSS 43509/17-18, ZW to Mrs Nelson, 15 Apr. 1830.

⁹⁹ Thomas Pierce to Richard Stephens, 14 Oct. 1829, in *Letters, Epistles, and Revelations*, p. 79.

categories simply do not apply here. Ward may be understood to have maintained most of his Southcottian followers' existing millennial epistemology – he based his messianic claim on interpretations of the Bible and Southcott's prophecies. Old believers like Bradley, flocking to Ward's standard, did not alter the basis of their belief in the millennium's coming when they accepted Ward. As Shiloh, he was the fulfilment of prophecy. Yet Ward decidedly shifted such Southcottians' conceptions of how the millennial change would come about. Instead of awaiting an ultimate, disruptive change, where everything was achieved through divine agency, Ward convinced them that this change was evolutionary in nature. In this evolution, a role was left for human agency, most particularly the agency of Ward's followers themselves. To these Southcottians, a new relationship to the millennium was available: they could now contribute to the messianic age by serving and supporting the messiah. In this, the importance of their own actions, their evangelism efforts, their financial contributions, was raised considerably, taking on a millennial meaning. From 1830, such followers found their activities, their evangelism and their funds, increasingly of interest to political radicals; the causes and campaigns of such radicals would, in turn, be perceived as a means of serving the messiah. This process which saw radicalism itself imbued with millennial meaning will be examined in Part 3 of this thesis. Before then, in the final Chapter of this Part, the 1820s career of James Smith, the Southcottian whose radical career would draw on both the new attitudes to human agency in the millennial ideas of Ward and John Wroe, is discussed.

Chapter 6

NEW BELIEVER

For the first ten years after Southcott's death, the religious movement she left behind, in all its varied fragments, did little to reach beyond its existing numbers. The vast majority of those who had followed Turner, submitted to the new rule of Wroe, accepted an alternative prophet such as Boon, or continued to pour over only Southcott's writings in the privacy of their own drawing room or cottage fireside, were those whose faith had survived the testing of the Shiloh failure of 1814. Belief was retained within families, so that if there was numerical growth, then it often marked the coming of age of children raised within earshot of the prophetic word, taken to the 'Millennium chapel,' or long included in believers' house-meetings.¹ Convinced adherents moved around the country, so that some congregations were bolstered by new arrivals. This was most spectacularly the case at Ashton-under-Lyne. Ward was not alone in drifting between prophets. In certain sections of the movement, groups were nonetheless dwindling: in the wake of the death of Southcott's one-time amanuensis Jane Townley in 1825, Thomas Foley reported that in London, 'our flock I am exceedingly sorry to say is reduced to a very small circle at present'.² By the mid-1820s, Southcottianism was supremely self-referential. Its prophets addressed those already sympathetic to prophecy; its believers sought to keep alive the tradition of a dead prophet, whom many remembered living.

¹ In answer to an enquiry from William Shingleton, a London follower, whether 'the children of believers must not be brought to be troublesome at the meetings', George Turner directed that children above ten were to 'come to the meeting to learn'. PS PN 243/59, 18 June 1820.

² Panacea Society (PS) PN 246/37, 2 Oct. 1828.

From 1825, the establishing of Ashton as the Israelite ‘Standard’, its impressive central Sanctuary, and its developing community life which drew so many millenarian migrants, catalysed a new confidence in mission among the Southcottians associated with them. By 1827, Wroe’s particular ‘brand’ of Southcottianism was making its first determined moves to attract new believers in areas of Britain never previously associated with Southcottian belief. The Wroeites were easily the most likely surviving body to embrace this direction: since 1824 Wroe had appointed ‘Israelite preachers’ to visit existing Southcottian congregations not yet convinced of his prophetic authority. He himself continued a peripatetic ministry, rarely residing with one congregation more than three months.³ Wroe had also persuaded his Ashton backers to fund further trips abroad, as pairs of missionaries were sent for brief preaching trips to the east coast of America in 1824-25.⁴ This missionary impulse was directed back to within the British Isles from July 1827, when Wroe’s journal records his visiting first Sunderland, then Berwick, then the lowlands and highlands of Scotland.⁵ At Sunderland, Wroe and his companion William Tillotson ‘preached on the Moor, three times, to large congregations’. Wroe declared that ‘there would be a church found in this place’, a prophecy his journal records being fulfilled as a Stockport Southcottian, Joseph Vernon, remained in the town to preach to a new congregation.⁶ In Edinburgh, Wroe was similarly successful, as an Archibald McPhail was in turn directed to remain in the city. Wroe’s journal records that ‘McPhail and James Vernon ...in a few months were the instruments, in the hands of God, of

³ *Extracts and Letters and other Writings of the Israelite Preachers* (Ashton-under-Lyne, 1824) p. 1.

⁴ These trips marked the beginnings of Southcottianism as an international creed. *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4; John Wroe, *Divine Communications and prophecies given to John Wroe ...* (Wakefield, 1834), pp. 58-9.

⁵ Small groups of Turner followers are recorded in Whitby and Newcastle-upon-Tyne in 1816, with whom Wroe also made contact on this trip. See Chapter 1, Fig.2.

⁶ Wroe, *Divine Communications*, pp. 155-7.

establishing bodies of believers in those places where the visitation of the Lord had scarce been heard of before'.⁷

Archibald McPhail was of Scottish origin and himself a rare convert to Southcottian millenarianism before this missionary period.⁸ McPhail had encountered Wroe's followers in Bradford in 1825, while training for the Baptist ministry at Horton Academy.⁹ He received 'his degrees for a preacher' before he joined the Israelite meeting at Bradford. This background and schooling were evidently utilised by Wroe, as by 1829 McPhail was the 'acknowledged, or head preacher' among the 'Israelite Preachers'.¹⁰ Though he remained the designated leader of the Edinburgh body, he was involved with the subsequent sending of preachers into Wales and Ireland.¹¹

In early 1829, McPhail preached regularly in central Edinburgh, to a small but growing group of converts, and anyone passing who would listen. A short surviving sample of his correspondence suggests that the emphasis of his message was the need to convince 'souls and bodies' of the Southcottian Israelite truth 'that both may be preserved at the day of his [God's] coming from the destruction that shall take place upon the world'.¹² His audience was warned not only of the apocalyptic prophecies received by Southcott and others since, but of the hope held out in the revelations to Wroe, that a people might be gathered in preparation for their fulfilment – a people descended from God's chosen people, Israel. Among those who stopped and listened to McPhail was a

⁷ Wroe, *Divine Communications*, p. 167.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 125-6.

⁹ The Horton Academy was founded by Yorkshire and Lancashire Baptists in 1804, housed in an adapted weaving shed and warehouse in Little Horton. It trained Baptist ministers in evangelism during a period of significant Baptist expansion. In 1859 it became Rawdon College.

¹⁰ Wroe, *Divine Communications*, p. 126.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 169, 214.

¹² Letter from Archibald McPhail to Ashton Trustees, quoted in Wroe, *Divine Communications*, p. 169.

twenty-seven year old private tutor, then with little else on his mind *but* the imminent millennium – James Smith.¹³

Smith was a convinced millenarian, and had been, with varying degrees of intensity, since his teenage years. While a student at Glasgow University in the late-1810s, he had gathered regularly with friends at the nearby Black Bull Inn, and filled numerous manuscript notebooks with ‘abstruse calculations’ working out the biblical timetable for the end times.¹⁴ In 1828, Smith had nonetheless experienced a dramatic epiphany that ‘the personal reign of Christ during the millennium ... is just at hand’.¹⁵ This belief, he came to after hearing Edward Irving (1792-1834), the once celebrated preacher at London’s Caledonian Chapel, and leading light among eschatologically-minded evangelicals, north and south of the border. During 1828, Smith had adopted many of Irving’s millennial views and scriptural interpretations, though he was evidently of a similarly conservative bent of mind to Irving before this. Corresponding frequently with Irving, Smith had also busied himself compiling his own proofs for the millennium’s coming, and converted several members of his family to his convictions in the process.

The encounter with the Edinburgh Southcottians initiated a significant new direction for Smith’s passionate beliefs and action. It moved him markedly away from those groups and views he was so committed to up to this point. After only a few months’ initiation into Edinburgh Southcottianism, Smith visited Ashton in June 1829, and in only

¹³ This encounter most likely occurred around mid-March 1829, as Smith’s first mention of Joanna Southcott is in a letter to his brother on 20 March. James Elishama Smith [hereafter JES] to brother John Smith, 20 Mar. 1829, quoted in W.A. Smith, *‘Shepherd’ Smith the Universalist: The Story of a Mind* (London, 1892), p. 42.

¹⁴ Smith, *Shepherd Smith*, p. 21. Such speculations of the expected time of the millennium, based especially on the use of numbers lifted from their textual setting in Daniel and Revelation, and placed in mathematical formulae, was a common pastime for the period, and *de rigueur* during the Napoleonic Wars. William Oliver, *Prophets and Millennialists: The Uses of Biblical Prophecy in England from the 1790s to the 1840s* (Auckland, 1978), p. 40. See also, Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, Book 3, Pt.1, Ch.19.

¹⁵ JES to brother John, 10 June 1828, *Shepherd Smith*, p. 34.

four days ‘saw enough of the Prophet to convince me that his work is from God’.¹⁶ Soon after his return to Scotland, he resolved to move to Ashton permanently, and become a full member of the community under Wroe’s direction, which he did in 1830.

Smith is so significant a figure in this study that his lived experience, developing beliefs and personal convictions before his arrival in Ashton are important to understand as far as possible. Much of the mental distance he had to travel between his teenage mathematical pursuits in Glasgow taverns and his radical political career in the 1830s would be covered by becoming a Southcottian, and through his experiences in Ashton. To comprehend that distance, more must be known of his background, and most particularly the conception of the millennium he brought to the Southcottian movement. In shifting his allegiance from the form of millenarianism associated with Edward Irving to that of the Southcottians, Smith perceptibly moved from one end of the interpretative/revelatory spectrum of millennial conviction to the other: he exchanged a belief in the millennium based solely on scriptural interpretation for one based largely on revelations to modern prophets. His eschatology nonetheless remained ‘disruptive’, as in both he continued to believe that the millennium would be realised imminently. Gaining some sense of how Smith’s views and actions altered as he made this transition enables this study to further clarify the distinctive understanding of human action and divine agency which had by then emerged in a form of ‘premillennialism’. Smith, the new believer, underlines the innovation within an ageing millenarian movement.

¹⁶ JES to brother John, 19 June 1829 and JES to father John Smith, 23 June 1829, *Shepherd Smith*, pp. 43-4.

Glasgow Beginnings

James Smith was born in a central Glasgow tenement in 1801, the second son and third child of Janet and John Smith, who were small textile manufacturers.¹⁷ The family had few means themselves, but retained links to land- and mill-owning cousins in Strathaven, Lanarkshire, whom they often visited.¹⁸ Smith's father was both deeply religious and ambitious for his sons, and dispatched them to Glasgow University when barely in their teens, intending them for the ministry of the Church of Scotland.¹⁹ James and his brother John, who was a year older, both matriculated in 1812, taking advantage of a clause exempting students of the professor of Divinity from paying fees.²⁰ Their other classes will have included logic, moral philosophy, Greek and Hebrew.²¹ James graduated MA in 1818, aged only seventeen; his brother, John, completed his degree a year later, after taking on teaching work to support the wider family. A permanent difference between the brothers, in the priority of personal ambition and family responsibility, was marked by

¹⁷ Many biographical details as well as much of Smith's personal correspondence with his family are reproduced in his nephew's biography, Smith, *Shepherd Smith*.

¹⁸ Strathaven is barely fifteen miles from New Lanark, the experimental cotton mill community where Robert Owen first made his name. Smith's family's mill interests in the area, together with Owen's national reputation for his work at New Lanark in 1801-1816, strongly suggests that Smith knew of Owen before he was involved in his later political movement.

¹⁹ James Smith was one of six surviving brothers (and an unknown number of sisters). Four attended the University with the intention of joining the ministry, though none gained conventional preferment. W.I. Addison, *The Matriculation Albums of the University of Glasgow from 1728 to 1858* (Glasgow, 1913), pp. 266-7, 333 and 377. Robert Angus Smith (1817-1884) achieved perhaps the greatest recognition (besides James), as a chemist and environmental scientist. His work on air quality in Manchester coined the term 'acid rain'. R.M. MacLeod, 'The Alkali Acts administration, 1863-1884: the emergence of the civil scientist', *Victorian Studies*, 9 (1965-6), 85-112; J. Eyler, 'The conversion of Angus Smith: the changing role of chemistry and biology in sanitary science, 1850-1880', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 54 (1980), 216-34; Christopher Hamlin, 'Smith, Robert Angus (1817-1884)', *DNB* [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/25893>].

²⁰ This was designed to raise the numbers of suitably educated young men for the Presbyterian ministry. James Coutts, *A History of the University of Glasgow: From Its Foundation in 1451 to 1909* (Glasgow, 1909), p. 375. W.M. Mathew, 'Glasgow Students 1740-1839', *Past and Present*, no. 33 (Apr. 1966), 74-94.

²¹ The papers of James Smith's friend and near contemporary at Glasgow University, the poet Robert Pollok, show him attending classes in logic, moral philosophy, natural philosophy, geography and ethics (University of Glasgow Special Collections, MS Gen 1355).

this episode. Although the two maintained a close correspondence in subsequent years (a crucial source on James' life and thought in the following two decades), their relation would be strained whenever the younger brother pursued his own path, in religious or political opinion, without regard for family standing or security.²²

Smith's degree gave him the position of 'probationer' – a licensed preacher without a living in the Church of Scotland. Over the next decade, he lived with the hope of preferment – securing a permanent position as a minister – but this never came. Instead he scraped a living as a private tutor to a series of families across Lanarkshire and Lothian. By 1827, now in his mid-twenties, he was lodging in Edinburgh, still tutoring the children of middle-class families.²³ His letters of the time reveal him frustrated with this work, and preoccupied with when he might gain preferment. His sense of being passed over was intensified by his few preaching opportunities coming from the invitations of university friends already in receipt of a Church position. His predicament was typical of the period: in the first half of the nineteenth century, universities across Europe expanded their places and curriculums, producing ever more graduates, who then found positions in their prospective professions restricted or closed to those without connections.²⁴ With typical black humour, Smith suggested that such conditions among all graduates for the professions would now mean that newly-qualified doctors would 'pilgrimage through the country in search of patients, praying no doubt for the increase of human sufferings, that he may the more easily and abundantly procure for himself his

²² W.A. Smith's biography, *Shepherd Smith*, features more letters from James to his brother John than anyone else, as the author was John Smith's son.

²³ JES to brother John, 9 Nov. 1826, *Shepherd Smith*, pp. 24-5.

²⁴ On such graduates, see Laurence Brockliss, 'The Professions and National Identity' in Laurence Brockliss and David Eastwood (eds.), *A Union of Multiple Identities* (Manchester, 1997), pp. 9-28; Stefan Berger, *A Companion to nineteenth-century Europe, 1789-1914* (Oxford, 2006), p. 90.

daily bread'. Yet, he noted that young surgeons still did not have 'as doleful a prospect before them as the clergy'.²⁵

Smith's upbringing and education gave him little natural sympathy with political radicalism, despite its presence in parts of Glasgow and Lanarkshire he knew well.²⁶ Evidence for this comes in personal letters from February 1828, when his frustrations over preferment in Scotland led him to contemplate applying to a Presbyterian congregation in England. The politics of such English nonconformists, and their independent views, proved too much for him. He told his brother that to them 'liberty' was everything:

Whigs, and all your universal suffrage gentlemen ... have a most extravagant conceit of themselves and the rabble ... exhibiting themselves and their disciples, the mob, consisting of ... all idle and discontented scoundrels, including Paddies of every description, as the models of perfect and finished humanity.²⁷

For Smith, 'liberty' was 'for perfect beings, and law, and strict law too, for fallible men'.

In 1828, Smith wore his Toryism on his threadbare cleric's sleeve.

Smith's Millennium

During the decade which passed between Smith's noted teenage days calculating the arrival of the millennium with friends, and 1828, Smith would later suggest that he

²⁵ JES to brother John, 24 Jan. 1827, *Shepherd Smith*, p. 28.

²⁶ Strathaven itself was the centre of radical weavers disturbances in the post-Waterloo depression, and 1820. See P. B. Ellis and S. Mac A'Ghobhainn, *The Scottish Insurrection of 1820* (Edinburgh, 1970).

²⁷ JES to brother John, 2 Feb. 1828, *Shepherd Smith*, p. 33.

possessed only ‘undefined ideas of a millennium’.²⁸ His known letters from these years make no mention of millennial themes. Yet, his view of the millennium in this time – ‘when we belonged to the church political’ – was nonetheless ‘delineated,’ as Smith put it, in the contemporary literary creation of one of his Glasgow companions, Robert Pollok. Pollok’s epic poem *The Course of Time*, published in 1827, was a significant religious work of the period.²⁹ It addressed the theme of the world’s destiny and God’s role in the life of man, and Smith’s close friendship with the author led to his suggesting ‘several ideas now embodied in the work’.³⁰

The Course of Time is divided into ten books, and features a bard explaining to a new arrival in heaven the course of human history, from creation and fall to the millennium, last day, final judgement and completion of time.³¹ In a manner reminiscent of the style of William Blake, Pollok calls on God in his opening stanza to aid him in receiving the prophetic vision of the Old Testament and John of Patmos, the writer of Revelation. As they, ‘In holy vision tranced, the future pass’, so he wishes to be inspired and taught : ‘...of things to come / As past, rehearsing, sing the Course of Time / The second birth, and final doom of man.’³² Over the first five books, the course of human history and development on earth is described, and God’s scheme of redemption is

²⁸ Smith described his early millenarian views in an article ‘Messiah’s Kingdom’ in his journal, *The Shepherd*, 26 Aug. 1837 quoted in Smith, *Shepherd Smith*, p. 176.

²⁹ It has been compared to Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and Robert Blair’s *The Grave*. Pollok died shortly after seeing his work in print, and though famous for a time, he rarely figures in modern literary surveys of his period. Sarah Couper, ‘Pollok, Robert (1798-1827)’, *DNB* [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/22481>].

³⁰ Smith, *Shepherd Smith*, p. 176. *The Course of Time* was written in 1825-26, and prepared for publication in October 1826, while Pollok stayed with relatives in Dunfermline. Smith’s letters indicate that he visited Pollok during this time, and received a copy from Pollok within days of its publication. JES to brother John, 9 Nov. 1826 and 24 Jan. 1827, *Shepherd Smith*, pp. 25-8.

³¹ Robert Pollok, *The Course of Time: a poem* (Edinburgh, 1826).

³² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

outlined, of which the ‘descent of the Son of God’ is the principal signifier. In the fifth book, the millennium as a set and defined period in human history is introduced:

... A time there came,
Though few believed it e’re should come; a time
Typed by the Sabbath-day recurring once
In seven, and by the year of rest indulged
Septennial to the lands on Jordan’s banks;³³

The Old Testament models of rest on the seventh day and for the seventh year were read as ‘types’ of the thousand years, so that after six thousand years, there would be a millennium ‘when all had rest and peace’. Worthy of note is Pollok’s description of how the coming millennium was conceived in the days before its arrival. True believers would understand what was going on, but be mocked by those who did not see the signs in the state of things: ‘The public credit gone, the fear in time / Of peace, the starving want in time of wealth / And insurrection muttering in the streets’.³⁴ If this poem represented Smith’s view of millennial events when written – as Smith himself suggested – it indicates an easy assumption that divinely-ordained events would follow conditions familiar to 1820s Britain.³⁵

Pollok’s poem sold well, in part because his death shortly after its appearance engendered an invaluable aura of ‘tragic genius’ around the work. Yet it also spoke to, and reflected, concerns popular in evangelical Christianity by the late-1820s. These included a persistent interest in both visionary biblical prophecies and history – two dimensions to what has been called ‘the adaptation of Evangelicalism into the Romantic

³³ Pollok, *Course of Time*, p. 153.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

³⁵ Smith, *Shepherd Smith*, p. 176.

idiom of the day'.³⁶ In Pollok's work, the capacity of human reason to make sense of such hidden things as the mystery of God is consistently denied; individuals are shown instead seeking to understand God through his ways of revealing himself, in inspiration or miraculous intervention. In turn, the created earth is declared to be on a set course, and human history portrayed as playing itself out within the divine plan of redemption. Pollok was thus a minor exponent of a wider shift in emphasis in evangelical religion during the 1820s and 1830s. This, David Bebbington has noted, placed a greater value on emotion and imagination, 'the dramatic, the extraordinary and the otherworldly element in religion'.³⁷

Closely associated with this shift, and a principal public exponent in the mid-1820s, was Edward Irving.³⁸ From a general interest in scriptural prophecy, Irving had, from 1826, come to be involved with the Albury House Group – an annual gathering of prominent evangelicals at the Surrey home of the banker and MP, Henry Drummond. The group examined the Bible's prophetic writings and decided which passages had so far been fulfilled in the life of Christ and of the Church, and which related to modern political and social events.³⁹ Irving and others were convinced that the vague prevailing hope of British evangelicalism to convert the world before Christ's return was erroneous. From a view of history shaped by God's personal relation with human nations, teaching them divine lessons by punishment and reward, they had moved to see many contemporary developments as both signs of divine displeasure with Britain, and

³⁶ David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* (London, 1989), pp. 19, 81-3; Oliver, *Prophets and Millennialists*, p. 40.

³⁷ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, pp. 80-2.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 75-81; Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795-1865* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 11-32.

³⁹ Columba Graham Flegg, *'Gathered Under Apostles': a study of the Catholic Apostolic Church* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 34-41; Oliver, *Prophets and Millennialists*, pp. 99-123; 124-49.

fulfilments of predictions of ‘the last days’. In 1827, Irving publicly criticised any belief that the Second Coming and millennium were still some way off – a belief, he complained, which caused ‘death and heaven to be the great object of the Church’s observation’, not God’s promise to rid the world of Satan. For Irving, Christ’s ‘personal appearance in flaming fire’ at the Second Coming was the greatest hope of living Christians; and this promise, Irving now insisted, God was preparing to fulfil.⁴⁰

As Irving moved beyond the ‘undefined ideas of a millennium’ expressed in works such as Pollok’s *Course of Time*, to beliefs with definite expectations and distinct convictions, so other contemporary evangelicals followed. Among those he personally persuaded of his now ‘defined ideas’ was James Smith.

The Irving Inheritance

In June 1828, Smith wrote to his elder brother in Perth, apologising for cancelling an intended visit. In light of what he gained by remaining in Edinburgh, Smith was not sorry:

I think it a very fortunate thing for myself that I have been detained so long, for I have heard Mr Irving’s lectures – lectures which have fully confirmed me in an opinion which I was beginning to adopt, or rather had already adopted, before his arrival, viz., the personal reign of Christ during the millennium, which, of course, is just at hand.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Irving’s views on the Second Coming in 1827 were heavily influenced by his reading of the writings of an eighteenth-century Jesuit priest, Manuel de Lacunza. Irving’s translation of Lacunza’s *Venida del Meias en Gloria y Megestad* in 1827 included a long ‘Preliminary Discourse’ setting out this influence. Irving, ‘Preliminary Discourse’ in *The Coming of the Messiah in Glory and Majesty*, (London, 1827), pp. iii-cxciv (quote from pp. lxi-lxii); Flegg, ‘Gathered under Apostles’, p. 40; Sheridan Gilley, ‘Edward Irving: Prophet of the Millennium’, in Jane Garnett and Colin Matthew (eds.), *Revival and Religion since 1700: Essays for John Walsh*, (London, 1993), pp. 95-110.

⁴¹ JES to brother John, 10 June 1828, *Shepherd Smith*, p. 34.

The lectures which Smith attended were a series Irving gave on ‘the Apocalypse’ during the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in Edinburgh, in May.⁴² Since the early 1820s, Irving had been based largely in England, so that his lectures, given to packed audiences in St Andrew’s Church, represented something of a homecoming for a preaching celebrity, as well as a determined attempt on Irving’s part to influence as many of his fellow ministers with his current eschatological convictions as possible.

In his Edinburgh lectures, Irving brought together the strands of millennial thinking he had developed over recent years: his conviction that God was readying to deal with the apostate nation of Britain, that human time was nearing its close, and that scriptural prophesies were being fulfilled. Above all, Irving pointed to the recent repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, and the proposed further emancipation of Roman Catholics, as constitutional changes linked to the beasts of Daniel 7, especially the fourth beast seen to arise in the ‘end times’ and ‘think to change times and laws’.⁴³ He declared that now was the time for loyal Christians to ‘stand to our posts, whether the pulpit, or the press, or the argument of discourse, and maintain this last position against the triumph of ‘Infidelity’ and Catholicism.’⁴⁴ A précis of Irving’s adventist convictions articulated in his lectures was given in a published summary of the current conclusions of the Albury Group, published the same year. This asserted:

That the present Christian dispensation is ... to be terminated by judgements, ending in the destruction of this visible church and polity ...
That during the time that these judgements are falling upon Christendom,

⁴² Edward Irving, *Sermons, Lectures, and Occasional Discourses* (London, 1828), iii. 780; M. Oliphant, *The Life of Edward Irving* (London, 1862) ii. 17.

⁴³ Irving presented a related argument in *Church and State responsible to Christ... discourses on Daniel’s vision of the four beasts* (London, 1829).

⁴⁴ Irving, *Sermons, Lectures*, iii. 780; Thomas Chalmers, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Thomas Chalmers* (Edinburgh, 1851), iii. 220-21; Flegg, ‘Gathered under Apostles’, p. 50.

the Jews will be restored to their own land ... That the second Advent of Messiah precedes or take place at the commencement of the Millennium.⁴⁵

Irving now saw this scheme in the process of realisation.

The effect of Irving's words and arguments on Smith was electric. They reinvigorated the latent interest in the millennium which Smith had previously held, and launched him into a period of fevered excitement. In the months following, Smith's correspondence suggests a fervour for the coming millennium almost to intoxication. In letters to relatives, he attacked the clergy for having 'sadly bewildered the Scriptures', turning it into 'monstrous and intricate labyrinth', instead of the clear prophetic statement of the coming Kingdom he now saw.⁴⁶ Displaying all the signs of a zealous convert to a cause, he sent copies of Irving's works to everyone he knew and informed them of the reasons to be convinced of the coming end.⁴⁷ In response, a concerned acquaintance wrote to Smith's brother, at the close of 1828, anxious that he should know how James was 'far from being well', thinking it best to explain 'the nature of this complaint ... by describing to you something of his conversation':

He has learned, he says, from the prophecies that Christ's second coming is just at hand, that He is to come and take up his abode in Edinburgh, that Arthur's Seat is the Mount of Olives, &c. A few days ago I chanced to call for him, when he assured me that he had that day discovered a key to the whole of Scripture, and so persuaded was he of its efficacy, and that some great crisis was approaching, that he had determined to go to London to communicate his views to Mr Irving...⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Edward Irving and Henry Drummond, *Dialogues on Prophecy [sic]* (London, 1828), [vol.]i, [pp.] ii-iii.

⁴⁶ JES to brother John, 10 and 15 June 1828, JES to father John, 15 June 1828, *Shepherd Smith*, pp. 34-6.

⁴⁷ JES to father John Smith, 15 June 1828, *Shepherd Smith*, pp. 35-6.

⁴⁸ Mr Bowie to brother John Smith, 22 Dec. 1828, *Shepherd Smith*, pp. 40-41.

Smith may well have introduced himself to Irving after one of the Edinburgh lectures – the two shared much in their early professional experience and family backgrounds, though Irving was ten years the older.⁴⁹ Their meeting in May is both plausible and probable, though there is no direct evidence for it. The earliest confirmed contact between them was by correspondence once Irving had returned to London. By November 1828, Irving was offering to publish any writing Smith could contribute to the cause.⁵⁰

Smith would later describe this period of his life in fairly measured tones: ‘the idea opened upon us by the discussion of the millenarian question, by Irving, in the year 1828... drew us out of the Established Church, and launched us into a sea of interesting inquiry’.⁵¹ This acknowledged the formative nature of the time on his millennial thinking, but did not record the precise shape of Irving’s intellectual influence on his beliefs. Something of this influence may be recovered from the recorded correspondence cited above, and evidence of Smith’s contemporary reading.

Smith’s deep conviction that the messianic period was imminent was based entirely on an interpretation of biblical prophecies – from his discovering ‘a key to the whole of Scripture’ indicating ‘that some great crisis was approaching’.⁵² This was precisely the basis of Irving’s own views: ‘the prophesies of Scripture’, Irving wrote, ‘are fulfilled in the present condition of the Church and the World, with those which are about

⁴⁹ Irving’s early career was almost identical to Smith’s – sent to university (Edinburgh) as a young teenager from an artisan home, graduating at seventeen, followed by a frustrating period as a probationer and tutor. After ten years, Irving gained a foothold for promotion: from 1819, he worked as an assistant to the celebrated Thomas Chalmers in his experiments in church poor relief in the inner Glasgow parish of St John’s – just a few streets away from Smith’s family home. In 1822, Irving took a version of ‘the English option’ that Smith declined, taking up a post at the small Church of Scotland chapel in Hatton Garden. It was here that he quickly drew large crowds by the spectacle of his passionate preaching, and made his name. Gilley, ‘Edward Irving’ pp. 95-6; Flegg, ‘Gathered under Apostles’, pp. 46-7.

⁵⁰ JES to brother John, 5 November 1828, *Shepherd Smith*, pp. 39-40.

⁵¹ Smith, *Shepherd Smith*, p. 176.

⁵² Mr Bowie to brother John Smith, 22 Dec. 1828, *Shepherd Smith*, pp. 40-41.

to be fulfilled in the years that are now beginning to run their course'.⁵³ Irving's was an 'interpretative' form of millennial conviction. That Smith set such store against the clergy's efforts to 'bewilder' the Scriptures, rather than showing the plain fulfilment of their historic prophecies, points to his sense of having had a great truth, previously hidden, now revealed to him, of how to read and interpret the Bible.

Writing to his father, days after the completion of Irving's lecture series, Smith enclosed a copy of a pamphlet, *A Cry from the Desert*, hoping that his father would now consider 'the long-concealed truth which the Scriptures contain regarding the kingdom of the saints upon the earth'.⁵⁴ The pamphlet was published in 1828 anonymously, though closely associated with Irving (at one point it recommends his 1827 introduction to Lacunza's *The Coming of the Messiah in Glory and Majesty* as 'a master-piece of theology').⁵⁵ Utilising verses from a range of Old Testament prophetic books, as well as Revelation and occasional passages from the Gospels, *A Cry from the Desert* first sets out to prove a 'disruptive' eschatology – where God breaks in suddenly to realise the millennium – to be the true and correct message of the Scriptures. It then outlines ideas on the restoration of the Jews and the earthly realisation of the new Jerusalem, naturally asserting their imminence.

In advancing an interpretation of biblical prophecies where Christ returns before the millennium, *A Cry from the Desert* strongly rejected an 'evolutionary' eschatology, expecting the world to improve progressively towards the millennium. In this, it closely followed Irving's views, which reflected a particular conception of human and divine

⁵³ Edward Irving, *Babylon and Infidelity Foredoomed of God* (2 vols., London, 1826), i. 40.

⁵⁴ JES to father John Smith, 15 June 1828, *Shepherd Smith*, p. 35.

⁵⁵ Anon., *Cry from the Desert* (Edinburgh, 1828), Pt.1, p. 36. The Bodleian Library attributes authorship of Parts 1 and 2 of this work to 'J. Evill'. See also Robert Lively, 'Bodleian sources for the study of two nineteenth-century millenarian movements in Britain', *Bodleian Library Record*, 13 (Apr. 1991), 491-500.

agency within the world. In 1824, Irving had indicated his movement in this doctrinal direction in a controversial sermon to the London Missionary Society attacking the organisation for its attempts to spread the Christian faith by human means.⁵⁶ The ‘ideal missionary’ travelled without staff or scrip, and relied on God, not a society of wealthy sponsors. Irving stressed instead the all-encompassing power of God. In Irving’s view, God acted to further his interests, humans did not act on God’s behalf. From this, stemmed a pessimistic view that all human efforts for reform or improvement would come to nought; indeed, they were bound to make things worse. Believers must await divine intervention, according to God’s own timetable. The latter might be deciphered, Irving insisted in a subsequent influential sermon to the Continental Society, through the Almighty’s signs and prophetic warnings.⁵⁷

Irving’s emphasis on God’s absolute sovereignty and full involvement in the universe and the world led him, during 1828, to advance several controversial theological views on both the Fall and the humanity of Christ. His insistence on the son of God’s full descent ‘into the fallen flesh’ provoked accusations of heresy, and eventually led to Irving’s expulsion from the Church of Scotland.⁵⁸ These ideas were first printed in Irving’s 600-page work *The Last Days*, published in Edinburgh only weeks after his General Assembly appearances.⁵⁹ Smith’s acquaintance with this work is strongly suggested by later developments in his own beliefs relating to its ideas about the Fall.⁶⁰ These were essentially an argument for God’s responsibility – Irving’s concept of divine

⁵⁶ Gilley, ‘Edward Irving’, p. 98.

