

RELIGION AND SOCIETY IN DERBYSHIRE DURING THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

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It is a failing of historians that they seldom meet the expectations they themselves raise in their readers. Professor W. R. Ward's *Religion and Society in England 1790-1850* is largely about Methodism, and minority Methodism at that! So it is with this essay. It is concerned with but two aspects of the effect on the Church of the social and economic changes of the 60 or 70 years which preceded Victoria's accession, and it is with the effect on the Church of England alone that it deals. These two aspects are the extent of the response of the Church of England to population growth by the provision of new church buildings and the extension or modification of existing ones, and the effect of social change on attendances at its churches. The first speaks of a belated, half-hearted and localised attempt to provide the poor with opportunities for worship, and the second of the disregard by the poor of such provision. Yet to relate the two in such a way is to over-simplify grossly the relation of church and people during this period, for the issue was not whether a benevolent Church would grasp the opportunity to preach the gospel of the love of God to his oppressed children, but whether a politically conscious middle-class institution *could* do so.

THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE CHURCHES

Substantial areas of 18th-century Derbyshire lacked not only Anglican churches, but churches and chapels of any kind. The mediaeval county had 109 churches, which, allowing for the difference in the size of the counties, was only half as many as Lincolnshire.¹ The scarcity of churches on the Derbyshire-Staffordshire border is well brought out in part II of *The Compleat Angler* in a comment equally applicable to much of Derbyshire:

Viator: What have we here, a church? As I'm an honest man, a very pretty church! Have you churches in this country, sir?

Piscator: You see we have: but had you seen none, why should you make that doubt, sir?

Viator: Why, if you will not be angry, I'll tell you: I thought myself a stage or two beyond Christendom.

At the close of the century the parish of Hope, for example, had two churches for the hamlets of Bradwell, Brough, Shapton, Aston, Thornhill, Woodlands, Highlow, Offerton, Abney, Grange, Fernalegh, Wardlow, Stokehall, Grindlow, Great and Little Hucklow, Whaley, Dovehole and Fairfield. The situation had not improved by 1832, when the incumbent wrote to the Ecclesiastical Revenues Commissioners:

I beg to state that there are no less than 18 hamlets in my parish, to make the tour of which I must travel six and thirty miles at least. Were it not for their vicinity to other churches, or for Methodist Chapels, several of them would be without opportunities of attending Divine Worship in my Parish.²

The parish of Glossop, which 'comprehends a large tract of mountainous country in the north-west extremity of the High Peak'³ contained the chapelries of Mellor, Hayfield and Charles, and ten separate hamlets. Here the archdeacon of Derby, Thomas Hill, spoke in 1847 of the 'as yet ill-supported exertions of the incumbent of Charlesworth' towards church extension in an area of 'spiritual destitution'.⁴ Dronfield had two chapelries of Holmesfield and Dore, the chapels of both of which were in a dilapidated condition for most of this period, to serve eight hamlets. North Wingfield had one church for the 30 houses of the township, and none at all for the nine hamlets which comprised the rest of the parish.⁵ The parish of Hartington extended for 12 miles along

the north-western boundary of the county. It was served by the parish church and one dilapidated chapel at Earl Sterndale. In 1832 the vicar of Ashbourne pointed out that his parish was

more than twenty miles in circumference; and that some of its Hamlets are so distant from the only Parish Church as not to be able to derive any benefit from attendance upon it. For instance the nearest point of the Hamlet of Hullan is upwards of four miles from Ashbourne.⁶

In a similar situation were the parishes of Crich and Heanor, which each had one church serving a village and seven scattered hamlets.

Yet it was in just such large scattered parishes as these in the north and east of the county that manufacturing villages were springing up as the period opens. In the parish of Hope 'the mining business is the chief support of the inhabitants';⁷ in Glossop it was the spinning and weaving of cotton and woollen cloth.⁸ In Hartington it was limestone-burning and cotton, thread and linen manufacture,⁹ in Crich, lead-mining, limestone-burning and cotton manufacture,¹⁰ and in Heanor, mining and stocking manufacture.¹¹ Many more examples could be quoted.

In some areas industrial entrepreneurs themselves erected churches to serve their work-people. These men were the owners of the new cotton-spinning mills. Mining, weaving, limestone burning and stocking manufacture were not organised by entrepreneurs, and if churches were to be provided for the population engaged in these industries, the parishes would have to provide them. This was clearly seen by contemporary observers. In 1811, J. Farey, noting that 'the Chapels of the Methodists seem the most rapidly increasing in the manufacturing districts', continued:

At the time when the very large districts . . . were laid out as single Parishes, it is to be presumed that the population was very low, and most of the land unproductive commons and moors, the value of the livings being then proportionally small, but since so large a portion of the lands have been brought under productive cultivation, and populous Villages of Manufacturers have arisen, far exceeding many of the smaller parishes in their number of Inhabitants, and far removed from the Church or any of the Chapels of Ease belonging to the over-grown Parish to which they belong, a division of such Parishes has certainly been wanted, as well as larger and more commodious Buildings than the Chapels of Ease are, in numerous instances: to the erection of which the increased Value of the Tithes as well as of the Lands ought perhaps to have contributed.¹²

Twenty-five years later, the archdeacon of Derby, Samuel Butler, calling for increased accommodation in the scattered rural parishes, saw the spread of Dissent in these parishes in a rather different light. In 1834 every parish in the archdeaconry (the boundaries of which were virtually coterminous with those of the county) was circularized for information about church accommodation. Butler received replies from 109 parishes (including 12 peculiars, technically outside his jurisdiction). He presented the results of his survey in his Charge in 1835. The population of these 109 parishes was 150,672, of which there was Anglican church accommodation for 45,000, or some 30 per cent. As accommodation in the diocese of Lichfield as a whole (that is, Derbyshire, Staffordshire, and Shropshire) was not sufficient for more than one-sixth of the inhabitants, Derbyshire had more than the average church accommodation in the diocese.¹³ But Butler agreed that it was the distance of townships and hamlets from churches and chapels in widely extended parishes which presented the problem. While not 'undervaluing the claim of a dense population' to extra church accommodation he pleaded that the claims of 'a more scattered one' should not be overlooked, 'which there is often a tendency to do when the many are concentrated into one body, and the few are dispersed over a wider district'.¹⁴ Of the completed returns in 1835 there were 15 cases where a population of more than 400 was more than two miles from a parish church or parochial chapel, 'and in the case of some of the distant hamlets . . . some are not only two, but three or four miles or more from their parish church, and above two miles from any church whatever'.¹⁵ Here was 'unquestionably the most powerful and efficient cause of dissent, and this evil we are bound to remedy by every exertion in our power'.¹⁶ For Thomas Gisborne, friend of Hannah More and the Wilberforces, resort to 'some body of Methodists or Dissenters' was an alternative to be avoided:

That those who *cannot* obtain admittance into our places of worship should frequent the religious assemblies of some of our brethren in Christ who differ from us, ought to be a subject of thankfulness to ourselves. But are we justified in driving them from truth which we regard as simple and as taught under very favourable modes, to truth blended with error or presented under circumstances of disadvantage?¹⁷

This therefore was the overall relationship of church accommodation to population throughout the 60 years or so before Victoria. The population of the county was increasing, but the increase was concentrated mainly in rapidly growing industrial villages, especially in the north and east. The problem for the Church of England was not only one of increasing the accommodation for worship in existing churches, but of providing adequate church room in those centres of population which were at a distance from the existing churches. It was not until the extent of the problem was appreciated and tackled on a diocesan scale with the creation of the Lichfield Diocesan Church Extension Society in 1835¹⁸ that adequate solutions were found to the problem of the scattered parishes. In Derbyshire in the 12 years from 1835 to 1847 the Society was instrumental in the erection of 20 new churches and the enlargement of 41 more, producing 17,323 additional sittings.¹⁹

Yet our period, and particularly the years following 1815, saw an attempt to meet the needs of the expanding population, albeit on a piecemeal scale and at a local level. During the period from 1772 to 1832 attempts were made to put the existing churches in repair, and to increase the accommodation in a large number by the addition of galleries, by re-pewing or by structural alterations. In these years at least 14 dilapidated churches were replaced, two or three virtually rebuilt and ten new churches erected on new sites in the county. In all some 17,000 to 18,000 additional sittings were provided by 1832. The difference between this expansion and that of the 1830s and 1840s, apart from its piecemeal nature, was that the former was largely at the expense of the members of the middle class to provide themselves with accommodation (with a few exceptions), whereas the latter was more directly related to the mass of the population. There is space for but a few examples of extra accommodation made available by extension and new building.

THE PROVISION OF SITTINGS

A study of the faculty petitions among the Lichfield cause papers, R. R. Rawlins's *Critical examination and survey*, and J. C. Cox's *Notes on the Churches of Derbyshire* shows that at least 90 major structural repairs, extensions, rebuildings and refittings were undertaken on Derbyshire churches and chapels between 1772 and 1832. Of these, about 50 were undertaken after 1815, and we would therefore expect that the period of greatest increase in the availability of church accommodation would fall in the years following 1815. A comparison of the total accommodation in 1815²⁰ and 1831²¹ shows that between these years sittings in the 181 churches for which comparative figures are available rose by about 4,215, or 6.6 per cent, from 63,589 to 67,804. The average sittings rose from 351 in 1815 to 375 in 1831. Allowing for extra accommodation made available in the existing churches before 1815, and for the few chapels not included in the two lists, it may be supposed that some 6,000 to 7,000 additional sittings were provided in *existing* Anglican churches and chapels between 1772 and 1832.

Seats in church were of two types, appropriated and free.

(i) *Appropriated sittings* Analysis of the information given in Archdeacon Butler's visitation returns for 1823–24 shows that some 85 per cent of all sittings were privately appropriated. They were held either by a type of modified freehold, that is, they were subject to some restrictions as to disposal, or freehold or leasehold. Much the greater proportion of additional sittings in the existing churches was provided in this way. Parishioners erected galleries containing pews which were subsequently privately owned, or churchwardens re-pewed naves and transepts, and erected galleries in order to provide sittings for letting. In the Lichfield cause papers are many examples of each. Typical

of the first is a petition for a faculty dated 30th March 1772 from three parishioners of Crich to erect a gallery, for

they were and are respectively Householders within the said Parish and have families and pay levies and Taxes to Church and poor there, and that there are likewise several other Housekeepers within the said Parish who have Families and pay Levies and Taxes to Church and poor there that are not sufficiently accommodated with convenient Seats and Sitting places for themselves and respective families to hear divine Service in the said Church, and that the said Parish is so much increased in its Inhabitants that they are straightened for want of a Gallery . . .²²