⁵⁷ This sermon was expanded and published as *Babylon and Infidelity Foredoomed of God* (London, 1826).

⁵⁸ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, p. 79;

⁵⁹ Edward Irving, *The Last Days: A Discourse on the evil character of our time. Proving them to be the “perilous times” of the “Last Days”* (Edinburgh, 1828), pp. 505-23.

⁶⁰ See Chapter 7, p. 238.

sovereignty led him to propose God's intention and participation in not only the process of Creation and Redemption, but also in the Fall; all three represented 'the progress of the Divine purpose'.⁶¹ For Irving, 'sublapsarian' theology, or the view that God permitted Adam's Fall but did not intend it, led to 'a Pharisaical church' and apostasy. For the Church to recognise God's true nature and sovereignty, it must consider the Fall as 'a decree and purpose of God'; it constituted 'the first stroke of that destruction of the created thing, that it might become the substance, the new substance, of the redeemed thing'.⁶² Ultimately, the world was entirely subject to God's redemptive purpose, in Irving's eyes. God dealt with the world as he did with individual believers. In both fall and redemption, God was in it all. 'He doth lead them into temptation', Irving explained, 'all to the end of shewing them the wickedness that is in them, and of purging it out of them'.⁶³ Here, Irving stressed once again the agency of God to realise the redemptive millennium, and denied all agency to humanity in its coming.

It was this last conception of human agency which James Smith would adjust and reconfigure in his journey into contemporary Southcottianism, while retaining elements of Irving's views of God's redemptive purposes. Meeting Wroeite missionaries on the streets of Edinburgh in early 1829, his beliefs about the imminence of the messianic age, drawn from his interpretation of the Scriptures, were little challenged. Rather, Smith perceived them to be confirmed, even corroborated by his finding a group claiming to know the millennium was coming on the basis of modern prophecy. In his choice to leave Edinburgh, and move to become a full, participating member of the gathered community

⁶¹ Irving, *Last Days*, p. 497.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 499, 502.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 501. It was on the basis of this conception of God's involvement in fallen humanity that Irving insisted that the Incarnation meant God's full adoption of humanity's fallen state. This idea led to his heresy trial.

under Wroe's direction, Smith nonetheless revealed a difference between millennial beliefs based on interpretation and on revelation – a difference marked in their attitude to agency. For in being in Ashton, Smith showed his preparations for the millennium were not entirely defined by waiting for God to act, but included his own choice of action also. He chose to combine his own human agency, to pre-empt and preview the actions understood to be divine.

The Ashton Contrast

Smith arrived in Ashton in May 1830. Uniquely among those involved in the millenarian community, some account of his initiation and elements of his Israelite life survives in print. Smith's novel, *The Coming Man*, written in 1848, features a main protagonist, Benjamin, who joins the 'Israelite' sect, led by 'John the Jew', in 'a populous and thriving manufacturing town in the centre of England'.⁶⁴ Its description of Benjamin's arrival on 'a fine May morning', the portrayal of the prophet as 'a stern, elderly man, of forbidding aspect', and corroborated details of clothing and other rites, have all been taken to indicate the autobiographical nature of the account.⁶⁵ Extensive extracts have consequently featured in existing histories of Ashton Southcottianism.⁶⁶

In his initiation, Smith pledged obedience to the prophet, and indicated his willingness to 'submit to the baptism of blood' – circumcision – a condition of holding Sanctuary office. He ceased shaving upon leaving Edinburgh, and by September

⁶⁴ The novel was published posthumously. James Smith, *The Coming Man* (2 vols., London, 1873), [vol.] i. [p.] v.

⁶⁵ Smith, *Coming Man*, i. 277-9.

⁶⁶ Harrison, *Second Coming*; pp. 141-50; Green, *Wroe*, pp. 28-9, 38-40.

considered himself to ‘look a great deal better with the beard’.⁶⁷ His minister’s black was exchanged for a new uniform – ‘white, broad-rimmed, low-crowned hat ... Quaker claret-coloured coat with large buttons, and waistcoat of similar colour’.⁶⁸ He also adopted a new name, Elishama, in recognition of his Israelite tribe.⁶⁹ Smith’s retention of this name – becoming J.E. or James Elishama Smith – for the rest of his life, attests to his enduring attachment to his Ashton experience.

Smith earned his living running a school-room, probably taking in pupils from the wider Ashton society as well as children and adults within the millenarian community.⁷⁰ His knowledge of Hebrew was also put to use, as the language was employed in various rites, including the chanting of the Lord’s Prayer.⁷¹ With ‘all the money I had for my support, which was only ten shillings a week’, Smith secured lodgings with ‘Widow Garland’, the mother of John Garland, the Gravesend farmer and butcher, whose family had migrated to Ashton during the 1820s.⁷² Smith formed a close friendship with John Garland, by now a leading member of the Ashton community, and received much of his education in Southcottian history from his family.⁷³

⁶⁷ JES to brother John Smith, 30 Sept 1830, *Shepherd Smith*, p. 53; Smith, *Coming Man*, i. 278-9.

⁶⁸ Smith, *Coming Man*, i. 279.

⁶⁹ For Wroe, the twelve tribes of Israel were not the twelve sons of Jacob/Israel, but the twelve tribes of the sons of Joseph – whose inheritance was divided between Ephraim and Manasseh. Wroe’s followers consequently adopted tribal surnames according to the sons of Ephraim and Manasseh, including Asriel, Machir and Elishama (See, 1 Chronicles 7:14, 23-27). An 1829 manuscript notebook belonging to an Ashton Israelite identifies members by their English first name, then Israelite surnames, e.g. ‘Henry Asriel’, ‘William Machir’ and ‘Ann Elishama’. TLSC, NCI/2/1, ‘Manuscript Notebook of a follower of John Wroe’; see John Wroe, *Private Communications, given to John Wroe*, Vol. 1 (Wakefield, 1845), p. 672; Smith, *Coming Man*, i. 270.

⁷⁰ JES to brother John Smith, 30 Sept 1830, *Shepherd Smith*, p. 52.

⁷¹ Wroe, *Divine Communications*, p. 277.

⁷² Smith, *Shepherd Smith*, pp. 56, 87. See Chapter 4, p. 153. Smith provided an evocative description of widow Garland in *The Coming Man*. Given the pseudonym ‘Mrs Riddle’, she was described as having ‘personally known Joanna’. Smith, *Coming Man*, i. 280.

⁷³ Smith and John Garland were of similar age, and remained close for decades. Smith would live with the Garlands again in London (see Chapter 9, p. 285), and even died at the Glasgow home of Elizabeth Garland (by then Mrs Harle), a daughter born in Ashton in 1826. Smith, *Shepherd Smith*, pp. 26, 322 and 434.

Smith's was a rapid education, and with it he rose quickly in the ranks of the Israelite community. Within four months he was preaching in the Sanctuary.⁷⁴ There, with the gathered community, he also listened to the prophet pass on his inspiration, concluding each declaration with 'Thus saith the Lord'. 'The solemnity with which this was uttered', Smith wrote in *The Coming Man*, 'the stillness with which it was heard, the fear and the awe which it seemed to inspire into every heart' was deeply moving; 'he luxuriated in the idea that he was bodily present in the land of inspiration and the valley of vision'.⁷⁵ To his brother, Smith wrote at the time of his contentment with his life: 'As long as I have the Word of the Lord to hear and to study, and the many great promises which will be speedily accomplished, when Israel is gathered into the fold which His Spirit is preparing, I do not care for anything more than a bare living'.⁷⁶

In the Ashton Sanctuary, Smith awaited the coming change, believing himself part of a community foreshadowing the 'great promises', hearkening to a revealed 'doctrine... like that of Moses, a doctrine of terrestrial redemption'.⁷⁷ Yet, in a short space of time, Smith found his expectations altered, and saw the terrestrial work of God in a different light. Actions preparatory to the millennial kingdom would no longer centre on the Sanctuary, but extend well into the society outside. Revelations and interpretations would be re-viewed; and new relationships developed in preparation for 'some favourable political change'.⁷⁸ This was the story of Southcottianism in the early 1830s, and the subject of Part 3.

⁷⁴ JES to brother John Smith, 30 Sept 1830, *Shepherd Smith*, p. 52.

⁷⁵ Smith, *Coming Man*, i. 299.

⁷⁶ JES to brother John Smith, 30 Sept 1830, *Shepherd Smith*, p. 52.

⁷⁷ Smith, *Coming Man*, i. 289.

⁷⁸ Huntington Library, Richard Carlile Papers 199, James Smith to Robert Taylor [May 1831].

PART 3

1830-1835

Chapter 7

FROM REVELATION TO RADICALISM

Religious millenarians and rational freethinkers are not natural allies. Each typically rejects the other's most fundamental beliefs about the world and the nature of knowledge. While the millenarian hopes for divine intervention in the world on the basis of religious revelation (in the Bible or to a prophet), the freethinker, be they deist or atheist, denies the prospect of such direct interference in the material world on the basis of human reason.¹ Despite this, the Southcottian engagement with radical politics in the early 1830s was forged in alliances with freethinkers. By 1830, two distinct bodies of surviving Southcottians had, under the respective leadership of John Wroe and Zion Ward, each developed a new understanding of their own human agency in relation to the millennium. Yet this new sense of agency did not, in itself, direct such millenarians into political activity. The direction was provided by a relationship with radical freethought – a relationship generated in particular contexts and events, within a period of one year, between autumn 1830 and summer 1831.

Freethought and Radicalism

In 1830, freethought was as closely associated with political radicalism as it had been in Joanna Southcott's lifetime, when the author of the most widely-read irreligious work

¹ Early nineteenth-century freethought encompassed deism as well as materialist atheism. It was more the denial of the Christian doctrine of a God intimately involved in the world than a God itself which united the period's freethinkers, also defined as 'infidel' or irreligious. Edward Royle, 'Freethought: the religion of Irreligion' in D.G. Paz (ed.), *Nineteenth-century English religious traditions* (London, 1995), pp. 171-96.

was also the most influential radical writer – Thomas Paine.² Paine’s marriage of freethought with revolutionary politics had shaped Southcott’s determination that her movement should have nothing to do with contemporary radicalism; her opposition to Paine concerned his leading people astray in both their religious and political loyalties.³ In the fifteen years after Southcott’s death, English radicalism was far broader than Paine’s republicanism, including various strains of constitutionalist and anti-corruption traditions, emergent social and economic ideas demonstrating the influence of David Ricardo and Robert Owen, and a new confidence in trade union action.⁴ While plebeian freethought also reached beyond Paine’s deism, it rarely diverged from its radical political direction. The leading figure ensuring this continuity was Richard Carlile.

Carlile’s radical reputation was forged in the early 1820s through illegal republications of Paine’s works, and the celebrated ‘war of the shopmen’ campaign for freedom of religious and political expression through his journal, *The Republican*.⁵ Carlile also promoted a network of associations for rational debate of political and religious subjects called Zetetic societies.⁶ Through this short-lived network and his journals, Carlile represented a distinct section of radical opinion which closely linked political reform with religious reform, believing one was impossible without the other. From the mid-1820s, Carlile’s increasingly militant materialist atheism, propounded in print and public appearances, and directed at removing the influence of religion from

² These were Paine’s republican *The Rights of Man* (London, 1791-92) and deist *Age of Reason* (London, 1794-95).

³ Joanna Southcott, *An Answer to Thomas Paine* (London, 1812), p. 2.

⁴ John Belchem, *Popular Radicalism in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Basingstoke, 1996), pp. 51-73; Iorwerth Prothero, *Artisans and Politics in Early Nineteenth-Century London: John Gast and His Times* (London, 1979), pp. 210-64.

⁵ Joel Wiener, *Radicalism and Freethought in Nineteenth-Century Britain: The Life of Richard Carlile* (Westport, 1983), pp. 75-100.

⁶ James Epstein, ‘Reason’s Republic: Richard Carlile, Zetetic Culture, and Infidel Stylistics’, in *Radical Expression: Political Language, Ritual, and Symbol in England, 1790-1850* (New York, 1994), pp. 109-36.

society, placed him largely beyond a discernable constitutionalist mainstream of British reformist politics. Carlile nonetheless contributed to an antireligious, as well as an anticlerical, element to radicalism in the 1830s.⁷ Freethought ideas informed other sections of radical opinion by 1830, including Owenite cooperation and some utilitarian campaigns for workers' self-improvement.⁸ Trade unionism had fewer overt links with freethought, and often wrapped its activities in the respectable cloak of religious morality.⁹ Some prominent unionists nonetheless had backgrounds in a range of radical freethought organisations.¹⁰

Most existing interpretations of the radical careers of James Smith and Zion Ward notice some link with contemporary freethought. In Smith's case, this is assumed to have begun in London from late-1832. His life in Ashton, from May 1830 until a return to Scotland in late-June 1831, is typically viewed as entirely wrapped up with events in the millenarian community. The only links commonly drawn between this period and Smith's subsequent work with the deist Robert Owen, and his largely freethinking radical followers, are those of similar community trading arrangements and a more general expectation of sudden change – a point where religious and secular millennialism might meet.¹¹ Smith is widely thought to have gone to London a religious millenarian, and

⁷ Belchem, *Popular Radicalism*, pp. 59-73; Prothero, *Artisans and Politics*, pp. 259-64.

⁸ Carlile was also a leading figure beside Francis Place in promoting the 'march of the mind' and working-class respectability. Iain McCalman, *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries and Pornographers in London, 1795-1840* (first published, 1988; Oxford, 1993), pp. 182-95.

⁹ T.H. Lloyd, 'Dr Wade and the Working Class' *Midland History*, 2 (1973-4), 61-83; R.G. Kirby and A.E. Musson, *The Voice of the People: John Doherty, 1798-1854; Trade Unionist, Radical and Factory Reformer* (Manchester, 1975), pp. 445-55.

¹⁰ On unions in London, see Prothero, *Artisans and Politics*; in Ashton, N. Cotton, 'Popular Movements in Ashton-under-Lyne and Stalybridge before 1832' (Birmingham Univ. M.Litt. Thesis, 1977) and below, pp. 229-32.

¹¹ J.F.C. Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites in Britain and America: The Quest for the New Moral World* (London, 1969), pp. 108-15; William Oliver, *Prophets and Millennialists: The Uses of Biblical Prophecy in England from the 1790s to the 1840s* (Auckland, 1978), p. 200.

fallen in among both freethinkers and radicalism there for the first time.¹² In Ward's case, his interaction with freethought is suggested to have occurred earlier – before the point he announced himself Shiloh in 1828, during a period of religious doubts and dreams.¹³ In Chapter 5, a case was made for Ward's arrival at his own theological understanding independent of the influence previously assumed from freethinkers at this stage.¹⁴ Ward's concept of the Bible as solely an allegory of himself was a logical progression from a Southcottian approach to interpreting Scripture. Yet in late-1831 and 1832, Ward was linked to Richard Carlile through appearing in his radical venue, the Rotunda theatre.¹⁵ Ward evidently maintained some relationship with freethought by this date.

This chapter traces the origins of the radical alliance between Southcottians and freethinkers in the distinct 1830-31 period. It recovers the settings of the emergent alliance, the points of personal contact which created it, and the intellectual bases behind it. To do this, it makes further use of the same Southcottian collections and sources as Parts 1 and 2. Yet this and subsequent chapters in Part 3 also draw on a wide selection of sources more commonly consulted by historians of radicalism than of religion. These include the unstamped radical press and the private correspondence of radicals – most notably of Richard Carlile and associates. Correspondence exchanged between such radicals relating to Smith and Ward is subjected to detailed examination in this and

¹² Only Barbara Taylor noted the potential for Smith to have been influenced beyond the confines of his sect, observing that during his time there Ashton 'was also a hotbed of radical politics', and suggesting that Smith's stay 'probably taught him more than just the intricacies of Joannaite doctrine'. As Taylor's discussion concentrated on Smith's later career, she did not define the form of such Ashton influences. Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1983), p. 167.

¹³ Oliver, *Prophets and Millennialists*, pp. 159-63; Edward Royle, 'Ward, John 'Zion' (1781-1837)', in Joseph Baylen and Norbert Gossman (eds.), *Biographical Dictionary of Modern British Radicals Vol.2: 1830-1870* (Hassocks, 1984), pp. 534-6.

¹⁴ See Chapter 5, pp. 177-9.

¹⁵ Edward Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, revised edn (Harmondsworth, 1968), p. 880; Oliver, *Prophets and Millennialists*, p. 163; J.F.C. Harrison, *The Second Coming: Popular Millenarianism 1780-1850* (London, 1979), pp. 155-6.

subsequent chapters. In addition, the reports of Home Office informants, cited on occasion earlier in this thesis, are further referenced. One intention of this research approach is to demonstrate the new insights available from reasonably familiar sources on political radicalism when read from a perspective which prioritises an understanding of the religious experience of those featured.

Internal disruptions: Southcottians in 1830-31

The year between autumn 1830 and summer 1831 witnessed dramatic developments within the Southcottian movement. From September 1830, the authority of John Wroe was severely tested by sexual allegations made against him by three of his servants, Ann Hall, Sarah Pile and Mary Quance.¹⁶ The young women, aged between 15 and 19, each accused Wroe of sexual improprieties, disclosing their stories while the prophet was away from Ashton, touring the South. After their cross-examination by older Israelite women, Wroe was recalled north on 17 October, the journal of his amanuensis recorded, ‘for there were certain charges ... laid against him, which could not be cleared up unless he returned’.¹⁷ Wroe took a week to arrive, taking an indirect route via several Yorkshire congregations, apparently securing their backing with his version of the story.¹⁸ Upon his

¹⁶ This was the historical reality behind the popular legend of Wroe and his ‘seven virgins’ – the story that the prophet once asked his Ashton congregation for seven of their daughters then got them pregnant. This is now familiar to audiences beyond Lancashire, through Jane Rogers’ compelling novel of the legend, *Mr Wroe’s Virgins*, and the subsequent BBC TV drama of the same name. Green’s biography devotes much attention to delineating the historical truth behind the various scandals attached to Wroe from press reports and a later edition of Wroe’s *Divine Communications*. Green notably neglects to place the 1830 scandal in the context of contemporary events in Ashton. Edward Green, *Prophet John Wroe: Virgins, Scandals and Visions* (Stroud, 2005), pp. 91-114.

¹⁷ ‘From the Journal of William Tillotson’ in John Wroe, *Divine Communications and prophecies given to John Wroe ...* (Wakefield, 1834), p. 254.

¹⁸ Wroe, *Divine Communications*, pp. 254-5.

arrival in Ashton, a court of the community was convened in the eastern gatehouse, with a chairman and a twelve-man jury.¹⁹ Wroe's *Divine Communications* records that, 'the Rev. James Smith, late of Edinburgh, proceeded to read the written statements of Mary Quance and Sarah Pile', and when Wroe denied all the charges, the trial was adjourned.²⁰ The following day, Smith and another member of the jury, William Masterman – a migrant from Gravesend – were deemed to have acted 'contrary to the rules of the court', and a new jury, made up of men from Sheffield, Wakefield, Leeds and Ashton only, heard evidence from each of the servants and other witnesses, in subsequent days.²¹ After this, Wroe was neither found guilty nor acquitted, as the jury remained divided.²² In response, Wroe left for Yorkshire, receiving the prophetic direction: 'Stop thou out of Ashton till the indictment be removed'.²³

The 'indictment' was not removed, and for three months Wroe stayed away, recording prophecies of revenge against Ashton, and former followers there, including 'James Smith, of Edinburgh'.²⁴ In Wroe's absence, the house latterly laid out for him and 'furnished as ... in the millennium' – the southern gatehouse – was looted by a faction within the congregation, taking 'all which was valuable and easy to be moved'.²⁵ This action was condoned by three of the four trustees whose wealth had funded the house. In late-February 1831, Wroe returned to address the gathered community in the Sanctuary.

¹⁹ Wroe, *Divine Communications*, p. 255.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 256.

²¹ Four of the witnesses were Wroe's other teenage servants: Mary Bullough, from Leeds, Nancy Knowlson, from Stainforth, Margaret Lovering, from Plymouth Dock, and Sarah Masterman, from Gravesend. These four, never previously identified, confirm that Wroe really did have seven unmarried women servants, as all four were aged 18 or 19. They are named in Wroe, *Divine Communications*, pp. 257-8, though not as servants.

²² Wroe, *Divine Communications*, p. 258.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

²⁴ [PS PN 561] John Wroe, *Private Communications given to John Wroe* (Wakefield, 1845), pp. 687-97.

²⁵ Wroe, *Divine Communications*, pp. 275-6. See Chapter 4, p. 158.

It was only at this stage that the public were informed of the accusations made against Wroe, through handbills circulated throughout Ashton, signed by William Masterman. These invited the public to the Sanctuary to hear Wroe ‘make his defence to the charges proved against him’.²⁶ At this crowded meeting, Wroe engineered an escape, reportedly through a trap-door and passage-way to another building. In the ensuing riot, pews were overturned, books thrown and the Sanctuary doors smashed.²⁷ This incident attracted widespread newspaper coverage, with reports of a ‘mighty sharpening of razors and scissors’ across Ashton, as beards were removed and ‘a very considerable part of the society gave up their faith’.²⁸ Of the four wealthy trustees, Samuel Swire and the Lees brothers left; John Stanley remained.²⁹ From April 1831, Wroe established a new headquarters near Wakefield, leaving a remnant following in Ashton which persisted well beyond his death in 1863.³⁰

A proportion of the number who receded from Wroe – about sixty – reconvened in a new Ashton chapel under the preaching leadership of James Smith. This body soon acknowledged the claims of Zion Ward. During Wroe’s period of absence from Ashton, copies of the Shiloh’s writings had circulated widely among the Ashton congregation. Ward’s 1829 ‘Epistle to John Wroe’s Followers, or Modern Jews’, which had previously gained attention in Kent only, was now read in Ashton with greater notice.³¹ The principal argument of the ‘Epistle’ – that Ward had come to give freedom from all laws,

²⁶ *Sheffield Courant*, 4 Mar. 1831.

²⁷ Green, *Wroe*, pp. 99-101; Harrison confuses this event with the October trial, *Second Coming*, p. 147.

²⁸ *Sheffield Courant*, 4 Mar. 1831; *Manchester Chronicle*, 5 Mar. 1831; *Manchester Guardian*, 13 Mar. 1831; A.J. Howcroft, *Tales of a Pennine People* (Oldham, 1923), p. 80. The extent of the withdrawal is from Wroe, *Divine Communications*, p. 176.

²⁹ Green, *Wroe*, pp. 179-80.

³⁰ Israelites still met in Ashton in the 1920s. Howcroft, *Pennine People*, pp. 89-91. From Wakefield, Wroe conducted several missionary tours to America and Australia, where churches descended from his teachings still exist today – principally the Christian Israelite Church.

³¹ Zion Ward, ‘Epistle to John Wroe’s Followers, or Modern Jews’, *Zion’s Works*, vi. 1-89.

‘forms and ceremonies’ – gained some traction in the immediate aftermath of the undermining of Wroe’s authority, and disillusion with the discipline of the Law.³² Smith was among those to write personally to Ward, with specific questions relating to his claims – on the source of his prophetic authority and whether redemption is ‘to be spiritual only’.³³ When Wroe addressed the Sanctuary in February 1831, his recorded sermon included barbed references to ‘he who calls himself Shiloh’ having ‘gathered his number’.³⁴

In March 1831, after Wroe had left Ashton once more, Ward paid a personal visit to the town, spending a week addressing the group now meeting ‘to hear the word through Zion’, and in personal interviews with enquirers.³⁵ Ward hoped to ‘have an interview with Mr S. Swire and another of the big ones’, but they did not welcome him.³⁶ Upon meeting Smith, Ward reported, ‘he seemed at first to oppose me’. After a few days, however, ‘he told me he did this on purpose to try me, to see how opposition would affect me’; now ‘we are very much united’.³⁷ Ward recognised in Smith a valuable ally: ‘I have the fullest confidence that he will be a zealous and strong advocate for the Cause – he is a young man of very great intelligence, and uncommon deep discernment into the ways of God’.³⁸ Smith’s own correspondence suggests he wielded considerable influence among a growing section of Southcottians in Ashton and in Scotland, who looked to his

³² Ibid., pp. 33, 48.

³³ Zion Ward to James Smith, 4 Dec. 1830, *Zion’s Works*, vi. 90-105.

³⁴ Wroe, *Divine Communications*, p. 267.

³⁵ British Library (BL) Add MSS 43509/70-72, 12 and 24 Mar. 1831. These and other British Library Ward MSS are Ward’s letters to followers in different locations in the period 1829-1831. Edited versions of these letters appear in Holinsworth’s *Zion’s Works*, vol.xvi, with small yet in some cases significant omissions. In this study, quotations are therefore taken from manuscript versions of letters.

³⁶ BL Add MS 43509/72, 24 Mar. 1831, Zion Ward to Thomas Pierce.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

judgment for guidance on the practice of their millenarian faith.³⁹ Smith's acceptance of Ward at this point determined their own embrace of the Shiloh. In future years they would follow where Smith directed, beyond the influence of Ward.⁴⁰

The visit to Ashton was part of Ward's ongoing attempts to win over existing Southcottians to his claims, following on from his efforts in 1829-30. During the second half of 1830, Ward also toured north Nottinghamshire and the Yorkshire West Riding, making public appearances as the messiah in a region of long-term Southcottian sympathy. His appearances drew large crowds, gaining increased attention to Ward and his message of the new millennial religion, to the great delight of the Southcottian supporters putting up the money for his promotion. In 1831, Ward turned the focus of his campaign for recognition back to London, remaining there for long periods. These developments, as with the fall of Wroe, and the new contact between the separate traditions of Southcottians, may easily be viewed as aspects of the internal workings of Southcottianism. The millenarian sect can appear subject only to its own dynamics, unaffected by the world outside. This was far from the case. These developments were each in some way affected by Southcottians looking beyond the boundaries of their sect, conscious of both influences from, and shared interests with, the wider culture and society. Elements of this attitude are signposted in incidents during the 1820s. In 1830-31, these would come to fruition in interactions with cultures shaped by radical freethought. These interactions are here narrated in two parts: the first concerns the place of Ashton and the person of James Smith; the second concerns the locations of Ward's mission as Shiloh, and responses to his message.

³⁹ W.A. Smith, *'Shepherd' Smith the Universalist: The Story of a Mind* (London, 1892), pp. 67-74.

⁴⁰ See Chapter 9, pp. 308-10.

The Place of Ashton; the Person of Smith

John Wroe counted James Smith among those most responsible for his trial and downfall. His prophecies of the time celebrated the ‘confounding’ of the ‘jury that was full of guile’, of Smith and Masterman.⁴¹ In December 1830, Wroe received a prophecy naming Smith directly:

Satan’s works now shall appear on the planet, even the substance, and his agents with him, and they shall be as though they were going to take possession of the ball. The deists and atheists shall be the head of them, shewing that there is no god but them; and James Smith, of Edinburgh, has been to inquire at their hands, and not at mine; for I shewed thee in Edinburgh how he should roar, like a lion in the street for madness, that he could not get his end...⁴²

This reference to deists and atheists, and James Smith’s relation to them in Ashton, has been comprehensively overlooked in every existing study of Smith.⁴³ Its clear implication is that Wroe recognised what historians of Smith have not – that he had forged links with freethought in Lancashire in 1830, well before his arrival in London in 1832. The ‘deists and atheists’ Wroe referred to were Ashton radicals associated with Richard Carlile. The prophet was well aware of them, as Israelites and such freethinkers had interacted at several points before.

⁴¹ Wroe, *Private Communications*, pp. 687-8.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 696-7.

⁴³ This is not wholly due to its appearance in the previously unstudied *Private Communications*. An edited version of the prophecy including James Smith’s name appears in Wroe, *Divine Communications*, p. 263.

Ashton Freethinkers

During the 1820s, Ashton-under-Lyne was both a stronghold for Southcottian millenarianism, and a town with an especially strong freethought element to its radical culture.⁴⁴ In the mid-1820s, one of the larger of Carlile's Zetetic societies was established in Ashton, and substantial funds were donated from the town to support Carlile and his radical publishing in London.⁴⁵ Between 1826 and 1829, following his release from a long period in gaol, Carlile conducted several tours, attempting to build a national atheist movement. He visited Ashton twice, reflecting his popularity in the town. His journal recorded, with characteristic hyperbole, that Christianity in Ashton was not 'merely disbelieved, but ... heartily abhorred and hated by thousands'; 'the hopes and prospects of Infidelity' – Carlile's term for his anti-religious movement – were as strong there as any where.⁴⁶ This spatial proximity between freethinkers and millenarians – their presence in numbers in the same small town – threw up points of interaction between them before 1830.

Ashton's post-war radical culture was sustained after 1820 by a distinct body of committed activists who met not only as 'Zetetics', but also in particular 'rituals of solidarity' – commemorative dinners and other demonstrations to mark the radical anniversaries of Paine's birthday and Peterloo.⁴⁷ The common location for such meetings

⁴⁴ Iain McCalman, 'Popular Radicalism and Freethought in early nineteenth-century England: a study of Richard Carlile, and his followers, 1815-32' (Australian National Univ. M.A. thesis, 1975), pp. 97-111; R.G. Hall, 'Work, Class and Politics in Ashton-under-Lyne 1830-1860' (Vanderbilt Univ. Ph.D. Thesis, 1991), pp. 84-86; Epstein, 'Rituals of Solidarity: Radical Dining, Toasting and Symbolic Expression' in *Radical Expression*, pp. 147-65.

⁴⁵ Lists of contributors to Carlile were printed in various publications, including, Richard Carlile, *To the Reformers of Great Britain* (London, 1821), pp. 33-40; and *Republican*, 8 Mar. and 24 May 1822, v. 302-7, 657-60.

⁴⁶ *Lion*, 24 July 1829, p. 107. Carlile even considered standing as a candidate for Ashton in the election after the passing of the Reform Bill in 1832. *Isis*, 16 June 1832.

⁴⁷ Epstein, 'Rituals of Solidarity', pp. 155-9.

in 1820-25 were the houses and hostelryes of prominent Carlile supporters in Charlestown – the same collection of half-a-dozen streets on the northern edge of Ashton where Southcottians retained their chapel between 1814 and the opening of the Sanctuary in 1825.⁴⁸ Ashton radical freethinkers and the town's millenarians were inevitably familiar with the other: they could not have avoided each other in this same small corner of the town. The extreme natures of the two groups' beliefs – at opposite ends of Ashton's especially diverse religious scale, including Anglican, Presbyterian, Independent, Wesleyan, New Connexion and Primitive Methodist congregations – brought rationalists and millenarians curiously together in their occupation of physical space, on the literal periphery of the town.

It is through Carlile himself that the best record of how these two groups could interact survives. Carlile's journals attest to his general curiosity about the movement, and points of contact. In 1824, Carlile published an open letter 'to Henry Lees and to the followers of Johanna Southcote generally', after reading a newspaper account of Lees' trial for manslaughter following the circumcision accident.⁴⁹ Carlile used the occasion provocatively to declare the beliefs of Southcottians as equally false as established Christianity: 'All the nonsense practised and held by the Southcotians [*sic*] is drawn from the general source of delusion, the Bible'.⁵⁰ Carlile subsequently retained a particular interest in the Wroete Southcottians: when next in Ashton, visiting his radical supporters in the town in August 1827, he made a point of joining 'twice ... the congregation of Israelites in their chapel'.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Epstein, 'Rituals of Solidarity', p. 157; See Chapter 2, p. 97.

⁴⁹ See Chapter 4, p. 151.

⁵⁰ *Republican*, 10 Dec. 1824, x. 705; see also, *Republican*, 25 March 1825, xi. 353-63.

⁵¹ Reports on this visit were subsequently published in *The Lion*, 18 Jan. 1828, p. 78.

Carlile's descriptions of the Sanctuary, the clothing and social arrangements of the community on this occasion were quoted in Chapter 4.⁵² After his visits, he wrote 'a very civil note to one of the principals of the Society, mentioning that I had been at the chapel, and requesting an interview for conversation or religious discussion'.⁵³ A reply from Edward Lees (printed in Carlile's journal) declined this request, pointing out that discussion between them was pointless without an agreed basis of authority for reference on a given opinion. For Israelites, Lees explained, this was the Bible, like any other Christian group, but whose truths they were now gaining, 'from the same source, and by the same means' – through the Spirit of God speaking to their prophet.⁵⁴ As Carlile had 'by public avowal' made clear his not believing 'the Scriptures to be the Word of God', then, Lees wrote,

our doctrine with you can have no foundation, nor can its merits or demerits be tried at all, until we have established the divine authority of the Bible: ... we have nothing particular to say upon it more than others, and are also acquainted with the arguments that can be brought against it.⁵⁵

This last comment, and the general sophistication of Lees' argument from epistemology, suggest that a certain familiarity with freethought literature and its arguments was available to Lees in Ashton.

Carlile returned to Ashton in 1829, and again visited the Sanctuary.⁵⁶ This time he was accompanied by Robert Taylor, the ex-clergyman whose irreligious yet mystical and

⁵² See Chapter 4, p. 159.

⁵³ *Lion*, 18 Jan. 1828, p. 79.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 79; *Lion*, 25 Jan. 1828, p. 98-9.

⁵⁶ *Lion*, 31 July 1829, pp. 138-40.

allegorical views have been related to Zion Ward.⁵⁷ By now, Carlile's freethought had left behind his earlier ridicule of the Bible, influenced largely by Paine's *Age of Reason*, and proposed instead an interpretation of the Scriptures as an allegory. Carlile declared the Bible an historical fiction, yet, in the figure of Christ, featured an allegorical figure equivalent to Prometheus or the Greek Logos, symbolising the principle of Reason – the real saviour of mankind.⁵⁸ Scholars of Carlile link this development to the influence of Taylor, who argued that the Christian Scriptures were entirely a code of astronomical and astrological symbols, an allegory of ancient Egyptian myths, and a fictional concoction of mysteries and legends compiled by the Essenes of Alexandria and 'secretly transmitted by Christian priests in succeeding centuries'.⁵⁹ Taylor was experienced in presenting his message to public audiences in ways which suggested its learning and authority. This Carlile sought to exploit after Taylor agreed to join him on a tour as 'infidel missionaries', preaching their freethought message challenging the historical evidences of Christianity.⁶⁰ In Ashton, Carlile and Taylor this time invited 'Rabbi John Wroe, Prophet in Israel' to debate their arguments, but were again refused.⁶¹

⁵⁷ See Chapter 5, pp. 177-9.

⁵⁸ Richard Carlile, *The Gospel according to Richard Carlile, shewing the true parentage, birth, and life, of our allegorical Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ* (London, 1827), pp. 3-7; idem., *Sermon upon the Subject of the Deity* (London, 1827), pp. 5-16.

⁵⁹ Edward Royle, *Victorian Infidels: The Origins of the British Secularist Movement, 1791-1866* (Manchester, 1974), pp. 38-40; Wiener, *Richard Carlile*, pp. 132-6; Iain McCalman, 'Popular Irreligion in Early Victorian England: Infidel Preachers and Radical Theatricality in 1830s London', in Richard W. Davies and Richard J. Helmstadter (eds.), *Religion and Irreligion in Victorian Society* (London, 1992), pp. 51-67.

⁶⁰ McCalman, 'Popular Irreligion', p. 53.

⁶¹ *Lion*, 24 July 1829, pp. 101-2.

Ashton Unionists

The specific context which saw James Smith notably reverse this trend – as the millenarian who approached the ‘deists and atheists’, as Wroe alleged, and not the other way round – was a context of disruption, division and a challenge to received authority. This was not only the context of the millenarian community following Wroe’s sexual scandal; this was the context of Ashton as a whole. During the precise period of the disintegration of the foreshadowed Jerusalem community, Ashton experienced a divisive industrial conflict – the Ashton-Stalybridge cotton-spinners strike. During this conflict, certain radicals previously associated with Richard Carlile were brought to a new prominence in the town. It was specifically to these radicals that Smith went ‘to inquire’.

By 1830, many among the committed freethought constituency in Ashton were involved in trade union organising – an activity with which Carlile himself had little sympathy.⁶² In the mill town, Carlile’s publications were reported to ‘circulate ... with one or two exceptions, amongst labouring men’.⁶³ In the late-1820s, such cotton workers, most notably the skilled spinners among them, had joined trade societies and affiliated to wider unions in Lancashire and beyond, in an attempt to secure wage-rates. A stock-market crash and widespread bank failures in 1825-26 had precipitated a trade slump, or ‘stable stagnation’ in prices, profits and wages across Britain, but especially in the textile trade, which would last until 1832.⁶⁴ Cotton employers in the Ashton district, as elsewhere, had taken to agreeing local price-lists among themselves, which each master agreed not to pay above or below. This minimised the worst excesses of local

⁶² Carlile, a determined advocate for workers’ individualism, considered unions like ‘any sect, party or society ... injurious to the general interest’: Belchem, *Popular Radicalism*, p. 53.

⁶³ *Isis*, 16 June 1832, p. 296.

⁶⁴ Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad and Dangerous People? England 1783-1846* (Oxford, 2006) pp. 398-9.

competition, yet discrepancies remained between towns: prices paid by Ashton employers were lower than those in Manchester; wages in Stalybridge and Glossop further east were lower than Ashton's. It was these discrepancies which a national union, the Grand General Union of Cotton Spinners (formed in 1829), sought to remove through negotiating wage increases to rates in higher-paid districts.⁶⁵ The most significant industrial action organised by this union, supported by the closely related National Association for the Protection of Labour, took place in the Ashton locality in 1829-31.⁶⁶ The most prominent Ashton unionist in this period was the secretary of the spinners' union, and a known supporter of Carlile, John Joseph Betts.⁶⁷

In 1829, Betts led protest meetings on Ashton Moss – an open-space to the west of the town – against the price of food staples. In early 1830, he was arrested after an altercation with a master, after attempting 'to reason with him at the rate of wages he was giving'.⁶⁸ When the Ashton cotton-masters collectively announced their intention to reduce wages to Stalybridge levels in July 1830, Betts addressed another excited meeting on the Moss attended by 'about 4000 spinners' from Ashton and neighbouring townships, moving a resolution to attribute the reduction not to the market but 'a principle of avarice'.⁶⁹ This meeting was also addressed by the lead figure in northern trade unionism, John Doherty, a Manchester spinner.⁷⁰ In the following six months, Betts worked closely with Doherty, a Roman Catholic, to organise two substantial strikes in the Ashton area.

⁶⁵ Kirby and Musson, *John Doherty*, pp. 85-118.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 119-52; On the NAPL, see Robert Sykes, 'Trade Unionism and Class Consciousness: The 'Revolutionary' Period of General Unionism, 1829-1834', in John Rule (ed.), *British Trade Unionism 1750-1850: The Formative Years* (Harlow, 1988), pp. 178-99; Malcolm Chase, *Early Trade Unionism: Fraternity, Skill and the Politics of Labour* (Aldershot, 2000), pp. 140-43.

⁶⁷ *Lion*, 29 Feb. 1828, pp. 276-7.

⁶⁸ *Manchester Times*, 27 June 1829; *Stockport Advertiser*, 26 Mar. 1830.

⁶⁹ *Manchester Times*, 31 July 1830; Kirby and Musson, *John Doherty*, p. 104.

⁷⁰ On Doherty, see Kirby and Musson, *John Doherty*.

The first, in August, successfully raised spinners' wages in neighbouring Stalybridge, so removing the basis of the Ashton masters' wage-cut.⁷¹ By December, however, all fifty-two spinning firms in the wider Ashton district, including Stalybridge, introduced the same reduced prices, and announced that all spinners who did not accept them would be locked out.⁷² A strike was called by Betts at a mass meeting of 15-20,000, advertised on placards headed 'Labour and Wages', and signed by Betts.⁷³ Thousands marched to the meeting in procession; the presence of 'short clubs, pistols, blunderbusses and small hatchets' among the crowd concerned the Government, as did the general 'excitement' generated in Ashton by the event.⁷⁴

The resulting strike, which lasted until February 1831, involved 2000 spinners, yet left, newspapers calculated at the time, 18,000 workers unemployed, and threatened the subsistence of 30,000 people – almost every person in the locality.⁷⁵ It was an especially bitter affair, and is counted among the most significant industrial disputes of the era for the divisiveness it demonstrated between classes.⁷⁶ Life in Ashton was especially unsettled as large crowds assembled each day, parading along the main streets, carrying tricolour flags and banners with such radical slogans as 'Liberty or Death', 'Bread or Blood'. When such marches were outlawed and troops were billeted in the town, other tactics were employed, including the intimidation of shopkeepers and tradesmen into supporting the strike.⁷⁷ The strike-relief from the union that many expected failed to materialise, leading to real hunger in Ashton. A union newspaper

⁷¹ Kirby and Musson, *John Doherty*, pp. 105-7.

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 119-20.

⁷³ The National Archives (TNA) HO 40/27/349.

⁷⁴ TNA HO 40/26/160; *Manchester Guardian*, 11 Dec. 1830.

⁷⁵ *Manchester Guardian*, 18 Dec. 1830. Kirby and Musson, *John Doherty*, pp. 122-3.

⁷⁶ Kirby and Musson, *John Doherty*, pp. 119-152; Sykes, 'Trade Unionism', p. 192; Cotton, 'Popular Movements', pp. 211-34.

⁷⁷ TNA HO 40/26/200 and 203.

newly established by Doherty, *The Voice of the People*, publicised the starvation threat and covered developments from the strikers' perspective.⁷⁸ Yet by late-February, the mills were reopened, to those 'workmen who choose to resume ... at the masters' list price'.⁷⁹ Three hundred men judged to have taken leading roles in the dispute were blacklisted and refused work in any firm.⁸⁰ Among these was Betts.

Smith and Unionists

That James Smith knew of John Joseph Betts while living in Ashton may be easily supposed from the radical's notoriety in Ashton itself, from union bills and mass meetings. The connection forged between these two men and Betts' fellow 'infidel' radicals in 1830-31 is implied by three specific sources. The first is Smith's own allusion to the connections between Israelites and Ashton freethinkers in his later novel, *The Coming Man*.⁸¹ Here, in contrast to the rest of Smith's description of the Ashton community cited in Chapter 6, the account of Wroe's fall is not presented as a fictional narrative, with pseudonyms such as 'Benjamin' and 'John the Jew', but as history. Referring directly to John Wroe, Smith located his place in a history of the Southcottian millenarian tradition, featuring figures such as Brothers, Southcott and Turner.⁸² Describing the point when Wroe 'was in a manner forced to leave the town by a resolution amongst his followers', Smith wrote: 'The party broke up. Many returned to the world in their gin and tobacco pipes, their politics, and their swearing, and many retreated to the churches and chapels, and not a few fell in amongst the Radicals and the

⁷⁸ *Voice of the People*, 22 Jan. 1831.

⁷⁹ *Manchester Guardian*, 5 Feb. 1831.

⁸⁰ Kirby and Musson, *John Doherty*, pp. 135-8.

⁸¹ Smith, *Coming Man*, i. 269-70. On this novel as a source, see Chapter 6, pp. 211-13.

⁸² Smith, *Coming Man*, i. 255-71.

Infidels’.⁸³ Smith did not specifically mention his own presence among the latter, yet something is implied by the principal protagonist of the novel engaging in politics after leaving the Wroe community, having ‘faithfully kept the law for six months’ – as Smith did.⁸⁴

The second, more contemporary evidence suggesting Smith’s links with radicalism during the winter months Wroe was away is a source familiar to historians describing the case of ‘Wroe’s virgins’: a published account of the allegations made against the prophet and of his community trial. This was exclusively published in John Doherty’s union-run *Voice of the People* newspaper in early March 1831.⁸⁵ The article featured a detailed description of the young women’s allegations, events within the community leading up to the trial, and of the opening of the trial itself. This was evidently provided by an eyewitness and community insider, as ‘none were to be present that doubted the [Southcottian] visitation’.⁸⁶ The description of Smith and Masterman, the jurymen identified in Israelite sources as the two removed on the second day, featured additional, telling details. The *Voice of the People*’s account described Wroe’s vociferous questioning by these two on the first day, then described how, the next day, when they ‘were determined to resume their seats, ... a scuffle ensued’.⁸⁷ Several men ‘attempted to turn one of the jurymen out of the room, but was prevented by the courage of the other’, a choice of phrase strongly suggestive of the paper’s correspondent – or source – being familiar with the individuals involved.⁸⁸

⁸³ Smith, *Coming Man*, i. 270.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, i. 304 and ii. 1-30.

⁸⁵ *Voice of the People*, 5 Mar. 1831. Neither Harrison nor Green acknowledged the specific nature, editorship or background of this newspaper: Harrison, *Second Coming*, p. 253; Green, *Wroe*, pp. 101-8.

⁸⁶ *Voice of the People*, 5 Mar. 1831.

⁸⁷ Wroe, *Divine Communications*, p. 256.

⁸⁸ *Voice of the People*, 5 Mar. 1831.

That Smith was the insider witness for this article, and perhaps its author, is suggested by the third, and most direct evidence of Smith's familiarity with Betts – the most frequent Ashton contributor to the *Voice of the People*. This is Smith's use of Betts' home address for a particular letter he composed in 1831. Betts lived at 46 Cavendish Street in Ashton, and it was from here that Smith wrote to Robert Taylor, the 'infidel' associate of Richard Carlile.⁸⁹ The letter survives among Carlile's papers in the Huntington Library. It is undated, but was written around May 1831, as its closing lines refer to Smith's coming to Ashton 'from Edinburgh, about 12 months ago'.⁹⁰ Smith's wider acquaintance with other Ashton freethinkers is suggested by the letter's postage details indicating that it was sent through Joshua Hobson, Carlile's principal book-seller in Ashton, and care of Carlile's shop in London.⁹¹ Such simple details of authorship and recipient, the context of composition and conveyance, do most to confirm Smith's connection with the Ashton 'deists and atheists'. Yet it is the subject of the letter itself, its content and concerns, which provide the clearest insights into why Smith believed an alliance was possible between millenarians and freethinkers. This was an alliance in ideas.

Smith and Robert Taylor

Between the time of their 'infidel mission' to Ashton in 1829, and the date of Smith's letter in 1831, Taylor and Carlile had instigated one of the more colourful chapters in

⁸⁹ Huntington Library (HL), Richard Carlile Papers, RC 199, James Smith to Robert Taylor, [May 1831]. *Manchester and Salford Trade Directory* (Manchester, 1832).

⁹⁰ HL RC 199. This letter is referenced in two notable 1990s articles on British radicalism, neither of which realises its significance with reference to James Smith's Ashton career and the relation of his millenarianism to radicalism. It was dated inaccurately in both works: McCalman, 'Popular Irreligion', p. 67; Epstein 'Reason's Republic', p. 215.

⁹¹ *Prompter*, 16 July 1831, p. 617, and Epstein, 'Rituals of Solidarity', pp. 156-8.

English irreligion: Taylor's star-turn at the Rotunda theatre as the 'devil's chaplain'.⁹² Carlile had bought the Rotunda – a rambling structure south of Blackfriars Bridge – in May 1830, intending it as a space for 'rational debate' and the spread of free religious and republican thought. Both the political and religious establishments were to be attacked within its walls: 'aristocratical [and] ... clerical despotism, corruption and ignorance' would be demolished, Carlile announced.⁹³ Taylor first appeared at the Rotunda on Sundays to give 'Astronomico-Theological' lectures, new versions of his mid-1820s discourses on how all religions were 'tissues of fiction', cleverly constructed from codes of astronomical and astrological symbols.⁹⁴ Much of his argument Taylor had published in two works previously promoted by Carlile, *Syntagma* and *Diegesis*.⁹⁵ These laid out a scholarly case for Jesus never having existed, and how the Gospels were authored by monks adapting a plethora of oriental myths about the sun, stars and figures such as Krishna. Taylor's works owed a clear debt to various 1790s freethought texts, especially Volney's *Ruins of Empire* – a still popular radical text casting all established religions as mythical constructs designed to further priestly power and political despotism.⁹⁶

Taylor's message still drew a certain section of freethinking London life. Yet, from late-1830 into 1831, Taylor introduced increasingly theatrical dimensions to his lectures. Dressed in his curate's canonicals and in dramatic lighting, he spoke as 'the Reverend Robert Taylor' from 'the Devil's pulpit'. Performing mock religious services,

⁹² McCalman, 'Popular Irreligion', pp. 51-67.

⁹³ *Prompter*, 13 Nov. 1830; Wiener, *Richard Carlile*, p. 164-5.

⁹⁴ McCalman, 'Popular Irreligion', p. 54.

⁹⁵ Robert Taylor, *Syntagma of the Evidences of the Christian Religion* (London, 1828); idem., *The Diegesis; being a discovery of the origin, evidences, and early history of Christianity* (London, 1829). Taylor wrote both while imprisoned for blasphemy in 1828.

⁹⁶ Epstein, 'Reason's Republic', pp. 138-43; Thompson, *Making*, pp. 107-8.

saying prayers backwards, sending up elements of liturgy, he equated priests with Satan, exploiting and enslaving the common people.⁹⁷ Such antics drew large, enthusiastic crowds, rarely below a thousand, twice a week, for months. His performances have been understood as an intentional challenge to radical respectability, a form of subversive behaviour which used idioms of Romanticism to undermine inherited meanings and authoritative symbols like the Bible, the Church and establishment.⁹⁸ The response of the crowd, recorded by Home Office spies in the audience each night, attests to an atmosphere of enthusiasm for the satirical, the comedic, and the irreverent.⁹⁹ Through such show, Taylor secured a far wider and more attentive audience for his irreligious message. His particular mockery of Satan, in both theatrical display and scholarly, philological comparison with the God of Scripture – declaring all the titles of the devil ‘are the common names of the Supreme God’ – was a deliberate attempt to undermine the Church’s message of sin and Hell.¹⁰⁰ In this way, Taylor stood at the centre of Carlile’s continued hopes for the fall of Christianity.¹⁰¹

Resident in Ashton over the months of Taylor’s Rotunda run, James Smith was most likely introduced to his ideas through Carlile supporters recalling ‘the infidel mission’, and Taylor’s books, *Syntagma* and *Diegesis*, sold by Joshua Hobson.¹⁰² Smith’s letter to Taylor alludes to his familiarity with these works – their study of the Bible ‘astronomically’, their efforts to ‘unriddle’ the hidden message of the Bible, and intended

⁹⁷ McCalman, ‘Popular Irreligion’, pp. 54-9.

⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 51-64; Epstein, ‘Reason’s Republic’, pp. 139-44; See also, David Worrall, *Theatrical Revolution: Drama, Censorship and Romantic Period Subcultures 1773-1832*, (Oxford, 2006), pp. 340-60.

⁹⁹ TNA HO 64/11/119-421.

¹⁰⁰ *Devil’s Pulpit*, 10 Sep. 1831, p. 58; Epstein ‘Reason’s Republic’, p. 141.

¹⁰¹ *Prompter*, 2 Apr. 1831, p. 352.

¹⁰² *Prompter*, 16 July 1831 p. 617; *Isis*, 16 June 1832, p. 296.

role in securing the downfall of present Christianity.¹⁰³ Strikingly, given the nature of Smith's religious convictions traced so far in this study, he claimed to have much in common with Taylor: 'I agree with you in the main respecting Christianity'.¹⁰⁴ From continued personal study of the Bible, Smith explained, he had now arrived at an analogical and allegorical understanding of the Scriptures close to Taylor's own now: 'I perceive we adopt the same principles'.¹⁰⁵

Smith's basis for these apparently counter-intuitive claims is set out within his letter to Taylor (which extends over three pages of tightly-written text). This attests to how far Smith's own attempts to explain recent events within his millenarian community had led him to reconfigure elements of his personal theology. Smith had consulted Ashton's 'deists and atheists' in the weeks following the revelations of Wroe's immorality, as elements of their Taylor-influenced beliefs apparently accorded with his own explanation of Wroe's evil. These concerned ideas of God and the Devil.

When Smith had first joined the Southcottians, and visited Ashton in 1829, a crucial factor in his decision had been his conviction that Wroe's 'work is from God'.¹⁰⁶ The source of Wroe's inspiration confirmed for Smith the divine nature of the community endeavour. Yet when the man of divine inspiration, of divine favour, was revealed to be tainted, to lie and prophesy falsehoods, then the nature of the source of his direction was questioned. How could Wroe be inspired by God and yet capable of evil? The answer, Smith resolved, lay in the relation of Satan to God: they were the same being, and humans were therefore capable of being inspired by both the good and evil sides to the

¹⁰³ HL RC 199.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ James Elishama Smith (JES) to father John Smith, 23 June 1829, quoted in W.A. Smith, *'Shepherd' Smith the Universalist: The Story of a Mind* (London, 1892), p. 44.

divine, without knowing which. Applied to the case of Wroe, the prophet demonstrated the influence of the evil side; ‘This visitation of Wroe’s ... was from the devil’, Smith explained to his brother in 1831, ‘for God is the devil’.¹⁰⁷ To Taylor, Smith declared: ‘I don’t regard prophets as impostors, but imposed upon, as it is written in Ezekiel 14:9 “If a prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the Lord have deceived the prophet”...’¹⁰⁸

Keen to explain his views further to Taylor, Smith stated his regard for the Bible ‘as prospective’, containing ‘an outline’ of all aspects of knowledge – all sciences, all nature. For it was a ‘work of the Devil or God or Nature – which are all one and the same active principle’. Smith insisted on there being a God: ‘I suspect you smile at my simplicity in believing there is such a Being as a Divinity – But I do – and a cunning Devil he is’.¹⁰⁹ Smith detected grounds for shared opinions in Taylor’s own writings on the synonymity between the Bible’s God and Satan. Similar views had previously been arrived at in Christian history, largely through readings of the Book of Job; though Smith’s beliefs probably originated in Edward Irving’s theodicy implying God’s responsibility for the Fall.¹¹⁰ Smith now pointedly cited this new interpretation as the grounds of his opposition to existing Christianity. ‘I regard all Religions as equally Divine and all delusions of the Devil’, he told Taylor; ‘I am determined to set my face against them all without exception ... Hence I bid you Godspeed, and rejoice to see your cause prosper’.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ JES to brother John Smith, 15 June 1831, *Shepherd Smith*, pp. 54-5.

¹⁰⁸ HL RC 199.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, emphasis in the original.

¹¹⁰ See especially, Jakob Boehme’s *Of Heaven and Hell* (1622) and William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790), and Chapter 6, pp. 209-10.

¹¹¹ HL RC 199.

This overtly anti-religious rhetoric of 1831 can appear hard to relate to the ordained Presbyterian, then Southcottian, James Smith of 1828-30, without assuming that Smith had left his religious commitment behind entirely after the Wroe debacle, to embrace Taylor and Carlile's 'infidel' cause. Elements of Smith's chosen rhetoric certainly suggest the bluster of the new devotee intent on impressing the figure of freethought distinction to whom he writes. Yet the ultimate purpose of Smith's letter to Taylor was to advise the radical on ways his message might be made more effective:

But I should like to see your sword two edged that you might cut right and left and do the greater execution. At present you are obliged to deny the truth of History – and thus put arguments in the mouths of your enemies. This is a pondrous chain which you drag along with you, and your cause will have a vile limp in its motions till once you get rid of it. From the short view of my principles ... it is evident that this limp is removed.¹¹²

Smith did not accept Taylor's case for the Bible as a work of fiction, with no historical basis. Rather he believed it a true record of human inspiration from the divine: 'I acknowledge the truth of the historical Bible, excepting of course chronological blunders and other evident mistakes, which were to be expected from an unlettered people, and a crafty devil who was hatching mischief for future generations'. Smith's own recent experience – having 'joined myself with ... a sect who follow modern prophecy' – led him to this belief. The communications claimed by modern prophets revealed, for Smith, the pattern for how humanity and the divine relate in all ages: Southcottianism was 'a perfect parallel to ... ancient Jewish prophesy' [*sic*]. Smith was convinced that this contained the seeds of a potent criticism of the present, established Christianity. He only wished that Taylor would now also enquire into modern prophets: 'for I know that your

¹¹² Ibid.

ingenuity and research would make a powerful weapon of them'.¹¹³ Here Smith located his link between millenarian prophecy and freethought: the two could combine in a battle to replace a corrupted Church, to 'have a blow at the clergy', and secure 'some favourable political change'.¹¹⁴

The factors which may be seen to have led Smith to the position embodied and expressed in his 1831 letter to Robert Taylor – his seeking a working alliance with freethinkers – were also at work, in precisely the same period, in Zion Ward's career. These were factors broadly of place, persons and shared ideas. In Smith's case, the context of Ashton where millenarians and freethinkers readily encountered each other and respective adherents and ideas were especially conspicuous, appears to have allowed relationships to form which were shaped by shared ideas. Smith's correspondence with Taylor was an outcome of this coalescing of place and people, and the surviving evidence of the articulation of those ideas. In the case of Zion Ward, place, people and ideas may be seen to have combined twice, or rather, in one context, one meeting between persons and one set of shared ideas which perceptibly led into a second, related context, meeting and set of ideas.

As Ward toured through the region east of the Pennines – north Nottinghamshire and the Yorkshire West Riding – preaching in public on his messianic claims, his appearances attracted the attention of freethinkers, including a prominent radical (and further ally of Richard Carlile) Lawrence Pitkeithly. As Smith had recognised a potential alliance in prophetic ideas with Ashton radicals and Taylor, Pitkeithly in turn recognised

¹¹³ HL RC 199.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

a potential ally for his and Carlile's radicalism in Ward's message. The following spring, Ward returned to London and began to present his claims in alternative, radical venues. In this milieu, Ward himself encountered Robert Taylor, and by summer 1831, had come to articulate his own views on the correlation of their ideas. By this later stage, Ward and Smith were known to each other, yet the developments of their respective alliances with freethinkers were distinct, and would in turn set the course of their respective and distinct radical careers.

The Person of Ward; the Places of his Mission – the West Riding

Between April and June 1830, Ward preached regularly in the Birmingham Lawrence Street chapel purchased for him by Charles Bradley. Here, Ward's public preaching style consisted largely of reading and explaining biblical and Southcott prophecies. His messianic claims soon attracted adverse attention: audiences interrupted 'in loud yells and hootings', riotous crowds gathered outside the chapel. Ward and his followers were 'pelted with cabbage stalks, dirt and stones'.¹¹⁵ In the second half of 1830, Ward undertook a near continuous public tour, through Nottinghamshire and Yorkshire, with occasional brief returns to London or Birmingham. Accompanied, as ever, by Charles Twort, they attracted growing crowds, sometimes holding forth from a wagon in the open-air, at other times hiring a room or theatre to preach in.¹¹⁶

In many locations, they were vehemently opposed, yet found elements within their audience approving. Denied a place to preach in Mansfield, they moved on to

¹¹⁵ *Birmingham Journal*, 24 Apr. 1830.

¹¹⁶ ZW to Thomas Pierce, 28 Aug. 1830, *Zion's Works*, xiv. 134-5.

Sutton-in-Ashfield, a near-by textile township, attracting an audience of 600 squeezed into a hired room.¹¹⁷ Many were ‘of the noisy and tumultuous sort’, Ward wrote of the meeting; yet ‘there were such a number who were anxious to hear, that they soon stilled the troublers, and demanded silence’. Opening first with a hymn, which ‘appeared pleasing to the people’, Ward and Twort then spoke with few interruptions.¹¹⁸ Many, Ward wrote, were ‘serious and sensible’, and at his conclusion ‘expressed their perfect satisfaction with what they had heard’. Among these were a number professing to be ‘Deists – for in this place there are a great many professedly so’, yet who ‘declared that our arguments on, and explanations of the Scriptures were incontrovertible’.¹¹⁹

By mid-October, Ward reached Barnsley, then also an expanding textile town. Before his arrival, Ward’s Southcottian followers had hired the town theatre, and posted bills and flyers. On both a Sunday morning and afternoon, Ward and Twort took to the stage, before packed audiences. Local newspapers reported on the ‘vast concourse of people ..., led no doubt by curiosity, and partly by a love of the marvellous, and consisting of all classes of persons and professions’ congregated in the theatre. Hundreds were left outside.¹²⁰

Present in the audience at Barnsley was Lawrence Pitkeithly, a Huddersfield draper, who subsequently achieved some prominence in several 1830s radical campaigns, from the Ten Hours and anti-Poor Law movements (he was one of the six local radicals to sign Oastler’s ‘Fixby Hall Compact’) to Chartism, becoming a West Riding delegate to

¹¹⁷ ZW to the Nottingham Brethren, 13 Aug. 1830, *Zion’s Works*, xiv. 129.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 129-30.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

¹²⁰ *Leeds Mercury*, 30 Oct. 1830; *Sheffield Mercury*, 6 Nov. 1830.

the Chartist Convention.¹²¹ At this 1830 stage, Pitkeithly was a relative unknown, but may be traced on lists of Richard Carlile's Huddersfield supporters during the 1820s, and was probably a member of the town's substantial Zetetic Society.¹²² Pitkeithly introduced himself to Ward and Twort after their performance; Ward would later mention him in personal terms in letters, describing him as 'a gentleman we very much esteem'.¹²³ After the Barnsley appearance, Pitkeithly wrote to Carlile in London, notifying him that Ward and Twort, were 'men well worthy of public notice'.¹²⁴

Pitkeithly's reasons for such a recommendation were probably various.¹²⁵ They likely included notice of the similarities existing between Ward's allegorical ideas about the Bible, and his and Carlile's freethought position, in the manner of Ward's Sutton audience. Yet, the approval which Ward received in Sutton was not solely grounded in his theological theories, and nor was Pitkeithly's recognition. Ward was now employing a rhetoric, and articulating particular ideas with an additional appeal to such groups. These centred around the themes of anticlericalism and the injustice allowed by present forms of Christianity.

¹²¹ Howard Mackey, 'Lawrence Pitkeithly', in Joseph Baylen and Norbert Gossman (eds.), *Biographical Dictionary of Modern British Radicals Vol.2: 1830-1870* (Hassocks, 1984), pp. 411-12; J.T.Ward 'Lawrence Pitkeithly' *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 2 June 1958. Pitkeithly commonly receives brief mention in studies of Chartism, including Malcolm Chase, *Chartism: a new history* (Manchester, 2007) pp. 59 and 250. See also Cecil Driver, *Tory Radical: the life of Richard Oastler* (New York, 1946). Pitkeithly was also an Owenite, Harrison, *New Moral World*, p. 227.

¹²² *Lion*, 17 July 1829, p. 96. Pitkeithly's son, Lawrence Junior, founded Huddersfield's pioneering branch of the Owenite secularist organisation, the Association of All Classes of All Nations in 1837. Edward Royle, 'Owenism and the Secularist Tradition: The Huddersfield Secular Society and Sunday School', in Malcolm Chase and Ian Dyck (eds.), *Living and Learning: essays in honour of J.F.C. Harrison* (Aldershot, 1996), p. 203.

¹²³ HL RC 286, Zion Ward to Richard Carlile, Sep. 28 1831. This letter is discussed further in Chapter 8, p. 262.

¹²⁴ *Prompter*, 3 Sep. 1831 p. 769.

¹²⁵ Pitkeithly's letter does not survive among Carlile's papers in the Huntington Library, though it is quoted by Carlile in *Prompter*, 3 Sep. 1831 p. 769.