There are many similarly phrased applications and citations, and notwithstanding the harm done to the appearance of many church interiors by the erection of cumbersome galleries, a not inconsiderable proportion of the additional sittings was provided in this way. Some 79 per cent of the churches in the archdeaconry possessed galleries by 1824. Yet in many respects the appropriation of sittings by private families was an unsatisfactory way of meeting the need for additional accommodation. Firstly, the available space was used very inefficiently. A large pew containing seats for six or seven people might be used exclusively by one or two, and even then only occasionally. Secondly, as private property, pews could be bought and sold, let and sub-let, even if the original faculty prohibited this. The potential dangers of this practice were outlined by Henry Mozley, a churchwarden of St. Werburgh's, Derby. In 1830 the pews in his church

were regarded in all respects as private property, and subjected to open traffic, frequently changing both occupants and owners . . . Several of the pews were of course occupied by non-parishioners or dissenters; and it was no inconceivable thing . . . that all of them should eventually pass out of the hands of the parish, or even accumulate and accrue to some one proprietor who would then be able to farm out church-room to such advantage as the monopoly and the demand might offer; or if he chose, to select half the congregation according to his particular religious views.²³

Thirdly, the confused state of the law of pew ownership meant that privately appropriated pews were often the subject of unedifying legal dispute. On 15th September 1777 George Hazelhurst was cited to appear at Lichfield consistory for 'intruding into and sitting in a certain Seat or Pew in the Parish Church of Eckington . . . and interrupting and disturbing Mary Staniforth and William Wicksell . . . in the quiet and peaceable possession and enjoyment which they had in and of the said seat . . .'.²⁴ One may suspect that the enjoyment Staniforth and Wicksell derived from their pew was more financial than religious.

(ii) *Free sittings* Archdeacon Butler found that only some 2 per cent of the churches and chapels in his archdeaconry were more than 90 per cent free. In 46 churches there was no accommodation for the poor at all, and in only two, Horsley and Hulland Ward, was the accommodation entirely free. This 'very deficient and limited extent of the accommodation attainable by the lower classes of the community in many of our churches' was ascribed by Thomas Gisborne to two circumstances, the increase of population and the private appropriation of pews. By the first, 'the churches are rendered . . . incapable of receiving the proportion of worshippers which on an average might reasonably be expected to attend' and by the second 'the poor man is shut out of the Church by his poverty'.²⁵

Some attempt was made in the county in the last years of the period to augment the accommodation for the poor. When Willington church was extended in 1830 over half the additional pews (but according to the pew plan barely half of the additional floor space) was devoted to the poor. But such provision was rare. It is apparent that in most churches considerable opposition existed to proposals to provide accommodation for the poor. At Ilkeston, the 'greatest trial' the curate, Richard Moxon, met with during his ministry there 'was the want of accommodation for the poor, and the . . . but fruitless attempts he made for 13 years in obtaining the enlargement of the Church, that to them also the Gospel might be preached'.²⁶ As we will note, it is questionable whether the poor would have come to church in any numbers even had the accommodation been available for them. Such accommodation as was provided was usually placed either in the most obscure corners of the church, or in the most immediately conspicuous areas. Gisborne said that 'some of the poor may occupy the obscure corners left open, if left

open, for them. Some may stand in the aisles, or may possibly obtain there the privilege of a bench.²⁷ In contrast, in the new church at Hayfield the poor were placed on a semi-circular bench immediately beneath the pulpit and desk, and in front of the appropriated pews, apparently as a reminder to the pew-owners that there, but for the grace of God, went they. In Gisborne's opinion such treatment of the poor put the wealthy under St. James's rebuke,²⁸ but Henry Mozley believed on the contrary that sittings in church should 'correspond with the natural orders in society' and doubted whether the lower orders themselves would wish for the whole church to be free, for

People are not all either rich or poor; there are many intermediate graduations: the more numerous class are at the same time master and servant, and every one so far as he is master or servant, or father of a family, naturally imitates in such scale as he can, the state and exclusiveness of his superiors.²⁹

This was a shrewd comment. Yet while the majority of pews were privately appropriated and bought and sold, let and sub-let, they were likely, as Gisborne said, to 'fall into the hands of persons raised, more or less, above the indigent. In towns, and in crowded parts of the country, they often are almost wholly occupied by the higher and middle classes, and are sought with eager competition'.³⁰ In other words, pew appropriation was one way in which the higher and middle classes distinguished themselves from the lower, in this case within the context of religious observance. Within the social context of the church, the 'natural orders' of society should be distinguished the one from the other as they were in other contexts. The poor were excluded from the church, or made to feel their poverty when allowed into the church, for purely class reasons. It seems likely therefore that the movement in the 1820s to make accommodation for the poor more readily available was motivated less by evangelical considerations than by fears of revolution. Religion was one means by which the poor could be kept in their place, and they could only hear the awful sanctions of the Gospel if allowed into the church to hear it.

NEW AND REBUILT CHURCHES

There were many reasons for the dilapidation of church buildings in this period. Undoubtedly some clergy and churchwardens were remiss, but the most common reason was an economic one. The Bishop of Lichfield wrote to the secretary of the Queen Anne's Bounty in 1799:

Several Chapels in Derbyshire, which had very small Stipends and had been suffered to go to decay, have lately been rebuilt or substantially repaired on account of the Great Increase of Inhabitants; in consequence of the erection of Cotton Mills.³¹

Very low stipends meant very rare duty, and a rarely used parochial chapel soon became a dilapidated one. The increase in population, the rebuilding of the chapels, the erection of new ones on new sites, the need for more frequent duty and the consequent demand for increased stipends were related factors in the Church's response to the Industrial Revolution.

Between 1791 and 1829 14 chapels and churches in Derbyshire belonging to the Church of England were rebuilt. They were Little Eaton (1791), Smalley (1793), Lullington (1799), Brimington (1808), Edale (1812), Elton (1812), Hayfield (1818), Rosliston (1819), Calke (1826), Blackwell (1827), Holmesfield (1827), Dore (1828), Earl Sterndale (1829) and Mellor (1829).

The rebuilt churches possessed a few common features. The extant pew plans for the rebuilt churches and those which exist for churches which were re-pewed during the period show a central pulpit, usually of the three-deck type, dominating the interior of the church and obscuring the altar. Most of the churches built and re-pewed during the period had the pulpit moved from mid-way along the north or south wall to this central position. This, together with the fact that in the rebuilt churches chancels were replaced by small semi-circular apses suggests that the evangelical emphasis on the primacy of the preached word met with widespread acceptance. This alteration of the position of the pulpit dates from the first decade of the 19th century in Derbyshire. A plan showing

the seats and pulpit in Scarliffe parish church in 1793³² shows the pulpit in the old position on the south wall, and the re-pewing plan for Etwall in 1805³³ also shows the pulpit in the old position. Thereafter the pulpit is shown in the central position, namely on the Edale plan of 1811³⁴ and either in the plans or mentioned in the faculty citations of Bonsall in 1813,³⁵ Brampton in 1815,³⁶ Beighton in 1815,³⁷ Hayfield in 1817,³⁸ Wirksworth in 1818,³⁹ Norton in 1819,⁴⁰ Ticknall in 1821,⁴¹ Earl Sterndale in 1829,⁴² and Glossop in 1832.⁴³

The average cost of the rebuilt churches based on what few actual or estimated building costs are extant was somewhat under £1,500, and the average cost per sitting was just over £4, or approximately the same as the cost per sitting of the churches erected by the Church Building Commissioners.⁴⁴ When the poor looked inside these new churches they discovered that they were allowed to occupy much the same percentage of the accommodation, some 15 per cent, as in the existing churches and chapels of the archdeaconry. These new churches were evidently not built for the poor to worship in, and the old social distinctions of pewage were continued in them. The importance of these new buildings lay rather in the fact that most of them were parochial chapels put back into use in widely scattered parishes than that any substantial increase was made in the total number of sittings.

ATTENDANCE

But even if the sittings in all the Anglican churches of the archdeaconry had been completely free, would the mass of the population have availed themselves of the opportunity to worship God in the Church of England way? It is very unlikely.

In the agricultural areas of the south-west of the county, attendance at the Church's services was remarkably stable throughout the period. It was in the areas of industrial development, with the consequential influx of population and increased nonconformist activity, that attendance at the churches and parochial chapels declined. It has been possible to study communicant figures for 78 churches and chapels over the period 1772 to 1824 using the bishop's primary visitation returns for the first date and the archdeacon's visitation returns for the latter. When such comparisons are made, and statistics of clerical residence, nonconformist expansion and population movement placed beside them, tentative conclusions can be drawn as to the relative importance of some of the social, demographic and religious factors in the determination of church attendance during this period. Such a study has shown that:

- (a) the communicant figures for 35 churches⁴⁵ were remarkably similar over this 50-year period;
- (b) in 12 cases⁴⁶ the figures, if not as close as in group (a), show no surprising dissimilarity, though the tendency in all but three parishes was for communicant attendance to decline over this period;
- (c) in only four parishes⁴⁷ was there a considerable percentage increase in communicant attendance; and
- (d) in the remaining 27 parishes⁴⁸ there was a decrease in communicant attendance approaching, and in some cases exceeding, 50 per cent.

It should be added that in most cases the holy communion service was celebrated four times a year at, or immediately after, the normal morning service time. It would be reasonable to suppose that most of those attending on a normal Sunday would attend on 'sacrament Sunday', and that, as many parochial charities were distributed only to the worshipping poor of the Church of England, that such poor as would attend church would be attending on that day.

The influence of clerical residence, nonconformist activity and demographic factors in determining these similarities and differences can be shown with reasonable certainty. The influence of a fourth factor, politics, is much more difficult to determine.

(i) *The influence of clerical residence* There is no evidence that the presence of a clergyman resident in his parsonage had much effect on church attendance. Of the 35 group (a) parishes in which communicant attendance was maintained over the period, there was no clergyman resident in eight cases in either 1772 or 1824, while in seven others there was a clergyman resident in 1772 but not in 1824.

In the 12 group (b) parishes there were eight resident clergymen in 1772 and seven in 1824.

In two out of the four group (c) parishes which showed a marked increase in communicant attendance there was no resident clergyman throughout the period.

Of the 27 group (d) parishes which showed a marked decline in attendance there was no resident clergymen in either 1772 or 1824 in five cases; in one parish there was a resident in 1824 where there had been none in 1772, and in three cases there was a resident in 1772 but not in 1824. In other words, in the majority of the parishes there was a resident clergyman throughout the period. The decline in communicant attendance cannot be blamed solely on clerical non-residence, neither can the maintenance, or even increase, in communicant attendance be put down to the residence of the clergyman in the parish.

(ii) *The effect of nonconformist activity* It is clear that increased nonconformist activity had a considerable deleterious effect on Church of England attendances in the industrial areas. There is a marked geographical distribution in the parishes in group (a) and (d). Group (a), though distributed over the whole county, shows a marked concentration in the agricultural areas in the south and west. Group (d) parishes show a marked concentration in the industrial areas of the north and east. The distribution of chapels in 1817⁴⁹ shows that the north and east were the main areas of nonconformist activity and suggests a connection between the rapid expansion of the nonconformist groups and the decline of allegiance to the Church of England in the group (d) parishes.