As he spoke to the audience at Sutton, Ward had noted that ‘when mention was made of the deceptions practised by the Wolves in Sheep’s clothing, the self-called ministers, - frequent cries of ‘That’s true,’ ‘You’re right!’’, were heard from several present’. In criticism of the clergy, he wrote, ‘all ... seemed to unite’.¹²⁶ An anticlerical element to Ward’s message may be detected during his prior struggle for recognition among Southcottians, when representatives of the established Church, such as Thomas Foley and Samuel Eyre, had frustrated his acceptance by more believers. In 1830, Ward had further found his public mission stifled by the oppositional influence of local religious elites. Especially galling for him were the interruptions of his addresses made by religious ministers, and their repeated efforts both to close down his followers’ meeting-houses and deny him a licence to preach.¹²⁷ It was at Sutton that Ward realised the resonance that an anti-Church, anticlerical message could have with a public crowd, and his appearances from this point on were never without it.

At Barnsley, Ward and Twort opened their address with:

a volley of the coarsest abuse on the bishops and clergy of the establishment, and on the ‘black-coated’ gentry in general, sparing neither sect nor party. The bishops were compared to cabbage stalks, and together with the clergy and all ministers of religion, were styled Rev and Right Rev devils, thieves, and robbers. The whole country was next denounced as in a state of complete vassalage to priestly domination.¹²⁸

They were soon interrupted by representatives of the Church, with such heckles as ‘read the terms of your license!’, ‘give us some evidence of your Messiahship!’, and ‘let us have some proof of the *divinity* of your mission, by *raising the dead*, or *opening the eyes*

¹²⁶ ZW to the Nottingham Brethren, 13 Aug. 1830, *Zion’s Works*, xiv. 130.

¹²⁷ ZW to Thomas Pierce, 28 Mar. 1830, *Zion’s Works*, xiv. 59.

¹²⁸ *Leeds Mercury*, 30 Oct. 1830.

of the blind!'. A slanging match ensued, with Ward retorting: did they think 'their Craft was in danger?'¹²⁹ According to the *Leeds Mercury*, 'the uproar became tremendous, some hissing, others shouting, others clapping their hands and encouraging the impostors to proceed'. Cries of 'down with priestcraft!' were echoed from every corner of the crowd. The uproar continued for close to two hours, before 'the two prophets ... took up their hats ... and marched off the stage'.¹³⁰ Such responses were repeated by audiences at Sheffield, and later back in Birmingham. Ward would subsequently produce bills and pamphlets addressing such subjects as 'the true nature of Tithes' – in which he pressed his readers to 'fully discover the delusions of the Priesthood, how they have imposed on the World, and robbed men of their property falsely.'¹³¹ This, together with rhyming bills such as 'Priestcraft detected! Its Overthrow projected!', Ward tellingly assured a Nottingham follower at the time, 'will give more publicity to the Cause than anything yet sent out'.¹³²

The strength of anticlerical sentiment in this period has been surveyed prominently by Eric Evans, and revisited by Frances Knight. Evans isolated clerical magistracy and grievances over tithes and enclosures as the dominant causes of rural anticlerical feeling.¹³³ Knight, writing since 1990s revisionist studies of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Anglicanism, emphasised the extent to which these issues reflected rather social division than opposition to the Church as an institution.¹³⁴ Instead,

¹²⁹ ZW to Thomas Kirk, 25 Oct. 1830, *Zion's Works*, xiv. 156.

¹³⁰ *Leeds Mercury*, 30 Oct. 1830.

¹³¹ ZW to Pierce and Kirk, 7 Jan. 1831, *Zion's Works*, xiv. 162-3.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 162.

¹³³ Eric J. Evans, 'Some Reasons for the Growth of English Rural Anti-Clericalism c.1750-c.1830', *Past and Present*, no. 66 (1975), 84-109.

¹³⁴ Frances Knight, 'Did Anticlericalism Exist in the English Countryside in the Early Nineteenth-Century?', in Nigel Aston and Matthew Cragoe (eds.), *Anticlericalism in Britain C.1500-1914* (Stroud, 2000), pp. 161-3.

she suggested a broader range of factors contributory to anticlerical feeling, including resentment of clergy with private wealth, ill-feeling over burial ceremonies, and the spread of anticlerical literature.¹³⁵ This last factor, synonymous with radical journalists including Carlile, William Cobbett and John Wade – though each anticlerical in different ways – is taken to have influenced specifically urban anti-Church feeling, though church-rates were an urban issue too. Neither Cobbett nor Wade (whose *Black Book* and *Extraordinary Black Book* chronicled the extent of ‘Old Corruption’) wanted to remove the Church as Carlile did. Yet they critiqued the Church for the burden it placed on working people, its top-heavy pay structure, tithes and non-residence – essentially, its corruption and failure to live up to the ideals of Christianity.¹³⁶

Ward played upon a range of these factors: his use of the epithet ‘Priestcraft’ certainly echoed the rhetoric of Carlile’s Paineite radicalism; his re-framing of the tithes issue, and portrayal of the priesthood ‘robbing men of their property’ stoked the economic elements of ill-feeling. When Ward provocatively declared ‘the root of evil’ to be ‘the deception of all Clergy’, he was nonetheless making a point about his own messianic claim: that established Christianity had imposed an incorrect reading of the Bible which put Christians in fear ‘of hell and damnation’. ‘Under this fear’, Ward went on, ‘they are supporting a set of men who from the Archbishop down ... are all ‘perjured’ persons ... they are not called of God, but are the false Christs and false prophets mentioned in the Bible’.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Knight, ‘Did Anticlericalism Exist?’, pp. 167-74.

¹³⁶ For a recent discussion of Church criticism touching on Wade’s critique, see Arthur Burns, ‘English ‘Church Reform’ Revisited, 1780-1840’, in Arthur Burns and Joanna Innes (eds.), *Rethinking the Age of Reform* (Cambridge, 2003). pp. 136-62.

¹³⁷ ZW to Thomas Kirk, 25 Oct. 1830, *Zion’s Works*, xiv. 154-5.

Ward was adept at playing on a further sense that current Christianity was betraying its biblical ideals, readily adopting a vocabulary, only just emerging, of contemporary protest and radical argument, to serve his message. This was in evidence in his Barnsley address. At one stage, the *Leeds Mercury* reported, Ward made a ‘sudden and inflammatory transition ... to colonial slavery, and white slavery in the mills of Bradford, Leeds, and elsewhere, ridiculing the emancipation of the former while the latter existed at home’.¹³⁸ From Ward’s account, this point was part of his accusation against the false clergy. They told people ‘that Christ had redeemed them, whereas no signs of redemption are seen to appear, either from the invisible misery of the mind, or the outward temporal miseries under which the poor labouring classes incessantly groan.’ In this England, ‘thousands of pounds are drawn ... from the hard earnings of the poor people, to send to missionaries of the Black slaves abroad, while all the poor *white* slaves are still kept in bondage at home’.¹³⁹

Ward was speaking just eight days after the publication of Richard Oastler’s first letter to the *Leeds Mercury* on ‘Slavery in Yorkshire’.¹⁴⁰ This letter, which gained Oastler instant fame from its loaded language, marked the beginning of the ten-hours, child-labour and other campaigns for improved conditions in northern mills.¹⁴¹ Ward almost certainly read the *Mercury* that week: he had not yet visited either Bradford or Leeds. Within days, he had skilfully turned the language of contemporaries conscious of how far Christians and the Church were falling short of true Christianity, to his own advantage in

¹³⁸ *Leeds Mercury*, 30 Oct. 1830.

¹³⁹ ZW to Thomas Kirk, 25 Oct. 1830, *Zion’s Works*, xiv. 155.

¹⁴⁰ *Leeds Mercury*, 16 Oct. 1830.

¹⁴¹ On Oastler’s employment of biblical rhetoric see Eileen Groth Lyon, *Politicians in the Pulpit: Christian Radicalism in Britain from the Fall of the Bastille to the Disintegration of Chartism* (Aldershot, 1999), pp. 140-5.

stressing the failure and falsity of such religion. It was surely this skill that Lawrence Pitkeithly noted, as much as Ward's theology.

The Person of Ward; the Places of his Mission – London

Ward spent January and February 1831 among his followers in Birmingham and Nottingham, before heading for London, with Twort, in early March. The two preached first at a chapel in Hackney Road retained by their London Southcottian following. Within days, however, this group provided the funds for him to appear on Sunday afternoons, at the Philadelphian Chapel off Finsbury Square.¹⁴² In both venues Ward preached to a 'crowded ... respectable audience', made up, he wrote, 'chiefly with professed Christians, and a great number also of those of Infidel principles ... who deny the Scriptures altogether'.¹⁴³

In entering the Philadelphian, run by the radical Pierre Baume and advertised for 'free discussion on political and theological subjects', Ward entered, once again, the distinct milieu of London's heterodox and radical 'underworld' mapped by McCalman and Prothero.¹⁴⁴ As was seen in Chapter 3, eleven years before Home Office agents had equated Ward's appearances alongside Samuel Sibley in the east-end Southcottian chapel with such an underworld.¹⁴⁵ By the early 1830s, just as many chapels and assembly-rooms were operated by ultra-radicals across London, though more now demonstrated the so-called 'march of mind' with their 'rational discussion', than the 'vulgar blasphemy'

¹⁴² ZW to Charles Bradley, Mar. 12 1831, *Zion's Works*, xiv. 180.

¹⁴³ BL Add MSS 43509/68 and 76, 9 Mar. and 22 Apr. 1831.

¹⁴⁴ McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, pp. 198-9; Prothero, *Artisans and Politics*, pp. 260-1.

¹⁴⁵ See Chapter 3, pp. 124-6.

and rough ‘indecent’ of radical culture of the 1790s and post-war years.¹⁴⁶ Ward and his supporters may have bought their way into such a space initially, through hiring the venue for a few hours a week, but over the next months, this proved a setting he remained within, as the venues where Ward appeared were consistently sites of radical religious and political discussion.¹⁴⁷

It was following their return from Ashton, in late-March 1831, that Ward and Twort first found themselves in the largest, and most popular London radical venue, as they ‘went to hear Mr Taylor at the Rotunda’.¹⁴⁸ On this occasion Ward and Twort were members of the audience, and heard Taylor speak on the allegories present in the Gospels. On Ward’s account, Taylor allowed him on stage: ‘I told the people then, how far we approved of Mr Taylor’s doctrine ... and said that his learning and science would produce more good than all the mummery of Popes, Bishops and Priests ever done, or can do’. For this, ‘there was a thundering and reiterated clap from the whole house’.¹⁴⁹ Taylor responded: ‘Well, gentlemen and friends, I can go on now with good grace, seeing that I have received the approval of the messiah himself’.¹⁵⁰

Taylor’s reported response is evidence that he was familiar with Ward’s claims by this point; Ward’s presence in the Rotunda and his declaration imply one of a number of interactions could have taken place. Ward may have learned of Taylor through Pitkeithly in Yorkshire, through Smith in Ashton or through his audiences in London. His listening to Taylor’s address evidently acquainted him with the radical’s allegorical idea. It was

¹⁴⁶ On the ‘march of mind’ see McCalman, *Radical underworld*, pp. 181-203.

¹⁴⁷ ZW to Bristol followers, 21 May 1831, *Zion’s Works*, xiv. 244.

¹⁴⁸ BL Add MS 43509/117, 17 Sep. 1831.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

several months after this that Ward's published writings included explicit references to Taylor and demonstrated the alliance that Ward thought possible in their ideas.

In May, Ward began a weekly publication – *The Judgment Seat of Christ* – ‘perhaps the only occasion,’ Edward Thompson quipped, when ‘Christ has been credited with the week-by-week editorial conduct of a popular journal’.¹⁵¹ After several weeks’ narrating Ward’s spiritual autobiography, the July editions contain the first evidence of Ward relating his own thought to Taylor’s. Here, Ward acknowledged Taylor’s ‘great talent in the science of astronomy, and great ingenuity in applying it to the Scriptures’, but deliberately used this to second his own allegorical reading; a reading which came from revelation and not reason. ‘There is a science above that,’ Ward wrote, ‘unto which Mr Robert Taylor has not attained, neither can he or any other man attain to it by his learning.’¹⁵² This was visionary experience: ‘The Word, God, came unto me ... my righteousness [is] to be *revealed*.’¹⁵³ Ward stressed that he was not only a fulfilment of prophecies, but a fulfilment of the very allegories Taylor preached; beyond the Bible and prophetic traditions, Ward now claimed to be the fulfilment of Taylor’s deist cosmology also.

This appropriation of Taylor’s ideas is an example of Ward’s continuing tendency to apply thoughts, ideas, prophecies and predictions of others to himself, to explain in yet new terms, his essential point of being the Christ. Ward was the theological *bricoleur* with a short attention span: his writings about himself essentially reflected the influence of what he had recently read or heard. Ward reported ‘making researches into the history

¹⁵¹ Thompson, *Making*, p. 879.

¹⁵² Zion Ward, *The Judgment Seat, of Christ*, 25 July 1831, p. 106.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

of ancient times, and we will not stop till certainty is obtained on the subject of Christ'.¹⁵⁴ In this, he was seeking to discover for himself the historical basis for Taylor's assertion that the person of Christ had never existed. Though it was Ward's personal revelation that 'whatsoever is said in the Bible, from one end to the other, was said unto him, and all was fulfilled in him', he nonetheless considered Taylor's historical 'evidence' useful in supplementing his own claims.¹⁵⁵ Ward was confident that 'in a very short time we shall be able to prove to the world from history, that our assertion ... is true, viz. that there never was a man born of a virgin woman, as the Christian world have said; and then will the refuge of lies be swept away'.¹⁵⁶ In this way, by the summer of 1831, both Zion Ward and James Smith had encountered the freethought ideas of Taylor, and each seen some alternative use for them in the furtherance of their own beliefs and priorities.

Though distinct, a certain murkiness remains over the complete independence of the influences and points of contact shaping the interaction between Southcottians and freethinkers in 1830-31. The nature of the sources used to trace these disallows definite conclusions. Was Smith first aware of Taylor from Ashton acquaintances, so encouraged Ward to follow up such links in London? Did Ward forge the first connection through Pitkeithly, and direct Smith to write to Taylor? Ultimately, evidence of the separation of Smith and Ward's activities in this period is less important than the recovery of the distinctiveness of the contexts and intellectual conditions leading to their alliances with freethought. These would determine the different radical directions each would take subsequently. Ward's familiarity with the preaching spaces of an urban radical milieu,

¹⁵⁴ BL Add MSS 43509/82-83, 20 May 1831.

¹⁵⁵ BL Add MS 43509/78, 5 May 1831.

¹⁵⁶ BL Add MS 43509/82, 20 May 1831.

and his readiness to appropriate a radical cause or rhetoric to serve his own mission, contributed to his radical fame in 1831-33. Smith's interaction with Ashton radicalism had influences beyond freethought, shaping his sympathy for trades unionism in 1833-34. These two distinct early 1830s radical careers, forged in alliances with freethought yet built on a new Southcottian understandings of human agency and the millennium, are turned to now, in Chapters 8 and 9.

Chapter 8

THE POLITICAL MESSIAH

The Road to the Rotunda

In their first six months in London in 1831, Ward and Twort spoke in a variety of venues, including Pierre Baume's Philadelphian Chapel, rooms in Cateaton Street in the City and the Southcottian chapel in Hackney.¹ Eventually their London following secured, on a more permanent basis, a chapel off the Borough High Street, south of the River, for Sunday meetings. This venue Ward described as 'large and commodious, with a good gallery all round', and was paid for by Ward's wealthiest London supporter, Thomas Crossley.²

At the Borough Chapel from late-June, Ward's reputation grew, attracting ever larger audiences to hear his message. To generate publicity for his appearances at the new venue, an 'Advertisement' was issued offering a £500 reward to anyone that could 'bring forward a Bishop, sitting at the head of any Sect or Party of Religion that will answer the description given by Paul, in his 1st Epistle to Timothy, Chapter iii', including being 'blameless ... not given to wine ... not greedy of filthy lucre'.³ Such provocative displays brought not only increasing attention from those with anticlerical sympathies but

¹ British Library (BL) Add MSS 43509/68, 76 and 83, Zion Ward (ZW) to Nottingham, 9 Mar. 1831, ZW to Charles Bradley, 22 Apr. and 20 May 1831; ZW to Charles Bradley, 12 Mar. 1831, *Zion's Works*, xiv, 180.

² ZW to Thomas Pierce, 18 May 1831, *Zion's Works*, xiv, 234. The Chapel in Borough Court had little association with radicalism before this date. Iorwerth Prothero, *Artisans and Politics, in Early Nineteenth-Century London: John Gast and His Times* (London, 1979), pp. 262, 281.

³ The National Archives (TNA) HO 64/17/83. This is reproduced (without attribution to Ward) in Eileen Groth Lyon, *Politicians in the Pulpit: Christian Radicalism in Britain from the Fall of the Bastille to the Disintegration of Chartism* (Aldershot 1999), p. 91.

opposition from those without them. Representatives of the Society for the Suppression of Vice attended Ward's talks; Southcottians who did not accept his claims made trouble as he spoke, and a mob collected outside Ward and Twort's lodgings. These were probably not up to much as they reportedly shouted: 'He's a pretty Christ ... to live in such a rookery'.⁴ The mob, which Ward bitterly believed was encouraged by the Vice Society – the 'religious hypocrites' – increased the vehemence of his antagonism to established religion. Yet, he was convinced his theme was getting through: 'the Chapel is now filled to excess ... there are many thoughtful persons who attend us, that are beginning to see the deceptive *trade* of Priestcraft.'⁵

It is difficult to trace anything of the negotiations undertaken to secure Ward the use of his early radical spaces. In this period, there are familiar cases of controversial religious groups, denied the use of conventional church or chapel spaces, securing rent-arrangements with venue owners of no sympathy with their doctrine – most notably Robert Owen's lease of his Gray's Inn Street hall to Edward Irving and his followers.⁶ There appears here to have been some trade-off by owners, many of whom were radicals themselves, between consistency with other events held at the venue, and a religious body's ability to pay. By early 1831, Baume, owner of the Philadelphian, was struggling with falling attendance at his political meetings, and therefore with revenues, so probably welcomed Ward's supporters' rent. It is unclear if the owner of the Borough Chapel was in a similar position.⁷ Nevertheless, Ward's meetings had increasing amounts in common with other radical meetings held in such London venues. McCalman's identification of a

⁴ BL Add MS 43509/103, ZW to Charles Bradley, 27 July 1831.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ J.F.C. Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites in Britain and America: The Quest for the New Moral World* (London, 1969), p. 113.

⁷ TNA HO 64/11/147, 152, 205.

trend among radicals by the late-1820s, to meet in ‘chapels’ for distinctly deist ‘worship’ and hear preaching on allegories and more mystical interpretations of the Bible – a departure from the Spencean debates and more ribald meetings of a generation before – reframes the extent to which Ward’s message would have appeared familiar.⁸ Meetings at the Borough Chapel appear to have mixed elements of a religious meeting – hymns and a sermon – yet with the sermon taking on increasingly the form of a lecture, an argument, on how conventional Christianity was a fraud and a myth, due to erroneous existing interpretations of the Bible, and a setting forth of Ward’s own allegorical reading. An apparent influence on this mode of presentation was Robert Taylor and the style of meeting that Ward and Twort had witnessed at the Rotunda in March.

In his public appearances and tone, Ward had demonstrated his ready appropriation of radical culture to serve the cause of the Southcottian messiah. Yet from the summer of 1831, Ward would find this radical culture now, in turn, willing to appropriate him and his message, for their own cause. First among the appropriators was Richard Carlile.

Carlile had been arrested, tried and imprisoned (yet again) in January 1831, this time for a seditious play and article defending the ‘Captain Swing’ rick-burners.⁹ From his cell in the Giltspur Street Compter, with the aid of sons, sympathisers, and sponsors Carlile continued to manage the Rotunda as a space where both the political and religious establishments were challenged.¹⁰ As he had during his time in gaol in the early 1820s,

⁸ Iain McCalman, *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries and Pornographers in London, 1795-1840* (first published, 1988; Oxford, 1993), pp. 198-202.

⁹ Joel Wiener, *Radicalism and Freethought in Nineteenth-Century Britain: The Life of Richard Carlile* (Westport, 1983), p. 175; On the play, see David Worrall, *Theatrical Revolution: Drama, Censorship and Romantic Period Subcultures 1773-1832* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 340-60.

¹⁰ *Prompter*, 13 Nov. 1830; Wiener, *Richard Carlile*, p. 164-5.

Carlile also edited his current radical journals. In 1831-32, these were *The Prompter*, followed by *The Isis* and *Cosmopolite*.¹¹ In July 1831, Robert Taylor was himself imprisoned for blasphemous libel, and Carlile lost his pre-eminent Rotunda attraction. The prospects for keeping the theatre open looked bleak, as it was losing Carlile five pounds a week.¹² In August, he offered the venue for use on Wednesdays to the National Union of Working Classes (NUWC) – an organisation whose programme and leaders he despised in that grand tradition of the political left of reserving the acutest odium for those differing on the most minor points of radical dogma.¹³ At the same point, he approached Ward to offer him the Rotunda on Thursdays evenings.

The arrangement offered, similar to that agreed with the NUWC, was that Ward could appear free of charge, and Carlile would keep the gate-receipts. Ward's correspondence from the time notes his receiving 'an offer from Mr Carlile, of the Rotunda where Mr Taylor used to preach'. Of this he was 'very glad, it being so noted a place'.¹⁴ In a circular letter to his national following Ward announced his acceptance of Carlile's offer as considerable progress for their cause:

The Rotunda, which is a public Theatre, and a very noted place where men of science and literature speak, and has been devoted to that purpose, now rings with our doctrine, and we are well received by the People, and in short the Cause is prospering, and Priestcraft will soon be put down to rise no more, by the knowledge of the True God and Eternal Life.¹⁵

¹¹ Wiener, *Richard Carlile*, p. 173.

¹² Prothero, *Artisans and Politics*, p. 281; *Prompter*, 17 Sep. 1831, p. 798.

¹³ The NUWC, an amalgamation of a number of mostly London-based radical groups, disagreed with Carlile in their view of the Reform Bill. While Carlile saw the Bill as a step towards achieving a republic, the NUWC wanted universal suffrage, and viewed the Whig Bill a betrayal: John Belchem, *Popular Radicalism in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Basingstoke, 1996), pp. 59-64.

¹⁴ BL Add MS 43509/112, ZW to Charles Bradley, 2 Sep. 1831.

¹⁵ 'Circular Letter to Believers', September 1831, *Zion's Works*, xiv. 293-4.

Carlile had known of Ward since the autumn before, when Lawrence Pitkeithly had first assured him that Ward and Twort ‘were men well worthy of public notice’.¹⁶ He was surely also aware of their subsequent interaction with Taylor. Yet his offer was almost certainly a result of their popularity at the Borough Chapel, and the proximity of their current message to Taylor’s and his own. These points Carlile took care to mention as he gave notice of his new tenants in *The Prompter*.¹⁷ Initially, he referred to Ward’s following as ‘a new sect of Deists’, who had recently made much progress since establishing their ‘place of worship’ in Chapel Court, in the Borough. Their doctrine was summarised as being centred on ‘the Bible ... interpreted as an allegory’, with ‘every part of it ... made to refer to natural things, and reasonable circumstances’.¹⁸ At this stage, Carlile had either not met Ward and Twort, or was seriously underplaying his knowledge of their claims. He admitted to having ‘seen one of their pamphlets’; and on this basis, he had

no hesitation in saying, that these men, in their mode of interpreting the allegorical Scriptures, will beat the Archbishop of Canterbury in argument, and bear off the palm of superiority from any mixed and unpacked audience. They are bold and persevering men, and are sure to succeed on such a soil of fanaticism as is England.¹⁹

After large audiences attended Ward’s first appearances at the Rotunda, and a further Sunday afternoon slot was offered, Carlile was more open in promoting Ward and Twort as they defined themselves, in following editions of *The Prompter*. He reported taking

¹⁶ *Prompter*, 3 Sep. 1831, p. 769.

¹⁷ *Prompter*, 27 Aug. 1831, p. 752.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 752.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 752.

great pleasure in hearing ‘the new Jesus Christ and his Disciple ... had given very great satisfaction to my most reasonable friends’.²⁰

That the arch-rationalist and committed atheist Carlile should opt to promote Ward, the millennialist messiah, can appear a case of political pragmatism, where principles played second fiddle to the survival of the cause itself. Given the knife-edge economics of chapel rents, Carlile’s initial invitation to Ward and Twort to fill the Rotunda seems just like any other deal between a proprietor and a preacher with divergent opinions, who found common interest in meeting-space and gate-receipt. Yet, there is a dimension to Carlile’s weekly promotion of Ward and Twort’s appearances, which suggests he had moved beyond explicitly economic pragmatism, to see the benefit of Ward’s message for himself.

For Carlile, Ward was more than a crowd-drawing tool, and turnstile turner. Rather, he was a continuation of the work Taylor had done, and its expansion to reach a wider constituency. In publicly emphasising Ward’s ‘reasonableness’ and satisfaction to ‘reasonable’ friends, Carlile could maintain his rationalist, materialist reputation. Yet he wrote in *The Prompter* after their first appearance:

I rejoice to have such men in action with me, and without detracting at all from the unequalled genius and eloquence of my brother martyr, I think with many of my friends, that this new Messiah will work more numerical good, than we have done, who are locked up [Carlile and Taylor]. They will shape themselves more congenially to the Bible-besotted multitude. They will give the mysterious a reasonable interpretation; and though the Rev Mr Taylor was doing this, it must be confessed, that his mode of doing it was only suited to comparatively intelligent and strong-minded men, which are but a very small minority of the general community.²¹

²⁰ *Prompter*, 3 Sep. 1831, pp. 766-7.

²¹ *Prompter*, 3 Sep. 1831, p. 767.

Carlile saw Ward's appearing at the Rotunda as maintaining and extending the attack on the 'clerical despotism', the social and mental influence of religion, which he had consistently intended for the place. As Carlile's biographer, Joel Wiener, has shown, throughout the 1820s and 1830s Carlile evolved the ways in which he attempted to achieve his convinced aim of religion's destruction, the expunging of its influence from the human mind.²² His support for Taylor's lampooning efforts were a stage when he hoped religion would fall under ridicule. His support for Ward (which Wiener does not mention) may be viewed in a related light. It must also be set beside existing studies of subversive behaviour and the undermining of inherited meanings and symbols at the Rotunda.²³

Zion Ward was a useful figure to Carlile, in his message and his performance. That Carlile chose to advertise Ward in *The Prompter* as an opportunity to see 'the messiah on a Thursday', and his description of his appearances as 'an entirely new species of religious entertainment', suggests a further intended overlap with Taylor's work. The more attention granted to Ward's allegorising and claim to be Christ on the Bible's authority, the more Carlile hoped the 'Bible-besotted multitude' would doubt.²⁴

Agents of the Messiah

Ward and Twort first appeared on the Rotunda platform on 1 September 1831. Ward reported speaking 'for about two hours upon the corrupt state of religion, and showing that it must all come down, and that we had the means with us to accomplish its

²² Wiener, *Richard Carlile*, p. 106.

²³ See Chapter 7, p. 236.

²⁴ *Prompter*, 17 Sep. 1831, p. 799.

overthrow'.²⁵ Greater details of Ward's subject in this and subsequent Rotunda speeches were recorded in a two-part publication issued the following year, *The Standard of Zion*.²⁶ This reveals that his themes included the errors of existing Christianity, but he gave longer discourses on his basis for believing that an alternative, better religion was being commenced in himself. Ward did not pass up the opportunity afforded by the Rotunda platform to introduce a wider audience to his own doctrines. Ward declared that his intention was to 'set forth the Truth of the Scriptures', not with a flourish of human learning or a display of eloquence 'but with plainness of speech'. Human wisdom had so far constructed a vast 'Babel Tower' of meanings of the Scriptures to support present Christianity, yet he Zion, would now pull down this tower by the wisdom he had now received from an alternative divine source – a stream of spiritual revelation like that of the Old Testament Prophets. He declared himself as 'being made partaker of the Divine Nature'.²⁷

After addressing the familiar themes of division among existing Churches and the errors and corruptions of religious ministers from all sects, Ward turned to the biblical promise that God would 'send forth divine light and knowledge in the latter times'.²⁸ The Bible was not history, but an allegory to be wholly fulfilled in these last days, through an individual experiencing the indwelling of God's spirit. The people's awakening to the Bible being an allegory – that 'all the Types, Figures, Shadows, Parables, and Allegories

²⁵ BL Add MS 43509/112, ZW to Charles Bradley, 2 Sep. 1831.

²⁶ Zion Ward, *The Standard of Zion... being the substance of a Discourse delivered by Zion, at the Rotunda, Black Friars Road, London*, (Birmingham, 1832); idem, *The Standard of Zion... being the substance of the Second Discourse delivered by Zion, at the Rotunda* (Birmingham, 1832).

²⁷ Ward, *Standard of Zion Part 1*, pp. 5-6.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 7-9.

mentioned throughout Holy Writ are fulfilled in him’ – would be the first step in the foundation of the new ‘sanctified and cleansed church promised in scripture’.²⁹

Ward was enthused by the response he received each week. ‘The public mind is now in great agitation about the Cause’, he wrote to Nottingham followers; ‘vast numbers flock to the Rotunda to hear us. We have engaged it now for Sunday afternoons: no power can stop us – the day is our own.’³⁰ Elsewhere, Ward confidently asserted he and Twort to be currently the biggest attraction at Carlile’s venue: ‘At the Rotunda, both Christians, Jews and Infidels speak, on alternate nights, but the majority of the People give us the preference.’³¹ Such success, Ward was well aware, had been made possible by the assistance, the patronage even, of a figure who could not currently accept his messiah-hood – Carlile. Yet, the closeness of this incongruous radical relationship, now revealed to have developed over the autumn of 1831 in letters never previously studied, played a significant role in shaping Ward’s – and a significant number of his Southcottian followers’ – attitude to political radicalism.³²

After the first few appearances at the Rotunda, Ward and Twort visited Carlile in his prison cell. To Charles Bradley, Ward wrote that Twort ‘and I dined the other day with Mr Carlile, at the Compter, taking him books and veal cutlets’.³³ A sense that Carlile did not take the two entirely seriously is given by his writing to Taylor at the time that ‘God almighty came down and [ate] veal cutlets with Abraham, and [now] he had the

²⁹ Ward, *Standard of Zion Part 1*, pp. 40, 56.

³⁰ ZW to Thomas Pierce, 6 Sep. 1831, *Zion’s Works*, xiv. 305.

³¹ ZW to Charles Bradley, [September] 1831, *Zion’s Works*, xiv. 351.

³² Many of the references to Carlile in the Ward papers in the British Library (BL Add MS 43509) are edited out of the reproduced versions in Holinsworth’s *Zion’s Works*, vol. xiv. No existing study has noted these omissions. Two further letters relating to Ward were discovered in the Carlile Papers, Huntington Library, while researching this thesis. These had not previously been linked to Ward, so were not cited in previous studies. Huntington Library (HL) Richard Carlile Papers, RC 286, Zion Ward to Richard Carlile, 28 Sep. 1831; RC 262, Twort to Richard Carlile, 29 Oct. 1831.

³³ BL Add MS 43509/117, ZW to Charles Bradley, 17 Sep. 1831.

honour of eating veal cutlets, that hour with Christ and his chief disciple'.³⁴ Letters to and from Carlile in prison followed. A Ward letter from the end of September, and a letter from Twort, written in Ward's stead, from the end of October, survive among Carlile's papers in the Huntington Library. These indicate that prison visits were not unusual, and apparently welcomed, during this time: 'Business has prevented our paying you a visit for several days last which you are so kind to say you will always gladly receive from us, you may be assured then that the pleasure of meeting will be always mutual'.³⁵ Further copies of Ward's works were requested by Carlile, including a set of *The Judgment Seat of Christ*. In both September and October letters there are references to their mutual acquaintance, the Huddersfield radical Lawrence Pitkeithly, his contact with Carlile and with Ward and Twort's respective Huddersfield supporters.³⁶ The letters each also contain brief comments which are suggestive of how Ward and Twort were really viewed by their new radical sponsors.

In his September letter, Ward mentions having 'seen in a letter of yours addressed to the Rev Robert Taylor, the following words. "I hate the man who calls himself the son of God"'. Rather than believe that this might demonstrate deception on Carlile's part, Ward declared:

Since we have had the pleasure of seeing you and the honour of conversing with you a little, we think your meaning must be that you hate the mock sanctity and diabolicle [*sic*] sonship assumed by those whom you know to be sons of violence, and oppressors of the weak ... the minister[s].³⁷

³⁴ See Genesis 18:1-8.