That this was the effect of nonconformity is confirmed by a study of its activity in the 27 group (d) parishes. In 1772 the incumbents of 11 of these parishes reported to the bishop that there were no dissenters whatever in their parishes. Less than ten families of dissenters were reported in each of 12 more parishes, and incumbents noted particularly that the old Dissent was very much in decline. The few Methodists (assuming that the incumbents could distinguish between the various nonconforming bodies) were invariably of 'the lowest Rank', the incumbents of Pentrich and Norbury reporting that the Methodists (and at Pentrich the Presbyterians also) attended the parish church 'and behave themselves very orderly and decently'.⁵⁰ There were at that time dissenting meeting-houses in six of the group (d) parishes. In four of these nonconformist membership seemed to the clergy to be in decline, the curate of Melbourne, John Mansell, believing that in his parish this was due to the 'more regular Discharge of Duty in ye Parish Church than heretofore'.⁵¹ The picture we have of Derbyshire nonconformity in the early 1770s is of old Dissent in decline and Methodism not yet establishing a hold, despite the courage and tenacity of the itinerant preachers.

A very different picture of nonconformity in these same parishes is presented in the archdeacon's returns for 1823-24. By this time there were nonconformist chapels, meeting-houses and rooms, day and Sunday-schools in 22 parishes in group (d). The vitality of these can be seen from the following examples. At Hathersage (population 1801, 498; 1821, 658), the Methodists had a Sunday school for 100 children.⁵² At Pleasley (population 1801, 473; 1821, 529) the Methodist Sunday school was attended by 40 children and the chapel by 250 in a village which 50 years earlier had had no nonconformity at all.⁵³ At Ilkeston in 1772 the incumbent reported that there were 20 Presbyterians (the number of whom had 'greatly lessened'), 50 Independents and 30 'Anabaptists', each sect having a meeting-house. Fifty years later there were two Methodist chapels, an Independent and a Baptist Sunday school, each 'numerously attended' together with four other nonconformist chapels. The population of the parish

had increased from 2,526 in 1801 to 2,970 in 1821.⁵⁴ Such examples as these can be multiplied. At Edale, which shows a very considerable decline in communicant attendances over this period, the influence of Methodism was freely admitted. In 1813, the incumbent, W. Sharpe, said that, on coming to Edale, he discovered

that the seeds of religious dissent had been sown there also by the same enthusiasts who go about the kingdom, not only 'subverting whole houses', but seducing whole districts from the religion of their forefathers, and the communion of that apostolic Church to which they originally belonged.

Sharpe advised his parishioners not to attend the Methodist meetings, for

I do not agree with them in their opinions, for I think that some of the doctrines they profess are untrue, and that others, which are true they debase by a mixture of enthusiasm. And there is one character which distinguishes Methodists from all other religionists, and that is an unbounded zeal to propagate their opinions: in this respect they resemble the Pharisees of old—they 'compass earth and sea to make one proselyte'. If they would only be content to take care of those who profess themselves their disciples. I should probably never have mentioned their name in this place; but, not satisfied with tending their *own* flocks in their *own* fields, they must break down the fence between us, and invite all who compose *my* fold, to leap through the gap.⁵⁵

Methodist influence was also admitted by the vicar of Derby St. Peter, Richard Ward. He complained to his bishop in 1817 that in his chapelry of Normanton-by-Derby, 'the great bulk of the inhabitants regularly attend the different Methodist chapels in Derby, and I am told solely on account of the duty being performed so seldom in the Church'.⁵⁶

This is but a selection of the evidence of the impact of nonconformity on these parishes at this time. It shows a rapidly expanding nonconformity competing for the allegiance of the people. By the 1820s the nonconformist bodies had become a challenge to the established church to an extent that they had never been before. Whereas in 1772 the incumbents of Norbury and Pentrich could speak of Methodists and Presbyterians attending the parish churches, and the vicar of Mickleover could report that an arrangement in his Findern chapelry enabled 'the major part of the parishioners' alternately to resort to the Presbyterian meeting-house and the church to the fortnightly service in each, by 1824 such dual attendance would have been impossible. At Edale in 1812, Sharpe answered those who said that occasionally 'frequenting the worship of the sectaries' they yet remained members of the Church of England, by saying that 'no man can serve two masters your affections cannot be divided'.⁵⁷ Although John Gisbourne could mourn the death in 1820 of William Bowler, '. . . . one of the followers of the Wesleyan Methodists but still a faithful member of the Catholic Church of Jesus Christ'⁵⁸ the denominational lines had hardened long before this time, and even the Derbyshire evangelicals had come to regard the Methodists as 'our most dangerous enemies'.⁵⁹

In the 35 group (a) parishes nonconformist activity was much less marked. In 1772 no dissenter was to be found by the clergy of 21 of these parishes, and in the remaining 14 what few there were were decreasing in numbers and influence. By 1823–24, 20 of these parishes had no nonconformist chapel. At Alfreton there was a Methodist Sunday school of 400 and a chapel attended by 350, but the population of the town had more than doubled from 2,301 in 1801 to 4,689 in 1821.⁶⁰ At Heanor, where in 1772 dissent was decreasing, there was in 1824 a Calvinist Sunday school and chapel, and a sparsely attended Methodist chapel.⁶¹ Here too the population had almost doubled from 1801. At Longford, where there was no nonconformity in 1772, there were 50 years later a Methodist school and three Methodist chapels in various parts of a large parish whose population had grown from 895 in 1801 to 1,264 in 1821. Only at Aston-on-Trent, Brailsford, Thorpe and Alvaston was communicant attendance maintained in areas of increased nonconformist activity which were not also areas of considerable population expansion. The same conclusions are arrived at from a study of the 12 group (b) parishes. The increase in communicant attendance in the four group (c) parishes can perhaps be explained by the standard of pastoral care. Notable Derbyshire evangelicals were resident at Ockbrook (Samuel Hey), and Bonsall (Henry Sim) in 1824. In neither parish was nonconformist activity particularly strong. At Mickleover (Findern chapelry) the doughty Frederic Curzon was incumbent. Only at Elton where there were 'many

Methodists' in 1823 can increased communicant attendance at the parish church not be explained in this way.

(iii) *The influence of population movement* Notice has already been taken of the population increase in some of these parishes. The population of the county increased by some 52,000 from 161,567 in 1801 to 213,333 in 1821. Most of this increase was to be found in the towns and industrial villages of the east and north-east. The population of the agricultural south and south-west, though increasing, did not expand at anything approaching the same rate. It is the parishes in this area which predominate in group (a), 23 parishes being found in this area. The population statistics suggest a stable community life and the communicant figures show a stable religious allegiance. One reason that could be advanced for this stability of allegiance in country areas is that whether the clergyman was resident or not the religious as well as the political attitudes of the rural community were determined by the local principal land-owner. Harold Perkin speaks of the social control of the ordinary squire over his tenants and villagers, which 'manifested itself in the inevitability with which they followed his religion and politics'.⁶² This suggests that the social factors in church allegiance were far stronger than the purely religious. In the towns and villages in the industrial areas the social pressure to conform in religion was less acute. Yet even in the rural areas the social control of which Mr. Perkin speaks was not as absolute as he suggests. As will be shown, only a small minority of the rural population attended the church throughout the period.

A more detailed study of the social, economic and demographic factors influencing church attendance would be too lengthy for this essay, but enough evidence has been presented to suggest that in areas of industrial development, expanding population and aggressive nonconformist (and especially Methodist) activity, resident clergymen could not easily maintain the place of the Church of England in the community, but that in areas of stable population and little social change the residence or non-residence of the clergy had little influence on the maintenance of that position.⁶³

(iv) *The influence of political radicalism* The impression one gains from a study of what attendance statistics there are in this period is that even the best attended churches in town and county alike attracted only a small proportion of the population, and that any suggestion that the whole village community attended the church is a false one. At Brailsford even on holy days there was 'but a small Congregation: the Parishioners pleading their Remoteness from the Church for their Non-attendance'.⁶⁴ At Crich it was 'not customary to have Prayers any more than once in the [Sun]day' as 'a Congregation does not attend'.⁶⁵ At Kirk Hallam there would have been no Sunday congregation at all 'if many of my Parishioners from Ilkeston did not attend there'.⁶⁶ Services were only held at Trusley 'when there is a Congregation, which is not always ye Case, as ye Houses lie scatter'd and at a Distance'.⁶⁷ At North Wingfield, although the resident rector said two services and preached one sermon each Sunday, 'prayers have been often read to no congregation, and therefore now are read at more solemn times and when tolling a bell any persons come'.⁶⁸ All these examples are from 1772.

Distance from a church was, as Farey pointed out in 1811, a reason why many did not attend, and why the 'Dissenting and Methodist preachers' had made such headway in the larger parishes, but the clergy themselves were not convinced that this was the real reason for the widespread refusal of the people to attend their ministrations. Samuel Pegge of Whittington, preaching in 1788, asked:

Was there ever a greater Decay of Christian Piety? true Religion either less practis'd, or less countenanc'd? The Profanation of the Sabbath, that great Bulwark of all Religion and Morality, is it not notorious and almost universal? and Devotion, at all other times, is it not a Thing almost unknown amongst us, and even neglected by all Ranks of People, the highest as well as the lowest? Look into our Churches on a Weekday, or a Festival and you will be astonish'd at their Emptiness.⁶⁹

Thomas Cursham of Ashover lamented in 1787 that

few of our hearers have the power of religion, many of our parishioners who yet profess themselves members of our church, have not so much as the form of religion, some coming but now and then to church, others not at all from one year's end to another . . .

He had preached 'the divine truths' again and again, but

how few are there who have cordially believed and embraced them, and how many have disbelieved, rejected and blasphemed them. I have been these six years among you, and seeking for fruit, but how little is to be found of the right sort How many calls have you had to repent and forsake your evil ways and turn to the Lord And what are the fruits with respect to the great part of you? Unbelief, hatred and opposition to God's Word, and him that ministered it unto you: pride, covetousness, oppression, injustice, love of the world, sabbath-breaking, drunkenness, uncleanness, envy, malice and such like evil tempers and practices . . . ⁷⁰

W. Sharpe of Edale could see 'numbers, nay increasing numbers of those whom God has committed to my care, dropping off one by one from our communion'.⁷¹ In 1835 Frederic Curzon of Mickleover addressed an open letter to his parishioners which was prompted by 'the entire neglect of many, the occasional and partial attendance of others, upon the ordinances of religion'. A similar letter a few years earlier on 'the indispensable necessity of Christian worship' had failed to convince the majority of his parishioners.⁷² Henry Cockshott of Tibshelf used the opportunity of a crowded church the Sunday following a colliery disaster in his parish in 1833 to address the many

who seldom or never bow the knee in this temple of the Lord, who never join in the holy service of the Sanctuary, who neglect, or disregard, or despise the customary solemnity of public worship; who absent themselves habitually from the congregation of Jehovah's worshippers, who spend most of their Sabbaths in idleness, and some perhaps in sin.⁷³