³⁵ HL RC 286, ZW to Carlile, 28 Sep. 1831.

³⁶ *Ibid.*; HL RC 262, Twort to Carlile, 29 Oct. 1831.

³⁷ HL RC 286, ZW to Carlile, 28 Sep. 1831.

In his late-October letter, Twort narrated to Carlile an occasion, one evening meeting at the Rotunda, when he lost his temper with Carlile's close supporter, Julian Hibbert, after overhearing him express delight at Twort and Ward suffering a misfortune.³⁸ When told that some of Ward's writings had been misplaced, Twort had heard Hibbert 'exclame [*sic*], that it served Mr Ward and Twort very right they deserved to loose it'. This, Twort found 'damnable provoking' and 'could not help speaking very sharply to him, perhaps to[o] sharp'.³⁹

In his handing over copies of his works, his visits and his correspondence, Ward hoped to convert Carlile to his message. He went to similar efforts with Taylor, though he was prevented from visiting him in person.⁴⁰ In the surviving September letter, Ward took the opportunity to press the principal point of difference he perceived to lie between him and Carlile: the existence of God.

What is God, why I am told, a Spirit, so he is, and not a being som[e]thing in the shape of a man sitting on a throne. God himself knows not where – the God that is my redeemer from darkness, is light, well if I have light, I have God. And I have light to discover all the Christian hierarchy a delusion, and its spirit of darkness by which it was established and carried on to this time ... truth has brought me forth, and judgment has redeemed me.⁴¹

To his body of supporters in Nottingham, Ward explained his involvement with Carlile, and through him, his additional contact with Taylor. He acknowledged a difference lay between them: 'though we cannot yet join with Taylor nor Carlile, yet we trust that they will yet join with us; and you may be sure that those called Infidels are not half so great

³⁸ HL RC 262, Twort to Carlile, 29 Oct. 1831.

³⁹ HL RC 262, Twort to Carlile, 29 Oct. 1831.

⁴⁰ BL Add MS 43509/117, ZW to Charles Bradley, 17 Sep. 1831.

⁴¹ HL RC 286, ZW to Carlile, 28 Sep. 1831.

Infidels as those called Christians.’⁴² To Birmingham, Ward further wrote of Carlile and Taylor: ‘there is something admirable about them, and that which compels me to esteem them; and my petition shall be that when God shall display his power more openly they may see it and convert.’⁴³

Ward urged his Southcottian supporters across the country to subscribe to Carlile’s journals.⁴⁴ As early as the end of September, the Birmingham congregation took *The Prompter* and back-issues of Taylor’s *Devil’s Pulpit*.⁴⁵ Ward was called upon to counteract some unease among his wider Southcottian following for his close relation to notorious figures they would previously have had nothing to do with. He argued that supporting them was ‘a means of facilitating our glorious Cause’, allowing the public to see ‘that we are not Bigots, but friends of all men’.⁴⁶ In early November, Ward wrote:

Taylor and Carlile are wheels in the Great Machine, and are doing their work and they minister in their way to us ... Taylor’s works are a corroboration of Zion’s, and proves their truth. Yet you see that Taylor (of his own mind) is striving to put out the idea of a God from the human mind, and so is Carlile. Yet we esteem them, and go with them as far as we can, knowing that they are instruments to help in pulling down the old rubbishing building [of Christianity].⁴⁷

In this reflection, Ward was arriving at a position where he could conceive – and encouraged his millennial followers to conceive – of infidels, and others beyond the pale of convinced believers, as unconscious agents of God’s redemptive work. In declaring himself to be the Southcottian messiah in the late-1820s, Ward had transformed the

⁴² BL Add MS 43509/119, ZW to Thomas Pierce, 22 Sep. 1831.

⁴³ BL Add MS 43509/125, ZW to Charles Bradley, 5 Nov. 1831.

⁴⁴ BL Add MS 43509/119, ZW to Thomas Pierce, 22 Sep. 1831.

⁴⁵ HL RC 286, ZW to Carlile, 28 Sep. 1831.

⁴⁶ BL Add MS 43509/119, ZW to Thomas Pierce, 22 Sep. 1831.

⁴⁷ BL Add MS 43509/125, ZW to Charles Bradley, 5 Nov. 1831.

existing understandings of divine and human agency of his Southcottian followers. From their waiting for God to act, in sending a messiah, Ward's 'arrival', or emergence as a 'new being', established a new conception of divine agency – one where God was understood to have *acted*, and *to be acting* in the messiah. Ward himself was now the agent of the millennium – the divine spirit dwelling within him supposedly spreading out to all who accepted his claim. God's divine agency and Ward's human agency were effectively merged; a sense of agency in serving the divine was available to followers serving the messiah. Yet, if this messiah carrying out God's work on earth had an identified cause or a specific task to complete similar to that which others were attempting – others who did not recognise the messianic, divine nature of this task – what did that make such others? They served the cause of God's messiah, yet did not know that they did so. And what did that make such wider popular movements, within which they carried out such messiah-serving tasks? As Ward declared his cause to be one of liberty and a free Church, then movements directed at overthrowing existing Christianity and ending existing constraints on liberty, could in turn be recognised to be aiding the work of God in the world.

The attainment of this way of thinking proceeded from Ward's work with Taylor and Carlile. To Charles Bradley, Ward reflected on 'the kindness of Mr Carlile to me, God's instrument of Life'. This, he insisted would 'not be forgotten, and my prayer shall be that it may not ... I have shed tears in secret for him and Taylor, desiring that they may yet acknowledge that Power by whom all things are brought forth, and move in their

perfect order'.⁴⁸ In Ward's view, because, 'Mr Taylor and Mr Carlile, and all who stand as they stand ... deny the everlasting and eternal existence of man in God [and] ... spurn at revelation', they showed themselves to 'have not the Spirit of the Love of God in them'. This made it impossible for it to be solely 'their inventions or wisdom that will bring about God's purposes'.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, it was clear to Ward that because Taylor's works were 'a corroboration of Zion's', then, 'God has given him a wonderful gift, and he is certainly a ministering spirit ... it will be seen that Taylor has written by a power not his own, but of God'.⁵⁰ Where figures such as Taylor and Carlile corroborated the cause of God's agent, Ward, so they were to be welcomed, recognised for their service, and supported in turn. From this position, reached in Autumn 1831, Ward and his Southcottian followers were set on a new course of engagement with further elements of English political radicalism – the context where they would find other 'instruments to help in pulling down' existing Christianity and the establishment. With these elements they would 'go ... as far as we can'.⁵¹

Radicalism and Reform

Ward preached at the Rotunda until the week the House of Lords rejected the Reform Bill on 8 October 1831. His addresses continued to feature the themes of his first appearance – 'the corrupt state of religion' and its overthrow prophesied in the Scriptures.⁵² Yet, he

⁴⁸ BL Add MS 43509/125, ZW to Charles Bradley Senior, 5 Nov. 1831. For the remainder of the chapter, Ward's correspondence is distinguished by whether it is directed to Charles Bradley Senior, or his son, Charles Bradley Junior.

⁴⁹ BL Add MS 43509/125, ZW to Charles Bradley Senior, 5 Nov. 1831.

⁵⁰ ZW to Charles Bradley Junior, 5 Nov. 1831, *Zion's Works*, xiv. 329.

⁵¹ BL Add MS 43509/125, ZW to Charles Bradley Senior, 5 Nov. 1831.

⁵² BL Add MS 43509/112, ZW to Charles Bradley Senior, 3 Sep. 1831.

came increasingly to combine this message with references to the broader causes of contemporary radicalism. The first of these was the ongoing campaign for freedom of expression, which during late-1831 centred on organising petitions for Robert Taylor's release from prison. The entire London radical press – beyond Carlile's particular branch – had protested the conviction, and Joseph Hume, the utilitarian independent MP presented petitions for Taylor in the Commons. Taylor's case became a stick with which radicals within and outside Parliament realised they could beat the Whigs. For MPs such as Hume and the radical Henry Hunt, the imprisonment of a man for his religious opinions embodied Whig hypocrisy (as they had made this a key principle of opposition to the preceding Tory administration). Ward explicitly directed his supporters in the Midlands to copy the public petition 'to liberate Taylor, and to pass an act against Prosecution for Opinion's sake', and then 'lay it open for signature in the Chapel; let every one of our friends sign it, and all the people that will'.⁵³

No instruction could perhaps be more striking as a representation of the alteration in attitude to politics and radical change among Birmingham Southcottians than this. Twenty years before a petition would also have lain open for signatures at the believers' chapel in Birmingham, only it would have been to God, and for 'Christ's glorious and peaceable Kingdom to be established'. Now, in 1831 Southcottians were instructed by their Shiloh to sign a petition to the English Parliament, and for a cause intimately related to worldly political radicalism.

During September, a public meeting in Smithfield was organised by leading radicals 'to petition the King' for the same cause, and at which, Ward reported, 'we were

⁵³ BL Add MS 43509/119, ZW to Thomas Pierce, 22 Sep. 1831.

invited to be on the hustings'.⁵⁴ Proposed for the day of William IV's coronation, the meeting did not meet the approval of the London authorities, and the Mayor outlawed it. Ward's invitation onto the hustings of a radical meeting may indicate his burgeoning celebrity beyond the Rotunda and Borough Chapel.⁵⁵ It certainly indicated his growing familiarity with wider groups of London radicals, beyond Carlile, and his introduction to their wider concerns. After this, Ward, as the prophet and envoy of millennial freedom that he believed he was, began to declare that people 'must work to gain their freedom, both as political and religious beings, and glory must be the end of their labour'.

Understanding himself to be the 'Word of Truth', he wrote to Birmingham followers:

let us use this word wisely ... let all join in the fight as well as in the faith, and the day is our own; and we shall have the happiness of freeing our fellow men – with our own liberty and freedom – from the domination of that tyrannical power. ... [may] the certain hope of victory give us a zest to press forward, saying, 'Huzza! Vive la liberte!! Reform! Reform'!! And is not the foundation stone laid in Zion for real reform?⁵⁶

Here, amidst yet more borrowed rhetoric, Ward directed his Southcottian believers determinedly towards engagement with the radical campaign for political reform.

The response of London radicals to the Lords' voting down the Reform Bill in October was immediate and dramatic: in the following days several mammoth meetings were held, thousands accompanied Henry Hunt to the Rotunda to hear him condemn the Bill, the Whigs, and, in a line of attack taken up across the country in the following days, the Bishops, whose voting pattern was pounced upon as causing the Bill to fail. From this point on, as historians of radicalism have long delineated, the disparate radical

⁵⁴ ZW to Thomas Pierce, 6 Sep. 1831, *Zion's Works*, xiv. 304; BL Add MS 43509/116, ZW to Charles Bradley Senior, 17 Sep. 1831.

⁵⁵ *Republican and Radical Reformer*, 20 Aug. 1831, p. 6.

⁵⁶ BL Add MS 43509/116 ZW to Charles Bradley, 17 Sep. 1831.

collectives, groups, unions and factions, splintered further in excited, moderate and extreme opinion on Reform – its rejection, the required improvements of the Bill, or the need to pass any Bill to head-off more revolutionary elements.⁵⁷ From here until the ‘Days of May’, the building of extra-Parliamentary pressure for Reform continued, as provincial political unions used the perceived threat of uncontrollable radical elements to press their case. This was eventually released in the Whig passing of the Bill, leaving the ‘Rotundanist’, ultra elements of radicalism bitter at the betrayal of the ‘working people’ by the now enfranchised ‘middle classes’.⁵⁸

Ward’s participation within these developments was peripheral and provincial, as was that of his Southcottian adherents. Though very much aware of developments, only Twort was able to be present at the Rotunda to hear Hunt in October, as Ward was ill with over-work.⁵⁹ Recovered by November, Ward left London and paid overdue visits to followers in Birmingham and Nottingham. By this point, Ward had ordered the exercise which counted his followers, so was forced to acknowledge how few new London believers he had won over with all their funding: ‘a great number [that] profess to be Friends ... have not given their names’, he admitted.⁶⁰ This confirms that Ward’s London popularity was little grounded in wide-scale religious conviction. In Spring 1832, Ward and Twort travelled to Derby - a town with few original Southcottians, but notable divisions over church rates and a reputation for instability since the October riots in response to the Reform Bill failure. Distributing his anticlerical bills and posters about the town, Ward was blocked from preaching publicly.

⁵⁷ Prothero, *Artisans and Politics*, pp. 286-99.

⁵⁸ Belchem, *Popular Radicalism*, p. 63

⁵⁹ HL RC 262, Twort to Carlile, 29 Oct. 1831.

⁶⁰ ZW to Thomas Pierce, 9 and 11 Nov. 1831, *Zion’s Works*, xiv. 331, 334. See Chapter 1, p. 49.

At this point, national tension was mounting not only because of Reform, but from the spread of cholera from its arrival at Sunderland in late-1831. A National day of fasting was proclaimed for 21 March, to appease the Almighty's wrath in this coming of, 'the pestilence which "goeth before" the judgement of God' – an initiative proposed in such measured tones by the millennial-minded evangelical MP Spencer Perceval, son of the assassinated Prime Minister.⁶¹ In Derby, Ward declared the fast a 'farce', and circulated pamphlets asserting that 'the burdened, afflicted, and distressed people of England [had] fasted long enough, by reason of heavy taxation, and supporting a numerous tribe of useless Bishops and Clergy'.⁶² This was a response inspired directly by that of leading London radicals: William Cobbett, the *Poor Man's Guardian* and the NUWC all similarly pointed to the fasting frequently imposed upon the poor, by the burden of Old Corruption, and on the day itself, sat down to dinners of roast beef.⁶³ To this Ward added his own theological take, that fasting, as invented by the Clergy, was 'a Demonic Delusion – a denial of the Truth of the Scriptures'.⁶⁴ On the day itself, Ward publicly feasted on a leg of mutton, provocatively sharing this with poor passers-by. His religion, Ward told them, was 'not to fast, but to make ourselves as comfortable as our circumstances would allow'.⁶⁵

For this, Ward was arrested, as was Twort on an assault charge following an altercation with a clergyman and his umbrella. Their bail was posted by Samuel Dawson,

⁶¹ Richard Janet, 'Providence, Prayer and Cholera: the English General Fast of 1832' *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, 51:3, (Sep. 1982), 297-317; Philip Williamson, 'State Prayers, Fasts and Thanksgivings: public worship in Britain 1830-1837', *Past and Present*, no. 200 (Aug. 2008), 121-174; R.J. Morris, *Cholera 1832* (London, 1976).

⁶² *Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser* (Dublin), 9 Aug. 1832.

⁶³ Morris, *Cholera 1832*, p. 149.

⁶⁴ Zion Ward, *The True Fast Explained* (Birmingham, 1832), p. 1.

⁶⁵ *Isis*, 8 Sep. 1832, p. 479.

a radical barber with millenarian sympathies.⁶⁶ Association with Dawson cast yet greater suspicion on Ward and Twort in the eyes of the authorities, as he was a ring-leader among the Derby Reform rioters the previous October.⁶⁷ When prosecuted at the August Assizes, on the direct instruction of the Attorney-General, the trial of Ward and Twort centred on a blasphemy rather than sedition charge. They were found guilty of being ‘the authors and disseminators of ... blasphemous publications, tending to bring into hatred and contempt the established religion of this country’, and sentenced to eighteen months in prison.⁶⁸

Confined to a cell in Derby gaol, the messiah’s mission might be presumed concluded. It had certainly reached a low ebb. Ward’s Southcottian following was deeply disturbed by the state-enforced separation of the Shiloh from his flock. For much of his time in prison Ward was denied visitors, and eventually had his writing, correspondence and incoming mail controlled.⁶⁹ Yet Ward readily redefined his prosecution as persecution, and turned his condition itself into a stage of the realisation of his divine aims: ‘it was needful that this affair should happen, the world must condemn the Spirit of Truth to fulfil the Scriptures’.⁷⁰ The connections that Ward had forged with radicals while at liberty, would now be deliberately utilised in his confinement, such that political radicalism remained a cause appropriated by God’s messiah.

Initially the appropriating occurred, once again, the other way – political radicals adopted Ward’s case for their own ends. The London radical press responded to Ward

⁶⁶ Ward suggested that Dawson was a Swedenborgian. ZW to William Matthews, 29 June 1832, *Zion’s Works*, xvi. 205.

⁶⁷ *Derby Mercury*, 12 Oct. 1832.

⁶⁸ *Derby Mercury*, 8 Aug. 1832.

⁶⁹ ZW to ‘All Believers’, 9 Aug. 1832, *Zion’s Works*, xiii. 57; ZW to Richard Carlile, 14 Aug. 1832, and ZW to Charles Bradley Junior, 2 Feb. 1833, *Zion’s Works*, xv. 74, 296-297.

⁷⁰ ZW to Thomas Pierce, 8 Aug. 1832, *Zion’s Works*, xv. 61.

and Twort's imprisonment as they had to Robert Taylor's prosecution the summer before. In August 1832, an effective re-run of the Taylor campaign was launched: Carlile's journals led with 'New Religious Persecutions ... [by] Whig Administration!!'.⁷¹ The *Church Examiner* and *Poor Man's Guardian* carried letters pointing out how 'these men boldly exposed the craft and trade of the Bishops, [and] the dreadful oppression of clerical magistrates', and how comparable to 'the infamous prosecutions of the Whigs against Carpenter, Cobbett, Hetherington, Carlile, and Taylor' was 'the late persecution against Ward and Twort'.⁷² In the House of Commons, Henry Hunt submitted further petitions of hundreds of names 'expressive of the "disgust and indignation" ... felt at the sentence passed upon ... Mr Twort and Mr Ward, for the declaration of their religious opinions'.⁷³ Concerned at the sentence, Hunt, seconded by Joseph Hume, challenged the Attorney General directly on 'prosecutions and punishments for opinion merely'.⁷⁴

Throughout August and September, Carlile's *Isis* journal carried successive articles on Ward and Twort's case, the details of the trial, the progress of petitions for their release, and letters from readers.⁷⁵ An *Isis* editorial declared Ward and Twort to be:

harmless and useful men toward everything sound and good in the community. They were very warm opposers of the Bishops and clergy generally of the Established Church, ... [yet] were not infidels and blasphemers, in the sense in which Messrs Carlile and Taylor have been so considered; for they never repudiated a particle of the bible; but made it the groundwork of their public teachings, with the advantage of reading its allegories in a rational sense.⁷⁶

⁷¹ *Isis*, 11 Aug. 1832, p. 401.

⁷² *Church Examiner*, 18 Aug. 1832, i. 55; *Poor Man's Guardian*, 15 Sep. 1832.

⁷³ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, 1832, xiv. 1410-11; see also *Journal of the House of Commons*, LXXXVII (1832), 15 Aug. 1832, p. 588.

⁷⁴ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, 1832, xiv. 1410-11.

⁷⁵ *Isis*, 11 Aug.-15 Sep. 1832, pp. 401-89. On the editing and production of the *Isis*, which Carlile shared (to an unclear extent) with his mistress Eliza Sharples, see Wiener, *Richard Carlile* p. 191, and Chapter 9, p. 293.

⁷⁶ *Isis*, 11 Aug. 1832, pp. 401-2.

Announcing that a Parliamentary petition on the prisoners' behalf would be open for signatures at Carlile's Fleet Street print shop, *The Isis* made a broad appeal to its readers to support this cause: 'Messrs Ward and Twort are now doomed to lie in gaol ... for no other offence whatever than that of being reformers'.⁷⁷ In following issues, *The Isis* warmed to its anticlerical theme, lionising the efforts of Ward and Twort for exposing 'the clerical wolves'. Their having 'fed the poor on a fast day', so teaching them 'that they ought not to fast', made them 'more like Moses and Aaron, sympathising with their oppressed countrymen, and seeking to deliver them; and for that, they have offended Pharaoh and all the Egyptians of the church'.⁷⁸ Extensive coverage of the reception of Hunt's petition in the House of Commons was given, including Joseph Hume's defence of 'religious opinions' as 'a civil right', and expression of his disappointment with the 'present Government, when in office, so ready to attack the civil rights of the subject, of which, when out of office, they had professed themselves so jealous'.⁷⁹

After only days in his prison cell, Ward informed his followers of his compiling for 'Mr Carlile ... a full account of all the affair, from the time of our first coming to Derby to our *Condemnation* at the Assizes'.⁸⁰ Carlile's coverage of Ward and Twort's case was undoubtedly aided by Ward's assistance: a letter to Carlile dated 14 August included Ward's first report on the trial, as well as some significant comments suggesting that Ward viewed the two of them as having a common cause, in their shared experience of imprisonment: 'we, both as religious and political beings, have been kept in

⁷⁷ *Isis*, 11 Aug. 1832, p. 402.

⁷⁸ *Isis*, 18 Aug. 1832, p. 418.

⁷⁹ *Isis*, 25 Aug. 1832, pp. 438, 442.

⁸⁰ ZW to Nottingham believers, August 1832, *Zion's Works*, xv. 63-4.

bondage'.⁸¹ In September, *The Isis* published a copy of a letter that Ward had written to the Attorney General, Sir Thomas Denman, protesting that his conviction had been one 'for difference of opinion alone', and objecting to the conditions of the trial.⁸² The 'full account' that Ward had been working on appeared in the same issue - 'The History of the persecution of Messrs Ward and Twort'.⁸³ 'Everything of this kind', Ward explained in a letter to Birmingham, was intended to 'keep the case before the public'.⁸⁴ Working within the radical movement opposing the restriction of religious opinion, and protesting against persecutory powers of the State, would aid the conditions, and in turn the cause, of the Southcottian messiah. Ward hoped that his other followers would 'see the importance of this ... [and] bestir themselves'.⁸⁵ This direction was taken to heart by Ward's Birmingham supporters, and most particularly by Charles Bradley and his family.

The Bradleys and Radicalism

Charles Bradley remained Ward's leading supporter in Birmingham, wielding a strong influence over meetings in the Lawrence Street Chapel, which he still owned. Though his wife Hannah had long shared his Southcottian and then 'Shilohite' convictions, their two elder children, Charles Junior (b.1810) and Louisa (b.1814) had demonstrated a strong opposition to their parents' religious position since their teenage years. From early 1832, this had changed as Charles Bradley Junior declared his acceptance of Ward's message,

⁸¹ ZW to Richard Carlile, 14 Aug. 1832, *Zion's Works*, xv. 69.

⁸² *Isis*, 8 Sep. 1832, pp. 474-5; ZW to Sir Thomas Denman, *Zion's Works*, xiii. 43-8.

⁸³ *Isis*, 8 Sep. 1832, pp. 479-80.

⁸⁴ ZW to Charles Bradley Junior, 3 Sep. 1832, *Zion's Works*, xv. 85.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

after extensive correspondence with him, and Louisa converted the following year.⁸⁶ The younger Bradleys – second generation Southcottians – were deeply involved with their father in the interactions between Birmingham Southcottians and political radicals during the period of Ward’s imprisonment.

From the time of Ward’s appearances at the Rotunda, Carlile publications had been read at the Birmingham Shilohite chapel, undoubtedly under the senior Bradley’s direction.⁸⁷ A year later, from the autumn of 1832, Bradley wrote open letters for insertion in Carlile’s current journals.⁸⁸ Charles Bradley Junior wrote his own letters for Carlile’s publication, but also sought to publicise the campaign for Ward’s release in other unstamped papers.⁸⁹ Several letters from the younger Bradley appeared in William Carpenter’s and John Cleave’s *Church Examiner* and Henry Hetherington’s *Poor Man’s Guardian*.⁹⁰ In September, he consulted Ward on whether to write to the *Register*, though Ward responded: ‘I hardly think that Cobbett will notice our case, yet he might, and it may not be amiss to write to him.’⁹¹ By 1833, the Bradleys, as seemingly the public voice of the Birmingham chapel, were decidedly broadening their radical interests. Charles Bradley Junior, in particular, appears to have declared his support for almost every radical campaign going. In the *Poor Man’s Guardian* he wrote to protest against Hetherington’s imprisonment, and praised the journal for its exposure of ‘the political mysteries and dark trickery of the “powers that be,” – of the vile, detestable, persecuting,

⁸⁶ ZW to Nottingham, 4 June 1832, and ZW to Charles Bradley Junior, 14 Apr. 1833, *Zion’s Works*, xv. 2-3, 191. See, J.E.M. Latham, ‘The Bradley’s of Birmingham: the unorthodox family of ‘Michael Field’’, *History Workshop Journal*, 55:1 (2003), 189-91.

⁸⁷ HL RC 286, ZW to Carlile, 28 Sep. 1831; *Prompter*, 29 Oct. 1831, pp. 895-6.

⁸⁸ Charles Bradley Senior’s letter to Lord Melbourne was published in *Isis*, 15 Sep. 1832, p. 482; *Gauntlet*, 9 June 1833, p. 274.

⁸⁹ *Isis*, 15 Sep. and 27 Oct. 1832, pp. 482, 553-4.

⁹⁰ *Church Examiner*, 18 Aug. 1832, i. 55; *Poor Man’s Guardian*, 15 Sep. 1832. Patricia Hollis, *The Pauper Press: A Study in Working-Class Radicalism of the 1830s* (London, 1970), pp. 325-6.

⁹¹ ZW to Charles Bradley Junior, 3 Sep. 1832, *Zion’s Works*, xv. 85.

knowledge-bating Whigs'. He cast himself as a constant reader of the *Guardian* 'and can assure you that all my relatives deeply sympathise'.⁹² Other letters indicated his opposition to the Reform Act, the press stamp and further Sabbath laws, as well as religious persecution.⁹³ In March 1833, he publicised the decision of Derbyshire magistrates to interdict 'any correspondence between Messrs. Ward and Twort and their friends' in the *Poor Man's Guardian*, and asked: 'In the name of God, then, I ask, will not these Derby tyrants be remembered in the day of popular resurrection and judgment!'⁹⁴ Several of his published letters were sent with donations for victims of press restrictions. The younger Bradley also indicated his being 'a subscriber to both Unions' in Birmingham, meaning the Midland Union of the Working Classes (affiliated to the NUWC) and the more middle-class, reformist, Birmingham Political Union.⁹⁵

At first, Ward greeted such extensive efforts on his behalf with enthusiasm. During his first months in prison, he was permitted to receive several radical journals and looked out for notices.⁹⁶ By 1833, he had 'written to Mr O'Connell MP for Dublin, describing our case', and other MPs with radical sympathies, including Colonel De Lacy Evans, from whom he received a sympathetic reply.⁹⁷ In February, after nearly six months in prison, Ward reflected:

Political Unions, and others of liberal sentiments, seem now inquisitive respecting us, no doubt with a view to petition Parliament for a redress of the general grievances; which is a most laudable way of proceeding, ... I

⁹² *Poor Man's Guardian*, 2 Feb. 1833, p. 38.

⁹³ *Gauntlet*, 7 Apr., 9 June and 1 Dec. 1833; see also *Poor Man's Guardian*, 2 Mar. 1833.

⁹⁴ *Poor Man's Guardian*, 16 Mar. 1833.

⁹⁵ *Gauntlet*, 9 June 1833, p. 264. Belchem, *Popular Radicalism*, pp. 62-63.

⁹⁶ ZW to Thomas Pierce, 2 Jan. 1833, and ZW to Charles Bradley Senior, January 1833, *Zion's Works*, xv. 137 and 169.

⁹⁷ ZW to Charles Bradley Senior, January 1833, and ZW to Col. Evans., 11 Sep. 1833, *Zion's Works*, xv. 169, 250-51.

feel confident that if all the wrongs are represented to Parliament in terms according to their nature, they must be remedied.⁹⁸

With this, Ward indicated that he still held essentially the same view of radicalism as the year before imprisonment – attention from political movements which had aims related, equivalent, or just convenient for his own mission, were to be supported. They were ‘a most laudable way of proceeding’ in his messianic cause, as the ‘redress’ of their grievances, would further that cause. Yet, as 1833 proceeded, this view began to alter, as, isolated in his prison cell, Ward perceived his outside following beginning to view radicalism – and individual radicals – no longer as servants of their messiah’s mission, but as something in its stead. For some Southcottians in Birmingham, being radicals appeared to be more important than being Shilohites.

The clearest indications of this development were the growing personal relationship between the Bradley family and Richard Carlile, and the changing nature of services in the Lawrence Street Chapel. In June 1833, Charles Bradley Senior publicised his personal opinions on how radical sentiments should be encouraged among working people, which notably reached well beyond any simple support for a movement to aid Ward’s position. Bradley’s views were voiced in a letter responding to a Carlile editorial in *The Gauntlet* which attacked political associations meeting in public houses – an element of Carlile’s determined campaign for a more ‘respectable’ radicalism through sober, rational debate and self-improvement.⁹⁹ Bradley explicitly supported Carlile’s position, declaring his opposition to such ‘political but tipping clubs or unions of the working classes’ because ‘no possible amelioration of their infamous thralldom can take

⁹⁸ ZW to Thomas Pierce, 26 Feb. 1833, *Zion’s Works*, xv. 182.

⁹⁹ Wiener, *Richard Carlile*, pp. 59-60; McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, pp. 182-95.

place, while smoking and drinking occupy that portion of time which they should only spend in the acquisition of real useful knowledge'.¹⁰⁰ In their place, Bradley notably advocated political meetings 'after the manner of the Methodist Class Meetings' (a style of congregation of which he had personal experience), held in 'one another's houses'.

These meetings were best held:

...for the space of one hour, without eating, drinking or smoking. Let the best reader be selected by them, to read and explain, and converse with them in the most instructive and persuasive manner. To make the meeting always cheerful, I would recommend, where it can be done, a song or glee to be sung, in praise of virtue, freedom, the rights of man and woman: ... let all things be done decently and in order, with the view to ennoble the mind, that they may know what are the rights of man, and be taught common sense, and how to use their reason to accomplish that most desirable object, the entire liberation of the human mind from the dreadful trammels of priestcraft, as well as their bodies from the labours for kingcraft and lordcraft, which are indeed the source and very root of all the evils under which poor enslaved man has laboured hitherto in every age and clime.¹⁰¹

As the only surviving version of this letter is that which was published in *The Gauntlet*, it is impossible to determine the extent to which it was edited by Carlile. The use of radical – especially Paineite – phrasing is nonetheless striking, attributed to Bradley the Southcottian. Yet the latter's genuine adoption of such sentiments is evident from reports of meetings at the Lawrence Street Chapel itself, where Carlile's *Gauntlet* and *Cosmopolite* journals were read, and 'working men have gone away, declaring they have been horrified that such things should be read, and are proper only for public houses; and that they thought "Bradley was worse than either Carlile or Taylor!"'¹⁰² When Carlile came to the end of his gaol term in August 1833, he was soon invited to Birmingham. It

¹⁰⁰ *Gauntlet*, 9 June 1833, pp. 263-4.

¹⁰¹ *Gauntlet*, 9 June 1833, pp. 263-4.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 264.

was thus that by the end of September, the incongruous phenomenon of the atheist radical Carlile taking to the pulpit in a chapel dedicated to the mission of the Southcottian Shiloh, had occurred.¹⁰³ Carlile's account of his appearance was published the following week in *The Gauntlet*:

On the Sunday morning I joined in the performance of divine service at the Lawrence-street Chapel, in the company of the most amiable and intelligent family of the Bradleys, in Digbeth. I had the pleasure of hearing the leading article of the last *Poor Man's Guardian* read as part of the divine service, and, as I was the representative of the Gauntlet, I was allowed to speak my own leading article, which is ever the politics of Thomas Paine...

I explained to the persons assembled in the morning, that the true meaning of divine service was that of communicating knowledge to the people, and that that was the most divine service which communicated the most knowledge. And I claimed of the service of that chapel on that morning, that it was more divine than that of any other chapel, or place of worship, in the town of Birmingham.¹⁰⁴

Carlile appeared again in the chapel the same afternoon, which was 'filled to hear from me'. In this address, he,

showed to the persons assembled, that, rightly understood, the Bible was to them a political text-book, and not a book for priestcraft ... I proposed a religious rebellion, and that they should entirely take the book out of the hands of the priesthood, and read and apply it to their own political purposes ... From all that I could see, I gave complete satisfaction to the congregation.¹⁰⁵

The dramatic change of direction in Richard Carlile's career, which led him to reclaim the Bible as his own weapon of radical reform in this way, and led, shortly after this Birmingham appearance, to his curiously combining his Taylor-derived allegorical

¹⁰³ *Gauntlet*, 29 Sep. 1833, p. 537. Wiener refers to 'Birmingham's radical Lawrence Street Chapel', but makes no mention of its Southcottian or Ward relation. Wiener, *Richard Carlile*, pp. 199-201.