Many were the reasons advanced for this state of affairs. G. Baddelley of Melbourne said in 1752 that

the reason we see no more of devotion and piety in the world is because men are ashamed of being thought religious: This false kind of modesty has almost destroyed domestic and social piety.⁷⁴

Some, like Cursham and Cockshott, found the cause in the attractiveness 'of the desires of the flesh and of the mind'.⁷⁵ Others, like C. S. Hope of Derby All Saints, regretting that the 'disregard of ministerial instruction' was a 'melancholy characteristic of the age in which we live', found that 'the voices of superstition and enthusiasm are too often more powerful, with their votaries, than all the injunctions of our pure and reforming Church'.⁷⁶ Evangelical and high churchman blamed each other. A layman, John Byng, laid responsibility at the door of the clergy. During his tour of the Midlands in 1789 he 'made enquiry' about religion 'having been in so many churches' and found it to be

lodged in the hands of the Methodists; as the greater clergy do not attend their duty, and the lesser clergy neglect it; that where the psalm singing is abolish'd none is established in its place; as the organ is inconvenient and not understood; at most places the curates never attend regularly, or to any effect, or comfort, so no wonder that the people are gone over to Methodism.⁷⁷

Nor must one disregard the reasons which the people themselves gave for not attending the Church's services. In 1738 the curate of Rotherfield Greys in Oxfordshire told his bishop that in his parish 'there are a great many yt come but seldom; their Pretences various; want of clothes, Distance from Church, a family of small children, Absence from home &c'.⁷⁸ These familiar excuses were advanced throughout the period in Derbyshire too. William Wheeler, curate of Wingerworth in 1756, admonished his parishioners for 'the trifling excuses which often prevent too many from constantly attending at the publick service of the church'⁷⁹ and the same 'plausible excuses for this neglect' were listed by W. Sharpe in 1812,⁸⁰ Henry Cockshott⁸¹ in 1833, and J. A. Fenton of Norton⁸² in 1847. A. A. Barker of Baslow and Beeley answered the rather more sophisticated excuses of those who 'with the most bare-faced contempt disregarded God and His holy Ordinances'. Apart from complaining of the length of the services they argued that as they saw 'many people who attend a place of worship and are no better for it' they might as well stay at home, where they might read their own Bibles, thus avoiding 'the necessity of attendance upon public worship'.⁸³

Such reasons may have had some force, and, as has been shown, there was little accommodation for the lower classes even if they had wanted to attend. On the other hand, they may merely cover simple disinclination—what Horace Mann was to call the 'negative, inert indifference' of the mass of the population to the claims of religion.⁸⁴ But possibly they mask a more basic alienation.

A particularly graphic description of the disregard of both the Church of England and nonconformity by the labouring poor is contained in a pamphlet which, though written in the late 1830s or early 1840s, reflects attitudes throughout the period. Sir George Crewe of Calke wrote of the neighbouring village of Ticknall:

I much fear that, take all the numbers of anything like regular attendants at our Church, or the two Chapels, the comparison of those numbers with our population would be as startling as it would be small Let any one walk down the street on a Sabbath-morning just at the hour of attendance upon Divine Service, and see how many are on the road to their place of worship; how many evidently neither prepared, nor intending to prepare themselves or their children for such purpose? He will see men and women idly lounging at their doors, or in the streets; boys and girls at play, or setting out in parties to wander in the fields, some in their gardens, or leaning over a pig-sty; and, were he to enter the houses, very many would be found in bed! I grieve to say I have seen many, who, at 12 or 1 o'clock in the day stand in their doors, or sit by their firesides in their working-dress—their children the same—who appear almost unconscious that it is Sunday.⁸⁵

If such a passage is expressive of alienation rather than mere indifference what were the causes of it? William Cantrell (curate of Derby St. Michael) plainly thought that Jacobin influence was to blame as he exhorted his readers in 1815 'to avoid Seducers (who would not only draw them from the Faith of the Gospel but to disobey Lawful Authority); to avoid such as are disobedient to Established Government, regular and good order in Society; and not to be misled to believe that Anarchy and Disorder will ever be for the good of any Nation or People'.⁸⁶ An anti-Jacobin tract of the same period and with the same object to exhort allegiance to Church and King has Jack Anvil, a blacksmith, insist to Tom Hod, a mason, and a 'leveller and a Jacobin' by conviction, that we have 'just rulers, as much liberty as can make us happy, the best laws in the world and the best Church in the world, if it was better attended' and bids Tom to 'put into practice this text which our parson preached on last Sunday: 'Study to be quiet, work with your hands and mind your own business!' Jack's argument succeeded, both departed singing 'God save great George our King' and no doubt were to be found in the free pew in the parish church the following Sunday!⁸⁷

It was this connection between Established Church and established government which the more politically imaginative of the clergy saw as the real reason for the estrangement of the common people from the Church. Robert Wilmot, the rector of Morley and Smalley, noted in his Smalley register in 1798 that the number of baptisms since 1780 had not been in proportion to the increase in population in the chapelry. He calculated that about one-third of the children born were not being baptised. In part this was to be explained by many of the parishioners 'becoming Dissenters from the Established Church under the designation of General Baptists', but in the main

for this circumstances I believe we are indebted to the works of the infamous Paine which have eradicated the principles of religion from the minds of the lower orders of the people; who, not having leisure to study what they read are caught by the sound of the words, and not by their meaning.