¹⁰⁴ *Gauntlet*, 6 Oct. 1833, p. 546.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 546.

reading of Scripture to an image of himself as ‘a messiah of reason’, has been noted, even if with some confusion, in biographical studies of the militant, secularist campaigner.¹⁰⁶ During 1832, through the pages of *The Isis*, Carlile had officially announced his ‘conversion ... to the Christian faith, after fourteen years of obstinate infidelity’.¹⁰⁷ He had subsequently defined this conversion to be to ‘the *spirit*, the *allegory*, and the *principle*’ of Christianity – a logical extension of ‘the gospel according to Richard Carlile’ he had presented five years before. Yet in late-1833, a growing ‘messianic ... temperament and conviction’ was observed, and, lecturing in Sheffield, Carlile declared: ‘I have risen again to stand before you ... and to show you the way to human redemption’.¹⁰⁸

Within his chapter-study of Ward, William Oliver suggested that Carlile ‘adopted the stance of millennialism’ at this stage for ‘tactical reasons’.¹⁰⁹ Making no claim for Ward having influenced Carlile in any direct way, Oliver concluded that Carlile, in a manner related to Owen’s millennialism, ‘simply adjusted his propaganda to the prevailing ideology’ of the early 1830s – a millennial ideology.¹¹⁰ The proximity of Carlile to Ward for a period, for Oliver, merely pointed him towards the potential of biblical interpretation to serve the cause of reform.

Zion Ward’s recorded response to Carlile’s shifting religious position, and entry into the chapel space of his followers, indicates that a rather different view was taken at the time. For Ward did not welcome Carlile’s new public doctrine: ‘he certainly has made

¹⁰⁶ Wiener, *Richard Carlile*, pp. 200-1; G.D.H. Cole, *Richard Carlile 1790-1843*, (London, 1943), pp. 30-35; G.A. Aldred, *Richard Carlile, agitator: his life and times* (London, 1923).

¹⁰⁷ *Isis*, 5 May 1832, p. 202.

¹⁰⁸ Richard Carlile, *A Full Report of the Third Lecture, Delivered in the Sheffield Theatre... on Religion* (Sheffield, 1833), p. 9. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁰⁹ William Oliver, *Prophets and Millennialists: The Uses of Biblical Prophecy in England from the 1790s to the 1840s* (Auckland, 1978), pp. 173-4.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

himself appear now unwise and simple, in taking up Zion's doctrine and calling it his own.'¹¹¹ This marked the beginnings of a new attitude to radicalism on the parts of Shiloh and his believers – one of growing suspicion and separation.

As his prison term drew to a close, Ward composed articles for Carlile's *Gauntlet* and Hetherington's *Poor Man's Guardian*, 'but they refused to publish what I wrote'.¹¹² Carlile advised Ward, in the pages of *The Gauntlet*, after acknowledging his 'distinctive originality in setting forth this reformed Christianity', to ensure that his future writing 'leave no part of his subject ... a mystery, but to present it in language suited to the plainest understanding'.¹¹³ This advice Ward did not take kindly, declaring to Charles Bradley Senior that 'Mr Carlile's meaning is, "let Mr Ward deny God altogether, and then we'll take him by the hand"'. 'I want not your hand, I despise your offers', Ward continued; 'I despise all Mr Carlile's friendship, since I must sell my God to purchase it'.¹¹⁴ 'Beware of that subtle, crafty being Carlile', Ward concluded to Bradley. With his release approaching, he prophesied, 'there will be some sharp-shooting between Mr C. and me, no doubt, till he gives up, if he ever will resign; but war is certain, and Zion's God is more than a match for ten thousand Mr Carliles'.¹¹⁵

To his distrust of a leading radical Ward added a new note of caution to promotion of his followers' support for other radical movements. In late-1833, he still retained a conception of political radicalism as a means of earthly change, furthering his messianic aims. 'God is working in various ways to bring peace and happiness to man',

¹¹¹ ZW to Thomas Pierce, 19 Mar. 1834, *Zion's Works*, xv. 308-09; ZW to Charles Bradley Senior, 16 Nov. 1833, *Zion's Works*, v. 37-8.

¹¹² ZW to Charles Bradley Senior, 8 Jan. 1834, *Zion's Works*, v. 57.

¹¹³ *Gauntlet*, 17 Nov. 1833, p. 649.

¹¹⁴ ZW to Charles Bradley Senior, 8 Jan. 1834, *Zion's Works*, v. 58, 64.

¹¹⁵ ZW to Charles Bradley Senior, 22 Jan. 1834, *Zion's Works*, v. 84.

he reassured the elder Charles Bradley; ‘the distresses and miseries heaped upon the industrious classes of Society by those in power, compel the mass of the people to sue for their rights, and they may press onward with courage ... God’s purposes shall be accomplished’.¹¹⁶ Yet a new and definite distinction was drawn between the followers of Shiloh – ‘you ... who live under the Sun and are becoming acquainted with that Power who is working all these things’ – and everyone else.¹¹⁷

... I have mentioned these few things at this time, just to show you all, your standing in creation, that you may know what part you are to act in the grand Revolution of the world; you are called particularly to the spiritual work, you are to dwell at Zion. Then take heed to yourselves how you meddle with the outward things, handle them cautiously, mix with them but lightly.¹¹⁸

Here, the radical campaigns that his believers, in Birmingham especially, had come close to counting synonymous with the millennial cause itself, were now counted ‘outward’, other, less important. ‘You have a much more weighty Government committed unto you, to which give all your main attention and powers’, Ward continued; ‘do good by all means, help your fellow-men, but take care not to interfere with the outsiders so as to retard your progress in the Heavenly calling, or to perplex yourselves, or to fall under the power of those who are waiting for you, to see you get into trouble.’ The troublemakers, the outsiders who would not abide by what Ward went on to call ‘our inward principles’ he elsewhere made clear, were not limited to ‘the Reformers ... [who] call Zion a flat and a fool’.¹¹⁹ They included the followers of Robert Owen.

¹¹⁶ ZW to Charles Bradley Senior, 16 Nov. 1833, *Zion’s Works*, v. 46.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 47, 53.

During his period in prison, Ward had received, again from Birmingham, several specific queries regarding Owenism, and whether members of the Lawrence Street congregation should join their fellow artisans in cooperative enterprises. ‘Regarding Mr Owen’s business,’ Ward replied, ‘I cannot give (at present) my mind fully on the subject ... Such things are good in their way ... but they are instruments merely in the outward things’.¹²⁰ Yet Owen, like Carlile, denied ‘Divine Revelation, and ... God’, and so confirmed the difference between theirs and ‘our own and better work’;

You must remember that you are called to be employed in the grand work of all, and as a man is called so let him *abide* in his calling. If God had designed you to be Owenites, he would have given you the mind of Owen, and you would have been concerned wholly in *that*. But you are called to the spiritual work, and of course you stand nearer unto God.¹²¹

In February 1834, Ward and Twort were released from Derby prison and embraced once more by their Southcottian followers in Nottingham and Birmingham. Carlile noticed their release, and subsequent arrival in London to preach in the Borough Chapel.¹²² The relationship between them was, however, severed. Carlile no longer promoted Ward’s publications, and the Bradleys collectively declared their loyalty to Ward alone. In March, Charles Bradley Senior wrote to Carlile, ‘talking to him ... plainly’; while in April, Ward praised Charles Bradley Junior for his letter ‘to Mr Carlile, in vindication of Zion ... the God of truth, of justice and of judgment guided your heart and your pen, to send such an answer to Mr Carlile’.¹²³

¹²⁰ ZW to Charles Bradley Senior, 29 Nov. 1832, *Zion’s Works*, xv. 113.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

¹²² *Gauntlet*, 9 Mar. 1834, p. 907.

¹²³ ZW to Thomas Pierce, 19 Mar. 1834, and ZW to Charles Bradley Junior, April 1834, *Zion’s Works*, xv. 309, 312-13. Neither private letters appear to have survived.

The paths of Ward and his committed followers, and Carlile's, would cross occasionally in the remaining three years the Shiloh was alive (he died in March 1837).¹²⁴ The political career of the Southcottian messiah was, however, effectively over in 1833-1834. After this, Ward continued to direct the surviving Southcottians who still accepted him to concentrate on their 'spiritual work', through following his personal message of their coming spiritual freedom through God. Yet, in this same period, an alternative vision of how millenarians could relate to radicalism was presented, and led other Southcottians into the political participation Ward now cautioned. This vision retained the view that radicalism might lead to the millennium; yet rather than God's agency being limited to a messianic individual, the agency to achieve the millennium was seen to rest in ordinary human individuals themselves. This was the vision of James Smith, and his career in 1832-34 is considered in Chapter 9.

¹²⁴ ZW to Charles Bradley Junior, 15 July 1835, *Zion's Works*, vi. 324-38. On Ward and Carlile's mutual sponsors, Sophia Chichester and Georgiana Fletcher Welch, see J.E.M. Latham, *Search for a New Eden: James Pierrepont Greaves (1777-1842), the Sacred Socialist and His Followers* (London, 1999), pp. 73-6, 121-38.

Chapter 9

A MILLENNIAL UNION

James Smith left Ashton-under-Lyne on 28 June 1831, returning to Edinburgh.¹ Here he remained among the body of Scottish Southcottians who looked to him for leadership, maintaining links with Zion Ward and ‘Shilohite’ groups in England.² Determined to move to London, Smith spent a year raising funds and contacting friends now resident in the capital. In August 1832, he finally set out, arriving as Ward was beginning his eighteen-month sentence at Derby.³ In London, Smith stayed within Southcottian circles, lodging again with the Garland family – recently moved from Ashton to Shoreditch – and began preaching in the Borough Chapel, south of the Thames, retained by Ward’s London following.⁴ Elements of Smith’s message were familiar to Ward’s congregation, from allegorical readings of the Bible, to predictions that current, erroneous Christianity would be imminently replaced by a new religion of liberty ‘without prayers, priests or temples’, where the ‘the spirit of God dwelleth in you’.⁵

Despite these Southcottian continuities in London, Smith’s life in the next two years was dramatically different from the two before. For six months, until March 1833, Smith’s hour-long addresses at the Borough Chapel each Sunday drew capacity crowds, attracting a predominantly radical and ‘infidel’ audience. Among such London radicals, Iorwerth Prothero has observed, ‘Smith became a celebrity’, as one of the most popular

¹ W.A. Smith, *‘Shepherd’ Smith the Universalist: The Story of a Mind* (London, 1892), p. 55.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 67-74; ‘Letters addressed to the Believers in Scotland’, 18 Mar-4 June 1832, *Zion’s Works*, xvi. 194-221.

³ Smith, *Shepherd Smith*, pp. 78-80, 85-91.

⁴ James Elishama Smith (JES) to brother John Smith, 9 and 26 Sep. 1832, *Shepherd Smith*, pp. 80, 86-7.

⁵ James Smith, *The Antichrist, or Christianity Reformed* (London, 1833), pp. 8, 214, 249. On this publication, see below, p. 295 n.51.

speakers at any comparable venue.⁶ From April 1833, Smith spoke at the Rotunda, drawing even larger, enthusiastic audiences. Both here and in the Borough, Smith became acquainted with leading radicals. John Gast, a veteran shipwright, unionist and freethinking political radical, commended Smith to audiences, though ‘sharply disagreed with his praise of Joanna’.⁷ Anna Wheeler, a prominent feminist ally of Robert Owen and follower of the French utopian socialist Henri Saint-Simon, also introduced herself to Smith.⁸ He later reflected on his debt to Wheeler for ‘directing my attention to social questions such as Owenism, St Simonism, and Fourierism’. She further introduced him, ‘to gentlemen with whom I conferred upon these subjects and thus became initiated into many of the mysteries of [this] popular philosophy’, which shaped his subsequent career.⁹

From June 1833, Smith became the regular Sunday speaker at the Charlotte Street Institution of Owen’s supporters, where he remained popular. His lectures appeared on the front page of the principal Owenite journal *The Crisis*; by September, Smith was appointed editor of the weekly publication.¹⁰ He held this influential position for just under a year, throughout the ‘trade union phase’ of Owenite socialist movement – the period in 1833-34 when Owen allied his hopes for a sudden transformation of social arrangements with an attempted union of all trades, the Grand National Consolidated

⁶ Iorwerth Prothero, *Artisans and Politics, in Early Nineteenth-Century London: John Gast and His Times* (London, 1979), p. 262.

⁷ Ibid., p. 263; The National Archives (TNA) HO 64/12/150 and 170, 8 Oct. and 12 Nov. 1832.

⁸ JES to brother John Smith, 6 Mar. 1833, *Shepherd Smith*, p. 89. On Wheeler, see Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1983), pp. 59-64; Dolores Dooley, *Equality in Community: Sexual Equality in the Writings of William Thompson and Anna Doyle Wheeler* (Cork, 1996).

⁹ Smith was writing to Wheeler’s daughter, Lady Lytton, with whom he forged a close friendship in the 1850s. Smith, *Shepherd Smith*, p. 325.

¹⁰ *Crisis*, 22 June 1833, ii. 185.

Trades Union.¹¹ In this period, Smith also contributed regularly to the GNCTU's official journal, *The Pioneer*, and is credited, together with James Morrison (1802-35), its editor, with the articulation of a 'syndicalist' theory – a system of government based on trades union representation in a 'House of Trades'.¹² In the 'Letters on Associated Labour', Smith, in partial collaboration with Morrison, further presented a noted analysis of both the concept of labour in a capitalist system and the historical process leading to a future society of liberated workers.¹³ Following the collapse of the Union, and the closure of *The Crisis* in August 1834, Smith distanced himself from Owen personally and political movements in general. His subsequent journal, *The Shepherd*, retained an Owenite readership, yet was predominantly a forum for feminist, utopian and religious subjects.¹⁴

Existing explanations for Smith's 'meteoric' career within London radicalism and the Owenite movement in 1832-34 cast his initial success as a repeat of Ward's preceding radical triumphs, and his socialist stage as a variety of logical progressions from his millenarian sympathies. Harrison and Saville each suggested that, with Ward in prison and the pulpit of the Borough Chapel vacant, 'Smith stepped smartly into the breach'.¹⁵ McCalman similarly observed that 'Ward was succeeded by ... Smith', and appealed to the same syncretic milieu of London radicalism – theatrical, anticlerical and

¹¹ On the GNCTU, see William Oliver, 'The Consolidated Trades' Union of 1834', *Economic History Review*, 17, (1964), 77-95; Gregory Claeys, *Citizens and Saints: Politics and Anti-Politics in Early British Socialism* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 194-9; Malcolm Chase, *Early Trade Unionism: Fraternity, Skill and the Politics of Labour* (Aldershot, 2000), pp. 148-52.

¹² See especially, Claeys, *Citizens*, pp. 194-207.

¹³ *Pioneer*, 15 Mar.-28 June 1834, pp. 243-419.

¹⁴ On Smith's *Shepherd* see, Taylor, *Eve*, pp. 166-8; Kathryn Gleadle, "'Our Several Spheres': Middle-class Women and the Feminisms of Early Victorian Radical Politics', in Kathryn Gleadle and Sarah Richardson (eds.), *Women in British politics, 1760-1860: the power of the petticoat* (Basingstoke, 2000), pp. 134-52.

¹⁵ J.F.C. Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites in Britain and America: The Quest for the New Moral World*, (London, 1969), p. 113; John Saville, 'J.E. Smith and the Owenite Movement, 1833-1834', in Sidney Pollard and John Salt (eds.), *Robert Owen: Prophet of the Poor. Essays in Honour of the Two-Hundredth Anniversary of His Birth* (London, 1971), p. 121.

unorthodox.¹⁶ On this reading, Smith's own involvement with radicalism was a further outcome of the pragmatic alliance of millenarians and freethinkers which had made Ward the political messiah, through convergent aims, interests and rhetorics.

The 'logic' of Smith's association with the Owenite movement in 1833-34 – a movement predominantly antireligious in tone, centred on the expectation of a secular 'millennium' on earth through human means – was argued in different ways by Harrison, Saville and Oliver. For Harrison, Smith's recent, rapid transitions through many religious positions demonstrated an ability to 'choose and reject what he wanted from any system, to ally himself to any movement while not fully accepting its aims and tenets'.¹⁷ This allowed Smith to appreciate aspects of Owenite social doctrines, yet not consider it the whole 'truth'. Smith's lectures further revealed his expectation that the millennium would supersede the reign of orthodox Christianity. This he based on allegorical readings of the Bible like Ward's, and 'analogical' readings – the view that a principle or law at work in Scripture (or the alternative 'Scripture' of Nature) might be inferred to be at work in human history.¹⁸ From analogy, Smith argued that the same process which had led the Christian Church to replace Judaism would be repeated in the coming of the millennium: just as a group of 'outsiders' had overturned the Jewish Church, so 'outsiders' or infidels would overturn the Christian Church and introduce the millennium. For Smith, this meant that 'infidel' Owenites were 'the heralds of the millennium'.¹⁹

Elements of Harrison's argument were drawn from Smith's *Lecture on a Christian Community*, first given at the Rotunda in April 1833, as 'it was this lecture

¹⁶ Iain McCalman, *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries and Pornographers in London, 1795-1840* (first published, 1988; Oxford, 1993), p. 202.

¹⁷ Harrison, *New Moral World*, pp. 116-8.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

which first attracted the attention of the Owenites to Smith'.²⁰ Written 'before Smith was actively working in the Owenite camp', Harrison asserted, the *Lecture* 'established his credentials, as a millenarian, among the Owenites'.²¹ Saville's study of Smith focussed on the same work, believing that it exhibited 'the intellectual marriage between his now muted religious millennialism and the radicalism of the Owenite position'.²² Here, Smith declared that the 'social system of communities' proposed by the Owenites was 'nothing but the Christian millennium about to be fulfilled'; present, corrupt Christianity must be resurrected in a new social order, with no private property.²³ From such sentiments, Saville concluded that Smith had progressed beyond his prior Southcottianism, to embrace a vision of the millennium achievable without messianic intervention.²⁴ A related argument was advanced by Oliver, seeing Smith secularise millennial concepts. On the basis of a dissection of Owen's 'millennial mentality', Oliver declared that there was 'nothing curious' about an alliance between Owen and Smith: 'they were, after all, fellow millennialists'.²⁵

Significant aspects of these interpretations can suggest that Smith's specific relation to Owenism, like his radicalism, was shaped by similar attitudes and intentions to Ward's political radicalism. A convinced expectation of sudden change, and a common language of social and religious criticism, allowed individuals and groups of diverse, even opposing, religious opinions to each identify in the other, a useful ally in the

²⁰ Harrison, *New Moral World*, p. 119. This was published as a pamphlet in June 1833: James Smith, *Lecture on a Christian Community* (London, 1833). References from this work are cited with page numbers from a recent reprinting in Gregory Claeys (ed.), *Owenite Socialism: Pamphlets and Correspondence 1832-1837* (10 vols., London, 2005), iv. 191-208.

²¹ Harrison, *New Moral World*, p. 119.

²² Saville, 'J.E. Smith', p. 121.

²³ Smith, 'Lecture on a Christian Community', pp. 193, 199.

²⁴ Saville, 'J.E. Smith', pp. 121-5.

²⁵ William Oliver, *Prophets and Millennialists: The Uses of Biblical Prophecy in England from the 1790s to the 1840s* (Auckland, 1978), pp. 196-216.

advancement of their own cause. Just as Ward and Carlile worked together, each serving a purpose in the other's eyes, so Smith and Owen did the same, recognising that their respective millenniums were more likely to commence with the other's assistance.

In truth, Smith's relation to both radicalism and Owenism was very different from this. Smith's initial entry into the London culture of freethought radicalism was more deliberate than Zion Ward's, and shaped by premeditated aims. Though radical figures and publications sought to support him, as they had Ward, Smith did not hold a purely pragmatic view of this assistance; he laid out a distinct theological basis for his alliance with such 'infidels', and a compelling argument for the millennial conditions this would achieve. This included not only the specific argument from biblical analogy which Harrison identified, but a range of other ideas also. Central among these was a distinct understanding of the relation between divine and human agency in the achievement of the millennium. From this, Smith articulated a view of how the coming of the millennium might be aided by human action – including his own. This related to both political engagement and other practices, as Smith elsewhere made clear his additional beliefs concerning the significance of human activity pre-figuring the social and economic arrangements of the millennial state. In this way, Smith bridged the apparent gulf between his diverse religious and political experiences in 1830-32 and 1832-34; he linked his Ashton and London careers and the Southcottian and Owenite millenniums.

Smith the Radical

James Smith was never a Southcottian preacher in London; he was a radical lecturer from his first public appearance. His chosen subjects, promotion, and reputation at the Borough Chapel owed more to the connections he had previously forged with Robert Taylor, and Richard Carlile's wider infidel circle, from Ashton. Smith asserted his independence from Zion Ward upon arrival in London. In following months, Smith articulated his own, alternative interpretation of Southcottian prophecy, and retained a Southcottian contingent to his audience and readership.

Smith quickly encountered Ward's supporters in London, yet he did not behave as expected: the 'conduct' of 'Brother James Smith' provoked considerable consternation and confusion.²⁶ Ward had led the London body to believe that Smith was a suitable candidate to assume his pulpit, yet 'when they asked him to preach, he refused to be counted one of them'. Entering the Borough Chapel, Smith 'carried himself altogether as a stranger towards the Friends'.²⁷ Instead, Smith presented himself as responding to an advertisement in the radical press offering the Chapel for use on Sunday evenings.²⁸ Thomas Crossley's original three-year lease still had eighteen months remaining, and with Ward gone, his followers only required the space for a Sunday morning meeting.²⁹ To attract additional users, six-month leases were offered for other times of the week. A Tuesday lease was taken out by the National Union of the Working Classes, moving from

²⁶ Zion Ward (ZW) to Thomas Pierce, 28 Oct. 1832, *Zion's Works*, xv. 107-11.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 107-8.

²⁸ *Poor Man's Guardian*, 15 Sep. 1832, p. 536.

²⁹ See Chapter 8, p. 253.

the Rotunda in mid-1832.³⁰ To Ward's *chagrin*, Smith 'hired the Chapel for evenings once or twice in a week for his own purposes, quite independent of us'.³¹

Smith advertised a 'Course of Lectures' in the radical press, the day before his first appearance on 23 September, under the title 'Religion, and its mischievous Consequences'.³² On first arrival in London, Smith had noted the popularity of public lectures, especially among atheists, making enquiries into the money some lecturers earned from door-receipts.³³ For his own, opening lecture, Smith charged a penny for admission. He was received, on his own account 'with most enthusiastic cheering, and ... the clapping of hands' by a sizeable audience. Confident of soon filling the chapel, he assured his brother 'I will easily support myself. There are vast numbers of people here ready to receive what I can give them'.³⁴

An alternative account of Smith's early lectures reveals the company he had been keeping, and the constituency he addressed. Just as activities at the Rotunda during 1830-31 were monitored by the Home Office through informants, so Smith's appearances at Borough Chapel generated spy reports.³⁵ After Smith's third lecture, the government informant Abel Hall, filed his first report on Smith.

I have been aware for some time that a young man who calls himself the Revd. J.E. Smith AM has been associating with Carlile, Taylor, Saul and the Lady of the Rotunda and that he intended to deliver lectures on the "fallacy of the Christian religion". He has commenced them on Sunday evenings at the Chapel, Chapel Court, High Street, Borough wch I sometime ago stated was taken by ... others from Ward and Twort...³⁶

³⁰ Prothero, *Artisans and Politics*, p. 262.

³¹ ZW to Thomas Pierce, 28 Oct. 1832, *Zion's Works*, xv. 107.

³² *Poor Man's Guardian*, 22 Sep. 1832, p. 544.

³³ JES to brother John Smith, 9 Sep. 1832, in *Shepherd Smith*, pp. 81-4.

³⁴ JES to brother John Smith, 26 Sep. 1832, in *Shepherd Smith*, pp. 86-7.

³⁵ See Chapter 7, pp. 236-7. Ward's preaching at the Rotunda in September-October 1831 appears also to have been monitored, yet the National Archive records are incomplete from this period. TNA HO 64/11-12.

³⁶ TNA HO 64/12/150, 8 Oct. 1832.

Besides Carlile and Taylor, the other individuals identified as Smith's associates were William Devonshire Saull, an Aldersgate wine merchant who had previously helped fund Taylor's radical career, and Eliza Sharples – 'the Lady of the Rotunda' – a follower of Carlile from Bolton who, by this point in 1832, was his mistress and editorial assistant on the journal *The Isis*.³⁷ Sharples had gained her specific epithet by appearing as 'Isis' at the Rotunda in Spring 1832, a role which entailed the 28-year-old appearing in a 'showy' dress, delivering a series of 'spiritual discourses' which formed the main article in each subsequent *Isis*.³⁸ Sharples was the last 'main attraction' at the Rotunda, after Ward; Carlile relinquished the lease on the theatre in April 1832.³⁹ The 'Isis' performances continued briefly at a Burton Street venue, but the novelty had worn off. For the remainder of 1832, *The Isis* was filled with articles and notices on related 'theological' subjects and Carlile's other interests, including, from August, considerable coverage of Ward and Twort's conviction and imprisonment.⁴⁰

Editions of *The Isis* establish Carlile's and Sharples' awareness of Smith from his earliest London appearances: the journal carried a two-page summary of his first Borough Chapel lecture within a week. Over successive editions, *The Isis* featured many approving comments on Smith, his background and message, as well as increasingly detailed accounts of his discourses.⁴¹ As 'a young gentleman of good character, and of good manners, standing forth on his own merits', one comment declared, 'the Rev Mr

³⁷ Joel Wiener, *Radicalism and Freethought in Nineteenth-Century Britain: The Life of Richard Carlile*, (Westport, 1983), pp. 194-5.

³⁸ *Isis*, 2 Feb.-12 May 1832. Sharples' contribution to the 'Isis' discourses is debated, given the closeness of their themes to Carlile's ideas, and her previous lack of editorial experience. For a study assuming they were a collaborative work, see Helen Rogers, "'The Prayer, the Passion and the Reason' of Eliza Sharples: Freethought, Women's Rights and Republicanism, 1832-52", in Eileen Yeo (ed.), *Radical Femininity: Women's Self-Representation in the Public Sphere* (Manchester, 1998), pp. 52-78.

³⁹ Wiener, *Richard Carlile*, pp. 180-2.

⁴⁰ *Isis*, 11 Aug.-15 Sep. 1832, pp. 401-89.

⁴¹ *Isis*, 29 Sep. 1832, p. 516.

Smith[‘s] ... whole demeanour gives assurance that he will be a valuable auxiliary in our infant cause’.⁴² An editorial admitted that despite Smith’s lectures being ‘at variance with the general style of the *Isis* ... they contain much ingenious originality’. He ‘deserves every possible encouragement, though we may neither like his style nor agree with his conclusions on all points’.⁴³ From mid-November, two Smith discourses were reproduced in full in each *Isis* edition, so ‘very useful’ were they, ‘to teach the persecuting Whigs that even they cannot succeed in their attempt to suppress freedom of discussion’.⁴⁴

Such testimonials echoed those from Carlile’s journals the previous year, promoting Ward’s Rotunda appearances. The Shiloh had similarly been viewed as ‘a valuable auxiliary in our infant cause’ – Carlile’s attempts to undermine existing Christianity.⁴⁵ One notable difference between their cases was Carlile’s lack of any discernable financial interest in Smith’s career: Smith appeared in no venue for which Carlile needed to cover costs, as Ward had at the Rotunda. Smith and his lectures were also discussed in *The Isis* in significantly different terms to Ward. His discourses were ‘most respectably original, and ... indicative of great mental power, arising from deep and laborious thought’.⁴⁶ Little reference was made to the novelty of his appearance or performance – he was no ‘new species of religious entertainment’ as Ward had been.⁴⁷ In the final edition of *The Isis*, Smith was further recommended for his utility to the wider radical cause. As ‘a young man of great promise in the great cause of free discussion, and

⁴² *Isis*, 17 Nov. 1832, p. 586.

⁴³ *Isis*, 3 Nov. 1832, p. 576.

⁴⁴ *Isis*, 17 Nov. 1832, p. 586.

⁴⁵ See Chapter 8, p. 259.

⁴⁶ *Isis*, 15 Dec. 1832, p. 610.

⁴⁷ *Prompter*, 17 Sep. 1831 p. 799.

very correct in his ... moral and political principle', Carlile considered him 'worthy of being taken by the hand, by any of our more influential and wealthy friends, and ... brought more prominently before the public'.⁴⁸

The closer precedent for Smith's Borough Chapel career was Robert Taylor's own Rotunda appearances, and prior presentations of his ideas. Comparisons between Smith and Taylor were made at the time, and since. Abel Hall, the Home Office spy, thought Smith as 'vulgar and blasphemous' as any other radical lecturer, notably 'Taylor, Hibbett, Gale Jones etc'.⁴⁹ Iain McCalman has suggested that Smith's almost instant popularity on the London radical scene stemmed from audiences seeing him as 'a Scottish incarnation of the Devil's Chaplain'.⁵⁰ Smith similarly styled himself as a learned 'Reverend', exercised considerable wit in his presentation, flouted respectable taboos and shared an authoritative knowledge of the Scriptures interpreted in such a way as to undermine existing, established religion. A close comparison between the ideas Smith had shared with Taylor in his Ashton letter of May 1831, and the views articulated in his autumn 1832 London lectures, reveals the resemblances were not confined to presentation, but intellectual also.⁵¹ Smith's Borough Chapel discourses were the fruit of

⁴⁸ *Isis*, 15 Dec. 1832, p. 610. Throughout this period, Carlile remained in his Giltspur Street prison (he was released in summer 1833). Robert Taylor was also confined in another jail. Any 'associating', as Abel Hall alleged, Smith did in person with either, will have involved prison visits and letters, like Ward's. Eliza Sharples almost certainly acted as a regular point of contact between Smith and Carlile, attending Smith's lectures and being Carlile's frequent prison visitor. Wiener, *Richard Carlile*, pp. 191-200.

⁴⁹ TNA HO 64/12/150, 8 Oct. 1832. Julian Hibbert and John Gale Jones were both allies of Carlile who often spoke at the Rotunda. Wiener, *Richard Carlile*, p. 180.

⁵⁰ Iain McCalman, 'Popular Irreligion in Early Victorian England: Infidel Preachers and Radical Theatricality in 1830s London', in Richard W. Davies and Richard J. Helmstadter (eds.), *Religion and Irreligion in Victorian Society* (London, 1992), pp. 63-4.

⁵¹ See Chapter 7, pp. 234-40. Smith gave twenty-four lectures at the Borough Chapel. Twelve were published in *The Isis*. From January to May 1833, Smith re-printed four of these again and full transcriptions of the remaining twelve in pamphlet form as *The Antichrist, or Christianity Reformed*, published by Benjamin Cousins, of 18 Duke St, Lincoln's Inn Fields, who would remain Smith's publisher for the next decade. See Patricia Hollis, *The Pauper Press: A Study in Working-Class Radicalism of the*

his own advice to Taylor fifteen months earlier – the continuation and the corrective of Taylor’s critique of current religion.

Smith openly expressed his personal admiration for Taylor and his ideas: ‘the Rev. Mr Taylor’ had ‘discovered many beautiful analogies ... [and] brought to light many beautiful resemblances in the astronomical heavens’. Smith considered these to ‘form a new era in the history of astronomy and theology’.⁵² He further introduced and expanded on precisely the doctrines he had previously recommended to Taylor in writing: how God and the Devil were ultimately ‘the same active principle’, how the Bible was their work, and how the claims to inspiration of individuals in both the past and present were a further insight into this God of history.⁵³ Understanding this ‘truth of History’ in the Bible, this record of the divine double nature reproduced in modern prophets, Smith had previously hoped might be ‘a powerful weapon’ in Taylor’s hands, against established Christianity. Now in 1832, Smith wielded the weapon himself, extending Taylor’s original critique. As Smith declared in his third lecture: ‘there are some things which Mr Taylor has not yet discovered ... which I will undertake to show you are contained in the Scriptures, as a completion to his system.’⁵⁴

Smith intended his lectures at the Borough Chapel to attract an audience of radicals and freethinkers; he designed his message for this constituency. He did not define himself as an unbeliever: ‘I myself ... am no Infidel, believing all nature to be conducted upon a systematic plan’.⁵⁵ Yet, he frequently explained, he was a committed

1830s (London, 1970), pp. 122-8, 161-4, 310. Smith’s lectures are hereafter cited by their page number in either published source.