In 1801 Wilmot recorded that he did not think that 'a total indifference to Religion increases', but that

'tis more from disaffection to the established government that induces the lower order of the people to separate themselves from the Church which they consider as part of that Government than from any real difference of opinion on the subject of Religion.⁸⁸

In 1794 Fletcher Dixon, the vicar of Duffield, related the Jacobin threat to that of nonconformity. Alienation from the Church was but the first step to an attack upon the State. In lamenting 'such Apostacy from the established religion of this realm', he warned that 'if we suffer our religion to be mutilated and corrupted, what can we expect but that our Laws and Government will next fall a Sacrifice'.⁸⁹

Such comments raise fundamental questions which would take us beyond the scope of this essay.⁹⁰ Perhaps they were simply panic judgments. Yet there can be no doubt that Derby and Derbyshire were areas of considerable, if moderate, Jacobin influence. Wilmot wrote in 1792 that

in no part of the kingdom have they more disaffected persons than in the town and neighbourhood of Derby from whence they have actually sent two persons⁹¹ to the National Convention of France to invite the French over to this country to create the same anarchy here which is there triumphant.⁹²

He noted that 'innumerable' seditious books and papers were being industriously circulated 'among the lower orders of the people for the purpose of raising dissentious faction and preparing them for rebellion'.⁹³ Recent research has shown that such Jacobin influence as there was, was on the wane by this date, yet the clergy of the period were fearful of the consequences of such influence and this fear must inevitably have sharpened the division between themselves and their parishioners. In 1813 W. Sharpe of Edale said of his parishioners that they were

a singularly barbarous people. You know that in that rude uncivilized district the lord of mis-rule has erected his most despotic throne: that in that place are to be found all the practical blessings of perfect equality; that subordination is totally unknown; that scarcely anyone possesses influence or control even over those whom 'the laws of God, the laws of their country, and of reason' have placed under their jurisdiction; that everyone does just 'that which is right in his own eyes', and nothing else; that, in short, liberty has degenerated into perfect licentiousness, and general independence into universal impudence.⁹⁴

What are we to make of such a comment? Allowing for Sharpe's disgruntlement and disillusionment it paints a vivid picture of the breakdown of the old community loyalties. It suggests that egalitarian ideologies may have found ready acceptance there and lends some weight to Wilmot's opinion that the lower orders had separated themselves from the Church because they considered it part of the government, i.e. that a fundamental division in English society had taken place and Church and government and law and order found themselves on the further side of the divide from the mass of the population. The refusal of the masses to worship even when they had the opportunity was a silent protest against a social and political order which the Church represented and by which it was upheld and to which they did not belong. Few of Sharpe's and Wilmot's parishioners and Crewe's tenants would have been able to voice this protest. It was left to a member of the Derby Corresponding Society, Henry Yorke, to do so for them. Denouncing war as 'the wretched policy of courts to uphold their government', Yorke said that to

Priests, who from their professions, should be ministers of peace, wars can never be deplorable, as long as their revenues and tythes are faithfully paid. It is not surprising that from their pulpits they should vomit forth desolation and bloodshed, since they constitute a part of a privileged corps, and their political existence is ensured, so long as the rest of the craft uphold their authority by arms.⁹⁵

When such sedition was being 'industriously circulated among the lower orders of the people' there was little that the clergy could do to combat its effects.

Yet we must not make too much of these political factors, for the rich stayed away from church as well. In 1788, in a sermon preached before the Duke of Devonshire and other 'noblemen', Samuel Pegge, rector of Whittington, said that 'devotion' was neglected 'by all Ranks of People, the highest as well as the lowest'.⁹⁶ C. S. Hope also spoke of those of 'rank and fortune' who 'neglect the worship of God' and thus 'neglect the first duty of gratitude'.⁹⁷ Events at home and overseas had helped to break down patterns of social behaviour in all ranks of society.

The reasons for non-attendance were complex and interrelated. What is evident is that there were more social, economic and political factors than purely religious factors involved and that the clergy had little control over them. Sadly for the sympathetic church historian, the changes through which society passes evidently have far greater effect upon the Gospel and the manner of its preaching, than does the Gospel on society and its structure and values. In the period which we have been considering the residence or non-residence of the clergy, their politics or their theology seem to have had little relevance for the mass of their parishioners. The clergy were seen to be part of a social and economic system which some wanted to overthrow and to which very many more were totally indifferent. When Wilmot's parishioners protested silently by refusing to

have their babies baptised in the 1790s and when C. S. Hope's parishioners broke his vicarage windows in Derby at the rejection of the Reform Bill in 1831 and tolled his muffled church bell in mourning, they were exerting a political force against which the clergyman, however holy and patient in the exercise of his parochial ministry, was powerless.

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- ⁴⁷These were Bonsall, Elton, Findern and Ockbrook.
- ⁴⁸These were Blackwell, Bradbourne, Brassington, Breadsall, Clowne, Denby, Dronfield, Edale, Elmton, Eyam, Hathersage, Holmesfield, Ilkeston, Kirk Ireton, Melbourne, Mellor, Norbury, Norton, Pinxton, Pleasley, Scropton, Shirland, Shirley, Ticknall, Tissington, Whittington and South Wingfield.
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- ⁶⁵L.J.R.O., B/V/5, Crich, art. 5.
- ⁶⁶L.J.R.O., B/V/5, Kirk Hallam, art. 5.
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