⁵² Smith, *Antichrist*, p. 36; *Isis*, 15 Dec. 1832, p. 618.

⁵³ Huntington Library (HL) Richard Carlile Papers, RC 199. See Chapter 7, p. 239.

⁵⁴ Smith, *Antichrist*, p. 36.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. i.

critic of ‘the Christian Church’ and sought to secure its downfall, to make way for what he described variously as a new ‘religion of charity’, the ‘religion of Nature’ and ‘the millennium’.⁵⁶ As he had written to Taylor, Smith contended that the radical case against religion was weakened by its neglect of the Bible as a critical tool: ‘Infidels dismiss the fabrication of the Bible as priestcraft, or astronomical allegory’, not noticing that the book itself contained principles to undermine the Church’s claims.⁵⁷ For Smith, a stronger critique of Christianity was provided, not by denying modern reports of prophecy or claims to visions, assuming them impostures, but accepting them. These experiences demonstrated both divine inspiration and deception, and, by this, the truth of the divided character of God – Smith’s doctrine of God as both good and evil.⁵⁸ God ‘tells you in the Bible that he deceives you, and talks riddles and puzzles to you, and sends strong delusions unto you, because you wont [*sic*] believe the truth’.⁵⁹ From the Bible’s explanation of the work of God and Nature, Smith stressed repeatedly, infidels would find the best weapons to secure the fall of current Christianity.⁶⁰ To remove the worst influences of religion, ‘the home thrusts of a real theologian are still necessary, to probe to the heart what are called the living, and spiritual, and fundamental principles of the Christian faith’. This, Smith could do, ‘in faith, not as an Infidel’.⁶¹

The fundamental purpose of Smith’s lectures was to bring ‘believers’ like himself and professed unbelievers into alliance. ‘Truth is broken to pieces and scattered amongst all parties’, Smith wrote, ‘and the two extremes of faith and infidelity may correct and

⁵⁶ Smith, *Antichrist*, pp. 6-12; *Isis*, 15 Dec. 1832, pp. 611-17.

⁵⁷ *Isis*, 20 Oct. 1832, pp. 536.

⁵⁸ *Isis*, 17 Nov. 1832, pp. 587-92.

⁵⁹ Smith, *Antichrist*, p. 10.

⁶⁰ *Isis*, 17 Nov. 1832, p. 582; *Isis*, 15 Dec. 1832, pp. 611-17.

⁶¹ *Isis*, 17 Nov. 1832, p. 588; Smith, *Antichrist*, pp. 15-16.

teach the other. The Atheist may teach the Christian, and the Christian the Atheist'.⁶² For this reason, Smith also promoted his lectures among millenarians.⁶³ Some Shilohites returned to the Borough each Sunday evening to hear Smith's early lectures; Smith reassured one in person that he would 'take care not to say anything against your doctrine, but shall rather favour it'; Smith esteemed Ward 'as a man, as also to his doctrine, much of which I admire as a *principle*'.⁶⁴ When publishing his lectures in 1833, Smith wrote of his intention to 'do all justice to Mr Ward, whom I respect and love dearly'; he would not print 'any thing which ... would prejudice any of my readers against him'.⁶⁵ Ward rejected all such statements, making every effort to inform his followers that Smith now 'refused ... to acknowledge me in the way God has called me'. Ward's direction to 'let none of our people listen to Smith nor anyone that would support his erroneous and wicked inventions' suggests that Smith had become a divisive figure among Shilohites.⁶⁶

The common ground that Smith identified for the mutual education of 'Christians and Atheists' was their expectation of radical earthly change. In dismissing both the prophecy of the Bible and of modern prophets, atheist radicals neglected to see how God's work in Nature pointed to their own aim. The 'prophesies and visions' of 'prophets and prophetesses of the present age', Smith declared, giving the examples of Brothers, Southcott and Turner, each concerned 'the same all-engrossing subject, a great political

⁶² Smith, *Antichrist*, p. i.

⁶³ Published pamphlets of Smith's Borough lectures included footnotes and appendices with further explanations of his ideas, inserted 'for the sake of Southcottians who may read these lectures'. Smith, *Antichrist*, p. 70.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 112. Smith appended articles on Ward and George Turner to several editions. Smith, *Antichrist*, pp. 95-6, 112, 125.

⁶⁶ ZW to Thomas Pierce, 28 Oct. and 29 Nov. 1832, *Zion's Works*, xv. 107, 131-2.

overturning change in society'.⁶⁷ Both the Bible and they predicted a coming millennium, which Smith described as 'a state of political happiness and scientific knowledge', and surely 'nothing can be more reasonable than the hope of such an enviable change in the constitution of society'.⁶⁸ Believers, in turn, needed to recognise the ways that political radicals might propose a more Christian state of society. In suggesting 'a more perfect society in community of property', Smith noted, such radicals mirrored both the early Christians and his personal expectations of property in the millennium. For Smith:

all Christians who believe at all in a Millennium must agree with me, but they have no faith; they want to *prop up* the Devil's kingdom, and Atheists and blasphemers are putting them to shame; 'publicans and harlots will get to heaven before them.'⁶⁹

Smith the Owenite

When Smith wrote this, in February 1833, he was well-acquainted with the social proposals of utopian radical groups. With such knowledge he compared the state of society supported by Christians and the future advocated by 'Atheists and blasphemers'. By such epithets he meant the followers of Robert Owen. His association with this group did not begin in April 1833, with his *Lecture on a Christian Community*; Smith took a detailed interest in the ideas and activities of Owenites from his first days in London.

Smith arrived in the capital at the precise moment a large body of London artisans were establishing the first 'Equitable Labour Exchange' – an institution designed to practice Owen's theory that human labour should be made the standard of a product's

⁶⁷ *Isis*, 17 Nov. 1832, pp. 588-9.

⁶⁸ *Isis*, 15 Dec. 1832, p. 616.

⁶⁹ Smith, *Antichrist*, p. 123.

value.⁷⁰ This was one of a number of theories within Owen's 'Plan' first proposed over a decade earlier, in writings and speeches responding to post-war social difficulties.⁷¹

While Owen himself spent the 1820s founding short-lived independent communities in Britain and America to demonstrate his 'Plan', groups of artisans in Brighton then London appropriated 'Owenism' for themselves, founding cooperative societies and establishing trading stores.⁷² These operated schemes either of shared profits or the direct exchange of goods between workers. By 1830, cooperative enterprises had spread to many parts of the country, promoted by radical journals and handbooks. Returning from America, Owen first attempted to redirect the autonomous 'Owenite' movement towards his communitarian vision. Yet by 1832, as experiments with stores accepting labour notes – an alternative currency of labour hours – proved a success, Owen threw his influence behind a National Equitable Labour Exchange opened in Grays Inn Road in September 1832. Within a week Smith had been to visit it.

Mr Owen's co-operation system was set agoing here on Monday last; it is a very large establishment; I was quite surprised when I saw it ... As the system is much more popular among the working classes than I had any idea of before I came here, and likely to be adopted to a considerable extent, I may give you some idea of it. It is a kind of bank called an Equitable or Exchange Bank ... A workman brings his work to the bank, and he receives in exchange, not money, but a labour note to the amount. With this ... wherever it is current, he purchases whatever he wants.⁷³

The appeal of this form of trading and exchange to Smith was not, as Oliver has suggested, predominantly due to the practical similarities it enjoyed with his earlier

⁷⁰ On the Labour Exchanges and labour theory of value, see William Oliver, 'The Labour Exchange Phase of the Co-operative Movement', *Oxford Economic Papers*, 10:3 (1958), 355-67.

⁷¹ See Robert Owen, *A New View of Society and Other Writings*, ed. Gregory Claeys (London, 1991), pp. 105-308.

⁷² See Prothero, *Artisans and Politics*, pp. 239-64.

⁷³ JES to brother John Smith, 9 Sep. 1832, *Shepherd Smith*, p. 81.

Ashton communitarianism; Smith was not especially ‘prepared’ for his Owenite career ‘by the sectarian co-operative at Ashton’.⁷⁴ Rather, Smith found the resemblance in the visionary *principle* of the Labour Exchange compelling. By the ‘system’ of labour notes, Smith informed his brother, ‘they contemplate the total abolition of all gold and silver currency and accumulated wealth – the root of all evil. And this they call the millennium’.⁷⁵ In this comment, Smith was not merely noting the Owenite millennial language, but appreciating the idea of ‘contemplating’ an arrangement present in the millennium. Here, as in Ashton, was a preview, a shadow of the millennium – a state without the evil influence of money. Just as the Ashton shops, Sanctuary and buildings were an arrangement ‘as in the millennium’, so Smith understood the Owenite labour exchange to be the same. From this understanding, commenced Smith’s journey into alliance with Robert Owen and his body of supporters in London.

Smith’s Autumn encounters with Anna Wheeler only directed his reading in the ‘philosophies’ of ‘Owenism, St Simonism, and Fourierism’.⁷⁶ His Borough Chapel appearances brought him into frequent contact with figures engaged in the practical schemes responding to such theories, most notably John Gast and Allen Davenport.⁷⁷ Smith did not complete his lectures at the Borough Chapel, move to the Rotunda theatre, then attract the attention of Owenites. His later Borough lectures demonstrated his awareness of Owenism; his Rotunda move marked his entry into membership of Owen’s

⁷⁴ Oliver, *Prophets and Millennialists*, p. 200. See Chapter 4, p. 159.

⁷⁵ JES to brother John Smith, 9 Sep. 1832, *Shepherd Smith*, p. 81.

⁷⁶ By December Smith’s lectures included references to Saint-Simonianism. *Isis*, 15 Dec. 1832, p. 615. On Saint-Simonian ideas see below, pp. 313-15.

⁷⁷ TNA HO 64/12/192, 24 Dec. 1832. Abel Hall reported, after Smith’s lecture, ‘Davenport and Yearly... following him chiefly in abuse of all religion and the immense Revenue drawn from the people’s pocket to support a Rapacious Clergy’. ‘Yearly’ was a member of the NUWC. On Davenport, a ‘literary shoemaker’ once associated with the Spenceans and contributor to Carlile’s *Republican*, see McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, pp. 43-6, 193-5. On the labour exchange, see Allen Davenport, *The Life and Literary Pursuits of Allen Davenport*, ed. Malcolm Chase (Aldershot, 1994), pp. 23-4.

following. By this stage, the Rotunda was an Owenite building – it was the second labour exchange in London. When the original Grays Inn Road Exchange was closed, the Rotunda became the focus of Owenite activities in the capital in early 1833. After a period of refitting, Owen began lecturing there towards the end of March, and Smith first presented his *Lecture on a Christian Community* there not long after.⁷⁸ Smith's audience was therefore Owenite to begin with; it was not this which 'first attracted the attention of the Owenites to Smith'.⁷⁹ The Southcottian had articulated a significant argument for his and other millenarians' involvement with Owenism before this, in the Borough Chapel. It was an argument he was himself responding to, by his presence in the Rotunda. At its centre, was Smith's personal conviction concerning what the millennium would be like, how he knew it was approaching, and how human movements – religious and political – related to its realisation. In short, it was an argument grounded in his recent Southcottian experience, and an emergent religious conception of human agency in the improvement of the world.

Smith's millennium

Smith addressed the themes of messiahs and the millennium in several Borough Chapel lectures. His approach and arguments reveal an evolution in his beliefs since living in Ashton, and a deliberate distinction from some Southcottian beliefs. Though Smith openly declared his anticipation of an imminent 'millennium', he often equated this with a condition of society recognisable as a secular substitution of religious belief:

⁷⁸ *Crisis*, 30 Mar. 1833, ii. 57.

⁷⁹ Harrison, *New Moral World*, p. 119. Smith subsequently followed the further institutional move of Owen's supporters, to a new institution in Charlotte Street, giving his first Sunday lectures here on 2 June. *Crisis*, 8 June 1833, ii. 169-76. Smith remained the regular Sunday lecturer at Charlotte Street until July 1834.

‘republicanism and liberty, and science, and commerce, and political prosperity are the millennium.’⁸⁰ ‘This is the Messiah I look for’, Smith further asserted: ‘all that I believe is, that a spirit of charity and liberality will grow up in society, and that all sects and parties of religion will come together, and embrace each other as brethren’.⁸¹

Despite such outwardly secular definitions, Smith explicitly described this messianic ‘spirit of charity and liberality’ as a ‘Southcottian doctrine, the most beautiful, natural, philosophical, consistent doctrine ever taught’.

Joanna ... and her followers believed that some divine, celestial looking baby was coming, and the public ... took it for granted that that was the real doctrine, but it was merely the sanguine interpretation of words that had another and a philosophical meaning. If the Southcottians had read with due attention ... they might have seen that no Shiloh was to come but a spirit of liberty and unity.⁸²

This ‘spiritual’ interpretation of the Southcottian messiah owed a discernable debt to Zion Ward’s understanding of the millennium, yet also to John Wroe’s dispensational chronology. Ward declared the process of millennial change to be underway through the influence of a messianic spirit within him and others. ‘Shiloh, the spirit of truth, will be found rising up in men, women, and children’, he wrote.⁸³ Yet like Wroe, Smith related the concept of a second messiah to the first – Jesus. As Jesus had marked the transition from Judaism to Christianity, ending the Law of Moses with the Gospel, so the second

⁸⁰ *Isis*, 15 Dec. 1832, p. 614.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 614.

⁸² Smith, *Antichrist*, p. 158.

⁸³ Zion Ward, *The Vision of Judgment; or, the Return of Joanna from her trance* (London, 1829), p. 4; see Chapter 5, p. 176.

messiah would replace the Gospel and Christian Church with the Millennium: ‘the Christian church ... gives birth at the last, to a spirit of liberty and equality’.⁸⁴

Smith’s descriptions of the religious and social arrangements envisaged in the millennium referred more directly to the Bible, yet also evoked the visions of his prior prophetic leaders. He equated the Hebrew prophets’ prediction of a state of earthly redemption with the millennium of humanity. Jeremiah had prophesied an ‘end of priestcraft ... and all clerical instruction’, when he declared how God would ‘put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts’, so ending sin, the need for prayer, and ‘ceremonial worship’.⁸⁵ Isaiah had prophesied ‘a state of society in which plenty of the necessaries and comforts of life are equally distributed upon a new system of political economy’.⁸⁶ The promise of this vision was an end to the division of humanity caused by money. The state of redemption represented was a state of poverty, ‘because money, the root of all political evil, is wanting’, and ‘the possibility of men becoming tyrants and oppressors removed’.⁸⁷ The Owenites’ comprehension of this vision, in addition to their ‘contemplation’ of it in practice, drew Smith’s admiration. For this reason, he later declared their ‘new system of social intercourse’ to be ‘nothing else than the predictions of the ... prophets of Israel’.⁸⁸

In a February lecture on ‘the Redemption of Man’, Smith set out why he believed the millennium was approaching.⁸⁹ Here, the epistemology of his millennial convictions was almost exclusively interpretative. Smith’s reading of the Bible as revealing the two-

⁸⁴ *Isis*, 15 Dec. 1832, pp. 613-14.

⁸⁵ Smith, *Antichrist*, p. 119. See Jeremiah 31:33.

⁸⁶ Smith, *Antichrist*, pp. 118-19. Smith cited Isaiah 45 especially.

⁸⁷ Smith, *Antichrist*, p. 117-18.

⁸⁸ Smith, ‘Lecture on a Christian Community’, pp. 204-5.

⁸⁹ Smith, *Antichrist*, pp. 113-25.

sided character of God and his dealings with humanity, also featured the idea of a providential plan for redemption. The single deity worked in particular ways, in certain patterns, in Creation and Scripture, in the direction of unity, towards good overcoming evil, in his own character and humanity.⁹⁰ This was not a redemption, Smith pointed out, in ‘a future state’ but ‘the progress of human society in this life’.⁹¹ Humanity currently existed in a state of ‘abject misery’, subjected to tyranny, and ‘to moral and physical thralldom, out of which, in the course of Providence, ... [it] is destined to be happily extricated’.⁹² No action of humanity could alter this course: ‘neither prayers, nor praises, nor mortifications, nor ablutions, nor self-denials, nor sacrifices ... will move the Deity to alter his plans’.⁹³ Yet for Smith, allegories and analogies in the Bible revealed the final stage of the divine plan to be reached. The condition of British society demonstrated the ‘iniquities’ which the Bible indicated would ‘abound in the last days’ – the ‘spiritual and temporal thralldom’ of the power of priests, kings and aristocrats over people.⁹⁴ ‘Instead of ... an equitable distribution of property and labour’, Smith continued, ‘one business tries to overturn another, by driving hard bargains, or underselling, or adulterating ... all [are] seeking each other’s destruction’.⁹⁵ Such a ‘want of unity in the plans of society’ embodied ‘the fall of man ... from which in due time he must be delivered’.⁹⁶

Agency and the millennium

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 114.

⁹¹ Ibid., pp. 122-3.

⁹² Ibid., p. 113.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 114.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 114.

⁹⁵ Smith, *Antichrist*, p. 116.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 117.

⁹⁷ His brief answer in this work, vaguely asserting the inevitability of ‘the hearts of men’ being ‘weaned from monopolies and selfish interests’ has led political historians to question how far Smith had worked out his revolutionary programme.⁹⁸ Yet Smith provided an earlier, fuller answer to this question, grounded in his religious perspective. For beyond proclaiming the imminence of the redemptive change, Smith’s ‘Redemption of Man’ lecture set out a theory of both divine and human contributions to the millennium.

Despite insisting that the plan for human redemption was built into the course of divine Providence, Smith envisaged a role for humans in its realisation. On one level, this related to the idea of a messiah whose ‘coming ... is known by a spirit of liberty,’ who ‘pervades all, and is working in a thousand different ways’.⁹⁹ Such a single spirit would be the making of many messiahs:

Every man is a Messiah, a Saviour, a deliverer to Zion, who lends a helping hand towards the redemption of his species from the house of bondage; [this is] every man in whom the spirit of liberty is at work, whether it be in the improvement of political and domestic economy, the advancement of the arts, or the unfettering of the mind from the thralldom of superstition.¹⁰⁰

This spirit was available to all; ‘he comes not in clouds, or in fire and brimstone ... [but] in the mind’; he was known by ‘men’s minds being stirred up by him’.¹⁰¹ Such a concept

⁹⁷ Smith, ‘Lecture on a Christian Community’, p. 207.

⁹⁸ Saville, ‘J.E. Smith’, p. 125.

⁹⁹ Smith, *Antichrist*, pp. 121-2.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 122-3.

¹⁰¹ Smith, *Antichrist*, pp. 121-2.

of a divine spirit stirring humanity can complicate the ways by which Smith's view of the autonomy of human action may be understood. To the subsequent published edition of his lectures, Smith added an explanatory footnote: To 'those who believe in a millennium', Smith declared, the 'possibility' of achieving a state of unity and peace, must not be doubted. 'If they reply,' he continued, that 'we must wait for this, that is, till God's time. I answer, God's time is when he is stirring up men's minds in the cause'.¹⁰² The action of stirring, Smith conceived to be God's; yet the response was human. Divine action and human action, were thus intimately linked. 'The whole picture of redemption, as given in the Bible', Smith concluded, involved the whole human race as well as God: 'the great mind of nature ... carries on his plans of human society by us, his unconscious agents.'¹⁰³

Only by the concept of 'unconscious agents' did Smith make sense of modern 'infidels' being the ones to commence the millennium – they carried out the work of God unwittingly. Yet, Smith articulated a further understanding of how humans could be *conscious* agents of the millennium, which applied to himself and others expecting the millennium of God. This redemptive, earthly change should be viewed very differently to any redemption in the afterlife; for while death, Smith believed, could only be faced with passivity and resignation,

in respect to the present state of existence, I have it in my power to take active measures in furthering, or attempting to further, the cause of human redemption. It is by human agency that it must be done; we must work out our own salvation ... We are fellow-workers together with God.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 149.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 125.

¹⁰⁴ Smith, *Antichrist*, p. 123. In declaring the need to 'work out our own salvation', Smith was quoting Philippians 2:12. Ideas of personal agency in early Methodism also owed much to this phrase. See John Wesley, 'On working out our own salvation' in *Works of John Wesley*, iii. 207; Phyllis Mack, *Heart*

With this, Smith provided an explanation for his political career. At Ashton he had been part of a community gathered as a sign of God's intention, who gained a sense of their own agency to improve their collective conditions within their ultimate expectation of God's impending redemptive action. In Ward, by contrast, Smith had encountered the individualising of this divine activity, where the prophet became God's singular agent of change in the world. For Ward and his most convinced followers, anyone who happened to aid their cause – be they freethinkers or radicals – aided God's purposes; yet the millennium itself remained caught up in the personhood of the messiah. Now, Smith looked beyond these understandings, to see the significance of broader 'active measures' in the cause of the coming millennium – not as a sign, not in service of a messiah, but as a work of salvation itself. He had come to consciousness of his own 'power' within the 'cause of human redemption' – consciousness of his own agency, and this led him to ally his energies and efforts, his talent and his thought, with those he recognised to be fellow-workers, even if unconscious workers, with God.¹⁰⁵

Southcottians and Owenites

Shortly after he was made editor of *The Crisis* in September 1833, Smith answered a letter from an 'A.B. of Birmingham', who mentioned believing in a coming messiah

Religion in the British Enlightenment: gender and emotion in early Methodism, (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 36-41.

¹⁰⁵ Robert Owen himself later held a related view of his work. In his autobiography he reflected that the succession of events in his life formed 'connected links of a chain, to compel me to proceed onward to complete a mission, of which I have been an impelled agent' Robert Owen, *Life of Robert Owen* (2 vols., 1857-58), quoted in Harrison, *New Moral World*, pp. 134-5.

which Smith suspected, from ‘the manner in which this is expressed’, indicated a sympathy for ‘Southcottian doctrine’.¹⁰⁶ ‘A.B.’ considered himself a ‘friend of Mr Owen’s system politically considered’ but was deterred by its ‘infidelity’. In his published reply, Smith gave both a succinct argument for the relation of millennial faith to Owenite socialism – how Owen’s ‘new system of society’ was indeed the way ‘God begins to reign, the Kingdom of God is come’ – and a further argument for his own and other Christians’ involvement with the movement.¹⁰⁷ Though unbelieving Owenites would introduce the millennium, believers would ‘ultimately join them’. ‘The meeting of the two parties shall be like the meeting of two chemical agents’ Smith wrote, ‘They shall mutually affect each other; the infidel will be reconciled to *Christianity reformed*, and the Christian to *Infidelity Christianized*. No other union is *natural*.’ Smith saw it as his task to catalyse this union, so allying himself to those he called the ‘masons’ laying the foundation of the millennium. ‘Hesitate not then to lend your aid in supporting the work’, he urged ‘A.B’. For as a believer, Smith had opted to work with the Owenites for the moment, as should other millenarians: for ‘the Infidels are the most useful of the two parties, for *now* is their time of action.’¹⁰⁸

Throughout his period as an Owenite editor and lecturer in 1833-34, Smith utilised the influence of his position to promote his views on Southcottian doctrines and prophetic subjects, and the importance of other millennial-minded Christians joining the Owenite cause. The extent to which Smith did this is almost entirely overlooked in the

¹⁰⁶ *Crisis*, 14 Sep. 1833, iii. 12-15. Smith assumed editorship of *The Crisis* from 7 September 1833. He was appointed, not by Owen directly (though certainly with Owen’s approval) but by Benjamin Cousins, owner of *The Crisis*, since April 1833, and publisher of Smith’s *Antichrist*, since January. See *Crisis*, 23 Aug. 1834, iv. 154.

¹⁰⁷ *Crisis*, 14 Sep. 1833, iii. 12.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

more detailed histories of his socialist career.¹⁰⁹ In one lecture, Smith compared Owen's doctrine of 'non-responsibility' to that 'expressed in a very clear and intelligible way, in some of the Southcottian writings'. Their similarity, Smith declared, 'proves that the sect, ... is much more rational and consistent in its religious tenets, than the whole fraternity of Jesus put together'.¹¹⁰ Smith believed that Owenites and Southcottians were comparable: 'Both ... are regarded as visionaries by the world. The Socialist, who preaches of community of goods, abolition of crime, or punishment, of magistrates, and of marriage is accounted equally deranged as the followers of ... Joanna Southcote [*sic*]'.¹¹¹ Yet it was not their perceived madness, Smith argued, which brought the two together; rather, 'the first grand sectarian movement towards the adoption of our social views', he boldly predicted, 'will be that of an ultra-fanatical party' such as the Southcottians. In a lecture on 'Prophecy', he provided his Owenite audience with 'an insight into some of their prevailing tenets'.¹¹² A later lecture discussed 'self-declared messiahs', including Zion Ward and other Southcottian claimants at length.¹¹³

Smith was a unique Southcottian. No other traceable believer of the period achieved anything like his independent, critical reflection on the prophetic tradition, combined with a public audience for his views and influence within a secular political movement. Yet, such uniqueness did not mean Smith was isolated – the sole Southcottian to travel his path, to engage with Owenism. Smith did not gather a defined group of believers under his personal direction in London, as he had at Ashton and in Edinburgh;

¹⁰⁹ Harrison, *New Moral World*, p. 122; Oliver, *Prophets and Millennialists*, pp. 197-217; Taylor, *Eve*, pp. 167-72; Claeys, *Citizens*, pp. 199-207. Saville writes of Smith's religious millennialism being 'muted' in 1833, then 'growing again' in 1835. Saville, 'J.E. Smith', pp. 121, 138, 143.

¹¹⁰ *Crisis*, 17 Aug. 1833, ii. 257.

¹¹¹ *Crisis*, 31 Aug. 1833, ii. 275.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 275.

¹¹³ *Crisis*, 14 June 1834, iv. 77.

yet he evidently remained a figure of influence among a section of Southcottians in the 1830s. Southcottian sympathisers were known among Smith's lecture audiences in Charlotte Street – *The Crisis* records Smith once denoting a certain individual there 'a Southcotian [*sic*]'.¹¹⁴ Smith's journals also circulated among Southcottian allies and acquaintances in Edinburgh, Ashton and elsewhere.¹¹⁵ Smith claimed that John Stanley junior, the son of the Ashton mill-owner, was one of his followers, 'being induced' to leave Wroe 'solely by reading my writings, which he has regularly taken in from the first'.¹¹⁶ By 1835, Smith learned he was 'also read by John Taylor, their regular preacher at Ashton, so that I have been playing some havoc amongst the Wroeites, to my knowledge, and probably a great deal more without my knowledge'.¹¹⁷ Smith met with some success in bringing fellow Southcottians into his own quest for a millennial union.

Smith and Socialism

It is for the distinct political ideas and social analyses that James Smith articulated during his tenure at *The Crisis*, between September 1833 and August 1834, that he is best known to political history. *The Crisis* was not the only setting where his thoughts were communicated. In addition to their prior public airing in Sunday lectures, they were published in the trades union-linked journal *The Pioneer*, and in pamphlets, most notably Smith's translation of the French socialist thinker Henri Saint-Simon's *Nouveau*

¹¹⁴ *Crisis*, 9 Nov. 1833, iii. 83.

¹¹⁵ Smith, *Shepherd Smith*, pp. 75, 153, 205, 418.

¹¹⁶ JES to brother John, 18 June 1835, *Shepherd Smith*, p. 139.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

Christianisme.¹¹⁸ In histories of early socialism, Owenism, general unionism, or any study of the brief, heady and confused episode of the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union of 1834, Smith is counted a significant figure. Together with James Morrison, editor of *The Pioneer*, Smith has been associated with moves within the GNCTU urging a more militant demonstration of union strength (*contra* Owen) and defining the divisions within English society in class-conscious terms.¹¹⁹ The two editors' respective articles proposing an alternative form of democratic representation through a 'House of Trades' were once well-noted for their prominent divergence from the period's radical ideological norm – seeking universal suffrage for elections for the House of Commons.¹²⁰ Their 'Letters on Associated Labour', written under the pseudonym 'Senex', presented such innovative definitions of 'Capital' and the latent power of 'productive labour' that they have been termed 'the most considerable piece of social theory prompted in this period'.¹²¹

Historians' perceptions of Smith's political ideas and influence in the 1833-34 period have inevitably altered with the substantial shifts in interpretations of English

¹¹⁸ James Smith, *New Christianity by Henri de St.-Simon... translated from the original French, by the Rev. J.E. Smith*, (London, 1834). This was the first English translation of this work, and published by Benjamin Cousins in January 1834. Smith also wrote, *A sermon by the Rev G. Redford [of Worcester] on the doctrines of Robert Owen... to which is appended a reply by the Rev. J.E. Smith* (London, 1834). *Crisis*, 25 Jan. 1834, iii. 176.

¹¹⁹ M. Beer, *History of British Socialism*, (London, 1953), i. 343-4; Saville, 'J.E. Smith', pp. 136-8.

¹²⁰ The application of the anachronistic 'syndicalist' term to this proposal was common among left-wing historians between the wars: Beer, *History of British Socialism*, i. 328; Raymond Postgate, *Out of the Past: some revolutionary sketches* (London, 1922), p. 102; idem. and G.D.H. Cole, *The Common People, 1746-1938* (London, 1938), p. 260. In the post-war period, Oliver rejected the relevance of the term. William Oliver, 'Organisations and Ideas Behind the Efforts to Achieve a General Union of the Working Classes in the Early 1830's' (Oxford Univ. D.Phil. Thesis, 1954), p. 431. It nonetheless continues to be used as a short-hand for such ideas in their GNCTU context. See Gareth Stedman Jones, 'Rethinking Chartism', *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History* (Cambridge, 1983), p. 128; Chase, *Early Trade Unionism*, p. 152.

¹²¹ Oliver, 'Organisations', p. 364; G.D.H. Cole and Raymond Postgate thought the letters' economic analysis 'astonishingly modern and intelligent: reading them torn from their context, few critics would believe they antedated Marx'. *Common People*, p. 268.

early 1830s popular politics of recent decades, not least in relation to class-consciousness, the evolution of radical ideology, the reception of the radical press, and the significance of trades union organisation. Gareth Stedman Jones' seminal study of radical language notably conceded the distinctiveness of Smith's concept of a trade-based form of representation, yet denied that the language of class in *The Crisis* and *Pioneer* was any different from wider contemporary radicalism – a rhetoric of 'producers' and 'idlers' little altered since the late eighteenth century.¹²² More regional surveys of 1830s radicalism have questioned whether 'the Owenite journals ... with their neo-syndicalist ideology and strategy' were as influential as once thought; the 'more familiar radicalism of the *Poor Man's Guardian*' – prioritising universal suffrage – may have reached more politically-engaged working people.¹²³ Related studies of trade unionism also contend that John Doherty's northern National Association for the Protection of Labour was the more sustained and therefore significant attempted general union in the period, so down-playing the organs and ideas associated with the GNCTU.¹²⁴

Within this revisionist trend, the respective studies of Owenite ideas of Gregory Claeys and Barbara Taylor have repositioned Smith's contribution to early socialism away from an emphasis on class, class-conflict or his overall journalistic influence, to secure his ideas a place in intellectual and feminist history. Yet for both scholars, Smith's 1833-34 political ideas were less innovative than his subsequent writings in *The Shepherd* after 1835. Claeys queried the originality of some of 'Smith's early views', as 'many

¹²² Stedman Jones, 'Rethinking Chartism', pp. 128-33.

¹²³ Robert Sykes, 'Trade Unionism and Class Consciousness: The 'Revolutionary' Period of General Unionism, 1829-1834', in John Rule (ed.), *British Trade Unionism 1750-1850: The Formative Years* (Harlow, 1988), pp. 188-9; Prothero, *Artisans and Politics*, pp. 300-9.

¹²⁴ Sykes, 'Trade Unionism and Class Consciousness', p. 180; A.E. Musson, *British Trade Unions, 1800-1875*, (London, 1972), p. 33; Chase's more recent survey of the general union phase of British radicalism provides a more balanced appraisal of the GNCTU and NAPL: Chase, *Early Trade Unionism*, pp. 133-73.

striking elements ... could easily have been derived from ... Owen'.¹²⁵ The 'notion of the 'House of Trades', for instance, Claeys suspected was 'taken directly' from a plan for extending union structures Owen suggested in autumn 1833.¹²⁶ Smith's writings also indicate influences from other socialist thinkers including William Thompson, John Minter Morgan, and James Bernard.¹²⁷ In contrast, Claeys has identified Smith's definition of the term 'individualism' in *The Shepherd* as highly innovative.¹²⁸ Taylor's exploration of Smith's feminist ideas similarly quoted more from this later journal, as here Smith first coupled a Saint-Simonian idea of a female messiah to his Southcottian beliefs, in a 'doctrine of the woman', where social salvation came through women.¹²⁹

Taylor's was not the first study to explore Smith's relation to the alternative socialist theories of Henri Saint-Simon. William Oliver assessed the influence of Saint-Simonian concepts on Smith's 1834 political arguments, most notably those articulated in the 'Letters on Associated Labour'.¹³⁰ These included a 'threefold historical pattern' laid out in *Nouveau Christianisme*, where the course of human social and religious development was marked by three phases, and 'the canonisation of human productivity' – the organising of society around the contributions of people's labour.¹³¹ With these concepts, Oliver contended, Smith's thought shifted beyond not only Owenism, but also his prior Southcottianism. In collaboration with Morrison, Smith presented a 'secular

¹²⁵ Claeys, *Citizens*, p. 199.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

¹²⁷ Saville, 'J.E. Smith', p. 124; Claeys, *Citizens*, pp. 201-3.

¹²⁸ Gregory Claeys, "'Individualism,'" "Socialism," and "Social Science": Further Notes on a Process of Conceptual Formation 1800-1850', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 47:1 (1986), 81-93.

¹²⁹ Taylor, *Eve*, pp. 168-72.

¹³⁰ Oliver, *Prophets and Millennialists*, p. 203, 207.

¹³¹ Oliver, *Prophets and Millennialists*, p. 208. A further concept was the close interrelation between social phenomena and the religious expressions of that society.

millennialism’, with an ‘impetus ... now unrelated to God’.¹³² The ‘new Christianity’ Saint-Simon proposed represented a third age, beyond Catholic Christianity, where belief and behaviour – and therefore religion and society – were fully integrated, and a just, equal and moral society achieved.¹³³ Subsequent followers of Saint-Simon called these the ages of ‘law, grace and love’.¹³⁴ For Oliver, Smith projected this ‘historical triad’ onto ideas and expectations surrounding the trades union movement in 1834, and, with Morrison, attempted to equip the readers of their journals with a way of thinking of their Consolidated Union enterprise as the mark of, and conduit to, the age of brotherly love.¹³⁵

In all these assessments of Smith’s career in 1833-34, the persistence of ideas and expectations drawn from his prior Southcottianism are significantly overlooked. Smith’s proven ability to synthesize varied beliefs and ideas so rapidly into single schemes of thought, allowing him to pass through such different religious and political doctrines between 1828 and 1832, suggests that a continued absorption of principles and theories from diverse thinkers was likely while associating with Owenite radicals in 1833-34. ‘No single individual can enlighten the world, or regenerate society’, Smith tellingly wrote in the preface to his translation of *New Christianity* in 1834; ‘we must suck honey from every flower, and collect the scattered fragments of truth together’.¹³⁶ The erroneous assumption has been that Smith discarded his prior religious honey when encountering more secular, socialist flowers, despite his suggestion that he preferred to blend – to collect and keep the ‘fragments’.

¹³² Oliver, *Prophets and Millennialists*, p. 212.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 208; Keith Taylor, *The Political Ideas of the Utopian Socialists*, (London, 1982), pp. 51-4.

¹³⁴ Oliver, *Prophets and Millennialists*, p. 204.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 210-15.

¹³⁶ Smith, *New Christianity*, p. vi.

It is beyond the purposes of this chapter, and indeed this thesis, to prove the extent of Smith's influence among working people nationally – to demonstrate how his ideas communicated in *The Crisis* and *Pioneer* were received in the wider country. It is also beyond this study's remit to explore the intimate workings of organisations involved in the distinct social movement for a general union of working people of 1834, the reasons for its rise and fall, and whether this particular vision should be interpreted in class or other terms. Yet the final dimension to this study's argument, now that the basis of James Smith's personal involvement in politics is asserted, is the extent of the influence of Smith's Southcottian experience on the ideas he promoted within the general union movement. It is argued here that Smith's millenarian religious convictions had a discernable influence on three central elements of his communicated political and social thinking in 1833-34: his sympathy and support for union, his conception of the shape of history, and his emergent views on the redemptive significance of labour.

Millennial union

'Union' was a term imbued with an especially broad moral and political significance in British radical circles in the early 1830s. Malcolm Chase has suggested that it was adopted by groups so varied in their economic or social aims, it 'came close to being the idea of its age'.¹³⁷ Smith's earliest uses of the term in addresses to Owenite audiences emphasised, significantly, its religious meaning, employing it as part of his critique of existing Christianity: 'The meaning of the word Religion is "Union"'; 'there is no such

¹³⁷ Chase, *Early Trade Unions*, p. 137. See also Oliver, 'Organisations', pp. 384-406.

thing as religion in the world; true religion is *union*'.¹³⁸ Smith often equated his Owenite audiences' intentions with this definition of religion:

Our aim is to establish religion – that is, to create a union amongst mankind which shall link them as one chain in the bonds of peace for ever. The religion of the world is falsely named religion – for religion means unity, and the religious world is infinitely divided.¹³⁹

'Union', for Smith, was closely associated with opinion and belief – the sharing of views and the end of division between people caused by convictions. Yet Smith recognised that division in religion reflected the divisiveness of competitive society: the reason existing Churches had never yet effected the union that their religion by definition encouraged was that 'none ... could unite two parties in mind, who were rivals in business, or were unequally blessed with the necessaries and comforts of life'.¹⁴⁰ From this social view, Smith's concept of union perceptibly expanded, first to emphasise the need for an arrangement of society based on neighbourly love, for this 'creates union of hearts, and union of hearts is the surest step to union of opinion'; then to promote attempts to realise unity in trade and material conditions.¹⁴¹

From Owen's first public promotion of a national union of trades and workers in October 1833, he described its potential with typical apocalyptic rhetoric: it would be the means of realising 'the great changes ... which shall come suddenly upon society, like a thief in the night'.¹⁴² This and Owen's subsequent pronouncements led historians to associate the episode of the foundation and fall of the GNCTU in 1834 with a millennial

¹³⁸ *Crisis*, 16 Nov. 1833, iii. 90; *Crisis*, 27 July 1833, ii. 226.

¹³⁹ *Crisis*, 20 July 1833, ii. 218.

¹⁴⁰ *Crisis*, 27 July 1833, ii. 226.

¹⁴¹ *Crisis*, 16 Nov. 1833, iii. 90.

¹⁴² *Crisis*, 12 Oct. 1833, iii. 43-4. 1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10.

mood.¹⁴³ Smith held his own millennial understanding of union, which drew together all his prior definitions of the term – unity in religion, in opinion, and society. The millennium would bring all this. The social movement to attempt it, beginning with trades, was its foretaste, its shadow and its sign:

Its day ... is approaching. Unity has now become the watchword, the motto of the people; they are beginning to perceive that a general union of trades and individuals is the grand consummation of society; and when they see that unity in trades is the standard doctrine of society, they will soon acknowledge that the unity of nature is the standard doctrine of religion ... The union of trades is only the prelude to the union of sects, which will follow in succession; and these two, the temporal and spiritual union of society, will consummate the regeneration of the human race.¹⁴⁴

In January 1834, Smith railed against all those still saying ““Let us stand still and see the salvation of God”” while denying current attempts ‘for curing human nature of original sin by union and fraternity’.¹⁴⁵ His argument echoed his earlier criticism of those ‘who believe in a millennium’ yet insisted on waiting ‘till God’s time’.¹⁴⁶ For Smith, the practice of union, like the practice of millennial living arrangements at Ashton and the trading without money by Owenite artisans, was to arrange the world now ‘as in the millennium’. The trades unions were not themselves ‘deliverance’, Smith insisted, but they would ‘bring forth something’; ‘they are merely the womb, that conceives and organises a new system’.¹⁴⁷ Union was the condition to which human history pointed: ‘this is the end of all progress, to bring the scattered tribes of trade, of science, and the fine arts into one, that universal union may take place, and all nature rejoice in the

¹⁴³ Cole and Postgate, *Common People*, pp. 268-70.

¹⁴⁴ *Crisis*, 8 Mar. 1834, iii. 225.

¹⁴⁵ *Crisis*, 18 Jan. 1834, iii. 165.

¹⁴⁶ Smith, *Antichrist*, p. 149.

¹⁴⁷ *Crisis*, 22 Mar. 1834, iii. 244.

fraternal compact'.¹⁴⁸ In this final phrase, Smith linked human and biblical history – 'scattered tribes' were no longer Hebrews but humanity; union was an answer to division as well as dispersal.

The shape of human history

From March 1834, Smith had 'always one and sometimes two articles in the *Pioneer*'.¹⁴⁹ From this date, the idea of union commonly put forward in Morrison's publication was strongly influenced by Smith's conception of the term. An editorial, 'concocted', Smith explained 'by Morrison and myself, but written by him', restated his observation that 'Religion means no more nor less than union'; as a consequence, 'he who speaks against our union is irreligious'.¹⁵⁰ *Pioneer* editorials featured not only a familiar Owenite millennial rhetoric – one declared, 'we think we hear the final trump a-sounding!' – but bore the hallmarks of Smith's phraseology.¹⁵¹ 'Where are the prophets of our day?' asked a lead article;

We have a faith in Union, a spiritual faith, which holds us up above all doubt and fear ... High heaven is working unity in all things; this is the age of unity; and by and by we hope to see a union of sects, a friendly feeling breathing through religion, the different creeds all shaking hands like loving brethren...¹⁵²

The concept of the 'age of unity' or union was developed in a distinct direction in the 'Letters on Associated Labour'. Authored by 'Senex', these are currently recognised as a further example of Smith and Morrison's collaborative work, with Oliver tracing Smith's

¹⁴⁸ *Crisis*, 21 Dec. 1833, iii. 130.

¹⁴⁹ JES to brother John, 28 Mar. 1834, *Shepherd Smith*, p. 98.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 98; *Pioneer*, 8 Mar. 1834, p. 237.

¹⁵¹ *Pioneer*, 29 Mar. 1834, p. 272.

¹⁵² *Pioneer*, 5 Apr. 1834, p. 281.

influence in their adoption of Saint-Simonian ideas of history. Published between March and June 1834, the series of fourteen two-page articles laid out an analysis of human history charting three phases of development, and a progression between them: from ‘enslaved labour, then hireling labour, then free, or associated labour’. ‘Hireling labour’ was identified with the current, capitalist system with its profit motive, long hours, and low wages, as well as its tendency to generate conditions of overproduction which left wage-dependent workers without wages, and therefore destitute. By ‘associated labour’ was meant unionised labour, acting in its own interests freed from the influence of capital.¹⁵³ This was explicitly termed ‘practical Christianity’.¹⁵⁴

...the connexion between plenty and misery, which is perpetually recurring, is as contrary to Christianity as it is to nature and to reason ... the system of individual profits and hireling labour is totally at variance with the welfare and improvement of mankind ... [It] will go on in a course of temporary employment, diminished profits, depressed wages, misery, ruin and discontent, until the generous and Christian system of Associated Labour shall be generally adopted.¹⁵⁵

‘Our only hope upon earth’, the articles reflected, ‘is in associated labour’ – unions.¹⁵⁶

Over several letters, further definitions were provided for ‘Capital’, ‘State power’ and the relationship between the collective body of ‘productive labour’ and everyone else within society.¹⁵⁷

The close relation of many of these ideas to Saint-Simonian thought is irrefutable: Saint-Simon’s views on the course of human civilisation featured transitions between ages of slavery and forms of serfdom, before the eventual supremacy of free producers.

¹⁵³ *Pioneer*, 15 Mar. 1834, pp. 243-4.

¹⁵⁴ *Pioneer*, 12 Apr. 1834, p. 292.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 291.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 291.

¹⁵⁷ *Pioneer*, 22 Mar.-10 May 1834, pp. 258-9, 282-3, 290-2, 315-16, 338-40.

The religious arrangements predicted for the third age were specifically correlated with the original teachings of Christ.¹⁵⁸ Yet, it must be recalled that Smith inherited a conception of the shape of human history from Southcottianism – in Wroeite Israelitism – containing its own ‘historical triad’, its own dialectic dispensationalism of Law, Gospel and Millennium. In his notes on his translation of Saint-Simon’s *Nouveau Christianisme*, Smith made clear his retention of this idea, and his relating it directly to the Saint-Simonian ‘social system’ of the third age:

The two great stages of progress naturally subdivide themselves into two great divisions of nature ... the material and the spiritual. These two departments correspond to the law and the gospel. The law had a material object, with a purely spiritual Deity. The first Christianity has a spiritual object, with a material Deity. These two churches are the two extremes of nature, set in opposition to each other. The Social System is the union of these two in one, and is the third stage of revelation, but the second stage of Christianity, and also the second stage of the law, which it embraces.¹⁵⁹

The third age of Saint-Simon was a synthesis of ‘law and gospel’ just as Wroe’s prophesied millennium had been. As union – or the association of labour – was a sign of this social system, then, once again, it might be foreshadowed in distinct practices.

The redemptive significance of labour

The ‘Letters on Associated Labour’ reveal their author to be well-acquainted with labour relations between ‘capitalist’ employers and ‘hireling’ workers, conditions of competition between employers to drive down wages, and theories of the entire wealth of a country resting with its productive labourers. Though Smith may be assumed to have picked up such ideas at a rapid pace from mixing with Owenite radicals in London, the prominence

¹⁵⁸ Taylor, *Utopian Socialists*, pp. 60 and 66-7.

¹⁵⁹ Smith, *New Christianity*, p. iv.

of such concepts in the ‘Letters’ has led historians to assume Morrison’s additional hand in their compiling – the editor of *The Pioneer*’s background in trade unionism and Owenism being more apparent than Smith’s.¹⁶⁰

Details of Morrison’s life are patchy.¹⁶¹ Originally from Newcastle, he was of Scottish descent, and related to a notable Presbyterian missionary.¹⁶² Close to Smith in age, Morrison was radicalised, became involved in trades unionism and learned of Owenism via the more conventional route of his labour. As a house-painter he moved to Birmingham for work and was drawn into the town’s union activities and political culture in the late-1820s. He was closely involved with Birmingham’s own equitable Labour Exchange, and in 1833 wrote several effusive letters to Robert Owen, demonstrating his detailed knowledge of Owen’s theories.¹⁶³ Morrison’s lead role in the Operative Builders’ Union – an association of construction trades intended to counteract the influence of building developers – indicates his further familiarity with issues of the relationship between capital and labour. Morrison began producing *The Pioneer* as a journal of the Builders’ Union in September 1833, and most likely first met Smith around this time, in the printing office of Benjamin Cousins – the publisher of both *The Crisis* and *The Pioneer*.¹⁶⁴ When Morrison moved his young family from Birmingham to

¹⁶⁰ Oliver, ‘Consolidated’, pp. 91-2; Saville, ‘J.E. Smith’, pp. 127-32.

¹⁶¹ The few brief studies of the man focus on his political views and relationship to Owenism. John Sever, ‘James Morrison of *The Pioneer*: notes on his life and background’ (Typescript. Bodleian Library, Oxford, 1963); Saville, ‘J.E. Smith’, p. 128; J. Rule, ‘James Morrison’ *DNB* [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/48765>]; H. Tyler Blethen, ‘Morrison, James (1802-1835)’ in Joseph Baylen and Norbert Gossman (eds.), *Biographical Dictionary of Modern British Radicals Vol.2: 1830-1870* (Hassocks, 1984), pp. 366-7. Morrison’s religious views are hard to establish, though *The Pioneer* was as sympathetic to religious subjects as *The Crisis* became under Smith’s editorship.

¹⁶² Morrison’s uncle was Dr Robert Morrison (1782-1834) the first Protestant missionary to China. L. Ride, *Robert Morrison: the scholar and the man* (London, 1957); Sever, ‘James Morrison’, p. 60.

¹⁶³ Cooperative Union Library, RO 649 and 659, James Morrison to Robert Owen, 22 July 1833 and 2 Sep. 1833.

¹⁶⁴ *Pioneer*, 7 Sep. 1833, p. 1.

London in Spring 1834 and *The Pioneer* became the official journal of the GNCTU, he and Smith began collaborating closely on articles.¹⁶⁵

The new evidence of Smith's interaction with the trade union culture in Ashton-under-Lyne, prior to his career in London, has some implications for understandings of the authorship of the 'Letters on Associated Labour'.¹⁶⁶ Throughout the letters, several discussions of the features of capital, and examples of the interaction between the capitalist and their 'hireling' or wage labourers, are recognisably drawn from the textile industry. In the third letter – on 'Capital' – Senex wrote: 'the capitalist perceives in the very plenty that flows from his mills into his warehouses, an accumulation of goods which he cannot force into the market ... he turns round and tells the operatives that he must reduce their wages'.¹⁶⁷ Arguments for operative workers associating – or forming a general union – put forward in the 'Letters' also echoed the economic analysis of cotton-producer unions in the north-west, led by John Doherty. This analysis emphasised that it was not only the Owenite observation that competition between employers which reduced wages, but that 'employers themselves combined to depress rewards to labour further' – as seen in the case of Ashton cotton-masters in 1830-31.¹⁶⁸ Smith's experience while a Southcottian in Ashton, observing the labour and union conditions of that distinct context, most likely informed the critique he produced two years later.

From this, it cannot be asserted that Smith was the sole author of the 'Letters'.¹⁶⁹

There is insufficient evidence to rule out Morrison's involvement, particularly as the style

¹⁶⁵ Morrison announced his permanent presence in London in *Pioneer*, 1 Mar. 1834, pp. 225-9.

¹⁶⁶ See Chapter 7, pp. 232-4.

¹⁶⁷ *Pioneer*, 5 Apr. 1834, pp. 282-3.

¹⁶⁸ Chase, *Early Trade Unions*, p. 142.

¹⁶⁹ This would be a reassertion. Beer, Postgate, Cole and Saville all assume that Smith was the sole author. Oliver's 1954 Oxford doctoral thesis first suggested that Smith and Morrison may have authored the letters together, and Oliver repeated this point in subsequent works. Oliver, 'Organisations', p. 364; idem,

of the ‘Letters’ varies slightly from Smith’s typical approach in the period. The weight of circumstantial evidence nonetheless points to Smith being their principal author.¹⁷⁰ With this the case, a final aspect of these articles’ message may be related to Smith’s Southcottianism – an interpretation of the biblical Fall and the relation of labour to God’s redemption.

In the fifth letter, ‘Senex’ employed a familiar radical trope contrasting his readership of virtuous labourers, who produced the wealth of the nation, with the idle body of the population living off ‘profits, rent, tribute, or taxes’; a group who ‘had their origin in conquest, in robbery ... in the fraudulent abuse of your religious confidence’.¹⁷¹ As labourers ‘you owe your existence to God alone’, he continued; ‘the energies of your mind and labour constitute your strength ... yours are the rights of honest toil; the just, the indisputable rights of the labourer to the bread produced by the sweat of his brow.’ The ‘system’ where wealth was taken by the ‘rights of the sword’ or ‘the rights of the crozier’ came from ‘the curse of man against man’ – the original Fall. Yet, the alternative system of associated labour was also ‘founded upon the curse – shall I not rather say the blessing? – which God pronounced when expelling man from Paradise’. For, ‘he condemned him, not to vicious indolence, but to the virtuous and invigorating exertions

‘Consolidated’, p. 91; idem, *Prophets and Millennialists*, p. 202, 217. On acceptance of Oliver’s position, see Claey’s, *Citizens*, p. 195; Chase, *Early Trade Unionism*, p. 137.

¹⁷⁰ Additional evidence for Smith’s involvement is provided by a near correlation in a case of illness. In late-April 1834, the series of *Letters* was interrupted due to the ‘ill health’ of their author; in May, Smith wrote to his brother reporting to have ‘been at Gravesend for a few days, just for my health, which is very bad. I have been troubled with a nervous fever, brought on by exertion and anxiety, for this is a most distressing time’. *Pioneer*, 26 Apr. 1834, p. 315; JES to brother John, 16 May 1834, *Shepherd Smith*, p. 98. Morrison is known to have employed few contributors to *The Pioneer*: Smith, Morrison’s wife, Frances (who would become a significant radical figure in her own right), and a Paris correspondent, were the only recorded writers beside the editor. Sever, ‘James Morrison’, pp. 32-3. On Frances Morrison, see Taylor, *Eve*, pp. 69, 73-7, 212-13.

¹⁷¹ *Pioneer*, 26 Apr. 1834, pp. 314-15.

of labour'. God had instituted human labour as the activity which would eventually lead to redemption:

It was by those exertions, and by those alone, that the mental and bodily faculties could be called forth; that man could learn his dependence upon man, and, after a long unhappy period of error and iniquity, could discover that his welfare upon earth consists in that true Christian charity, that real love of his neighbour, which is nowhere to be found but in Associated Labour!¹⁷²

Within this rhetoric lay a further evolution of Smith's ideas of the didactic role of the millennial spirit and the human realisation of the millennium. It was the divine intention that humanity should overcome the curse of the Fall and experience an earthly millennium of the practice of Christianity. Yet this intention had to be worked out with the tools put at humanity's disposal – to 'work out our own salvation' became to work itself. The providential plan was to turn the curse into a blessing. Humanity had now discovered the way back to Eden in true Christianity, and in union.

¹⁷² *Pioneer*, 26 Apr. 1834, p. 315.

CONCLUSION

Religious millenarians and political radicals both believe in visions of an altered future. They not only hope for change in the present world, they imagine the alternative state itself – its conditions, its requirements, its relationships. In early nineteenth-century Britain, their respective descriptions of these imagined futures are recognised for their common vocabulary. Yet the biblical promise of a state of justice and equality, devoid of sorrow and pain – where ‘the former things are passed away’ – is still widely assumed to have been either believed religiously or appropriated ‘to new psychological and political purposes’. Radicals and socialists reached for such rhetoric ‘as the only language of social optimism’ available; theirs was not a literal faith.¹

In the British radical tradition, the early 1830s were a moment of multiple visions, where old and new vocabularies mixed. Zion Ward’s popularity at the Rotunda has been a noted example of an enduring vocabulary and vision, illustrating the apparent persistence of a messianic appeal reaching beyond any ‘secular ideology’. This success is seen occurring at just the point such religious hopes were superseded by secular visions.² And a celebrated instance of the latter was *The Pioneer*’s proposal of ‘associated labour’ as a means to secure social control.³ In the concluding pages of *The Making of the English Working Class*, Edward Thompson pointed to the two years immediately following the passing of the Reform Bill, and the significance of the visions of ‘industrial

¹ Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1983), pp. 159-60.

² Edward Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, revised edn (Harmondsworth, 1968), pp. 879-82; William Oliver, *Prophets and Millennialists: The Uses of Biblical Prophecy in England from the 1790s to the 1840s* (Auckland, 1978), pp. 173-4, 207-12.

³ Thompson, *Making*, pp. 910-12.

syndicalism' and the social system articulated by 'a writer in the *Pioneer*'.⁴ The language of 'capital' and 'labour' utilised in the 'Letters on Associated Labour', and the idea that working people might gain political power to reshape society through representation in 'a House of Trades', were identified as crowning achievements of an 'heroic culture'; such 'collective self-consciousness was ... the great spiritual gain of the Industrial Revolution'.⁵

This vision was lost, almost as soon as it had been found, in the terrible defeats of 1834 and 1835. And, when they had recovered their wind, the workers returned to the vote, as the more practical key to political power. Something was lost: but Chartism never entirely forgot this preoccupation with social control ... to exert the collective power of the class to humanise the environment.⁶

That it was a Southcottian articulating this social vision escaped Thompson's view. The intellectual and religious journey that James Smith travelled to become the person who did, reveals an alternative side to this story of emergent consciousness of political agency, and the sources feeding this vision.

Smith's political career was forged not in the denial of divine agency in the realising of his imagined future, but in a distinct understanding of how human agency was required to work 'together with God' to achieve earthly change. His religious experience led him to believe that the divine 'plans for human society' were redemptive and progressive; they would be carried out through both 'unconscious agents' and believers such as himself taking 'active measures in furthering ... the cause of human

⁴ Thompson, *Making*, p. 912.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 913-15.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 913.

redemption'.⁷ The cause of 'union' in trades, the expectation of the adoption of socialism, and the idea of productive labour as a means of representation and redemption, were all imbued with millennial significance; Smith advocated them for religious reasons.

Developments within the Southcottian millenarian tradition in the prior two decades led to this. The original religious movement in Southcott's lifetime provided no encouragement to its adherents to ally themselves with political movements seeking radical change. The expectation of a sudden, disruptive change accompanying the arrival of a divine messiah dominated Southcottian beliefs before and immediately after 1814, in both divisions of the millenarian movement. Both bases of knowledge of the millennium – prophetic revelation and scriptural interpretation – continued to direct such Southcottian expectations up to 1820. Any contemporary's construal of Southcottian activities in this period as politically-motivated was misplaced: such millenarians may have inhabited the same localities and cultural milieu as radicals, but their beliefs at this stage contained insufficient emphasis on themselves as agents of change.

These beliefs were modified for many during the 1820s. Under Wroe's prophetic leadership, a substantial section of surviving Southcottians adopted new religious practices demonstrating their own agency in society, while symbolising the conditions of the millennium. This human agency was endorsed not by an alteration to the time-table of the millennium – a shift from any prior premillennialism to postmillennialism – but by a prophet's revelation. Wroe claimed to receive knowledge of what the millennium would be like, and his millenarian followers aligned their actions with this vision of the redemptive will of God. By the late-1820s, Zion Ward provided his separate Southcottian followers with an alternative view of their role as agents of the millennial age, through a

⁷ See Chapter 9, pp. 307-8.

revealed and interpretative understanding of serving the cause of a messiah already arrived. Crucially, these new Southcottian views were each in place before 1830-31, when an alliance between Southcottian individuals and radical freethinkers emerged in specific contexts, through personal relationships and the mutual recognition of shared ideas.

In converting to Southcottianism, Smith saw his existing belief in an imminent millennium from scriptural interpretation corroborated in modern, prophetic revelation. This altered his understanding of human preparation for the millennium: he had a choice of action, initially understood as the ability to preview the conditions of the millennium. As his theological understanding of the nature of God evolved, Smith recognised in the actions of others, beyond his millennial sect, contributions to a process of dramatic earthly change. In time, he chose to align himself with these others – these freethinking ‘infidels’, these unconscious agents of God – accepting their support, and attempting to persuade other religious millenarians to join him in the ‘time of action’.

After 1834, Smith took his own path in journalism, producing a series of periodicals, besides *The Shepherd*, with more theological than political subjects.⁸ He maintained links with Owenism for a period, attempting to counter its development into an exclusively secularist movement.⁹ In the late-1830s, Smith had little sympathy with Chartists, considering them ‘pike-and-gun philosophers’ and ‘irrational’, as complete suffrage alone would not secure social redemption.¹⁰ In the early 1840s, Smith briefly promoted the utopian socialism of Charles Fourier; then founded his most successful

⁸ Besides *The Shepherd* (1834-38), Smith was involved in the *London Free Press* (1836), *Weekly Herald* (1836-37) and *Penny Satirist* (1837-38). W.A. Smith, ‘*Shepherd*’ *Smith the Universalist: The Story of a Mind* (London, 1892), pp. 151, 154, 165.

⁹ Cooperative Union Library, RO 761, [Dec. 1835], James Smith to Robert Owen.

¹⁰ JES to brother John Smith, 9 Nov. 1840, *Shepherd Smith*, p. 211.

journal, *The Family Herald*, a mid-Victorian household bestseller.¹¹ In 1854, Smith published the 644-page *Divine Drama of History and Civilisation*, which demonstrated his retention of many of the analogical and allegorical ideas of two decades earlier, without the political imperative.¹² He died respectable, and rather less radical, in 1857.

For Charles Bradley and other followers of Zion Ward, engagement with the early 1830s campaigns for political reform, freedom of expression and the end of Church influence, was a means to serving their messiah – so furthering the millennial work. Ward’s direction to cease support for these ‘outward’ causes, in late-1833, re-directed such Southcottians’ ‘main attention and powers’ back to promoting their messiah’s peripatetic preaching ministry, until his death in 1837. The religious dimension to this engagement, as with Smith’s political career in 1832-34, unveils a distinct relationship between Southcottianism and the forms of radicalism identified as ‘masculine ... rationalist politics’ – the radicalism of journals, labour unions and campaigns for the vote.¹³ In these contexts, visionary religion was both ‘radical’ and ‘political’ *within* the definitions of Thompson’s original study. The ‘particular strand of early nineteenth-century politics’ Thompson is criticised for prioritising was not only a contrast to a broader contemporary radicalism with ‘feminine’ and visionary religious elements, it contained a religious millenarian dimension itself. Religious ideas and experience influenced individuals to engage with such politics; respective visions mixed in addition to common vocabularies.

¹¹ Smith wrote for the Fourierist journal, *London Phalanx* (1841-43). *The Family Herald* was established in 1842 and only closed in 1940. Smith, *Shepherd Smith*, pp. 209, 220. On Smith’s editorial career, see T.C.F. Stunt, ‘Smith, James Elishama (1801–1857)’, *DNB* [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/25826>].

¹² James Smith, *The Divine Drama of History and Civilisation*, (London, 1854).

¹³ Joan Wallach Scott, ‘Women in *The Making of the English Working Class*’, in *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York, 1988), p. 78. See Introduction, p. 11.

In the aftermath of Ward's death, the Bradley family and other Birmingham Shilohites ceased their meetings in the Lawrence Street Chapel. It was then let to the Birmingham Owenites – the 'Rational Religionists' – in 1839.¹⁴ Some Shilohites may have here followed the earlier advice of Smith, and attended the alternative meetings of the 'infidel masons', laying the foundations of the millennium.¹⁵ Yet this exchange of millennial visions was not the end of the story. Smith's vision of a millennial union may have been lost in the defeat of 1834; Charles Bradley's role as Southcottian host to radical gatherings survived. On 13 May 1839, the Chartist Convention reconvened from London, in the Lawrence Street Chapel.¹⁶ Here, the Chartist *Manifesto* was debated, including its proposal for a 'Sacred Month ... to prepare the millions to secure the charter of their political salvation'.¹⁷ As the words of the delegates' deliberations rose and drifted towards the chapel ceiling, they surely mingled with older utterances in that same space: a radical's insistence that 'the Bible was ... a political text-book' and the claims of a messiah, announcing the coming millennium, through 'the spiritual man-child brought forth by Joanna Southcott'.

¹⁴ The National Archives HO 129/394/32; The Owenites only bought the chapel in 1841, when they added a school room and named it a 'Hall of Science'. *New Moral World*, 10 Apr. 1841, ii. 231.

¹⁵ Evidence of contact between a Birmingham Shilohite and Owen survives in CUL, RO 746, 12 Aug. 1835, Charles West to Robert Owen.

¹⁶ R.B. Pugh (ed.), *Victoria History of the Counties of England: a history of Warwickshire*, (London, 1904-1964) vii. 314 and 375; Conrad Gill, *History of Birmingham*, (London, 1952), i. 246; Malcolm Chase, *Chartism: a new history* (Manchester, 2007), pp. 75-84. Current Chartist histories only ever describe the Lawrence Street Chapel as 'Owenite'; its Southcottian heritage is not acknowledged.

¹⁷ On the alternative (Spencean) millenarian heritage of the specific concept of the 'Sacred Month', see Iowerth Prothero, 'William Benbow and the concept of the "general strike"', *Past and Present*, no. 63 (1974), 132-71.

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