Church and Chapel: Parish Ministry and Methodism in Madeley, c.1760-1785, with Special Reference to the Ministry of John Fletcher

A thesis submitted to the University of Manchester for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Religions and Theology in the Faculty of Humanities

2010

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## Contents

Abstract .......................................................................................................................... 7  
Declaration .................................................................................................................. 9  
Copyright Statement ................................................................................................. 9  
The Author .................................................................................................................. 11  
Acknowledgements ..................................................................................................... 13  
Abbreviations ............................................................................................................. 15  
Preface ........................................................................................................................ 21  
Fletcher-Madeley Chronology ................................................................................... 25  
Introduction ................................................................................................................ 29  
  Methodology ............................................................................................................. 33  
  Methodological Premises ....................................................................................... 33  
  The Sources ............................................................................................................. 36  
Review of Literature ................................................................................................... 36  
  Religious History .................................................................................................. 37  
  The Church of England ......................................................................................... 40  
  Methodism .............................................................................................................. 43  
  Biography and Religious Identity ....................................................................... 46  
  Industrialization .................................................................................................... 53  
Originality of this Study ............................................................................................. 54  
Chapter 1 Madeley in 1760 ....................................................................................... 57  
  Religious History .................................................................................................. 58  
    Hereford Diocese .................................................................................................. 59  
    Madeley Clergy .................................................................................................... 60  
  Parish and People .................................................................................................... 61  
    Landscape and Population ................................................................................. 62  
    Leisure and Amusements .................................................................................... 64  
    Employment ........................................................................................................ 65  
    Agriculture and Early Industrialization ............................................................ 66  
Fletcher’s Call to the Church of England and to Madeley ....................................... 67  
  Preparation for Ministry ....................................................................................... 71  
  Ordinations ............................................................................................................. 74  
  Appointment to Madeley ....................................................................................... 76  
Chapter 2 Church Services and Patterns of Worship ............................................. 81  
  Sunday Duty .......................................................................................................... 82  
    Frequency of Services ....................................................................................... 82  
    Conduct of the Services .................................................................................... 84  
    Worship Singing ................................................................................................. 89  
    Communion ........................................................................................................ 91  
Remembering the Sabbath ....................................................................................... 95  
Fletcher’s Preaching in Madeley ............................................................................. 99  
  Language and Presentation ................................................................................... 102  
  The Form of Fletcher’s Sermons ........................................................................... 104  
  Effect of Fletcher’s Preaching .............................................................................. 111  
Baptisms, Weddings and Burials ............................................................................ 113  
  Baptisms ................................................................................................................ 114  
  Weddings .............................................................................................................. 115  
  Burials .................................................................................................................. 117
Chapter 3 Church Extension: ‘Chapel’ Ministry and the Societies in Madeley ..... 119
Introduction..............................................................................................................119
Official and Unofficial Means of Extension .........................................................123
Expansion of Church Services .............................................................................126
Madeley Religious Societies .................................................................................130
Origins and Development .....................................................................................130
Leadership in and Management of the Societies ................................................138
Expanded Ministry to the Coalfield ......................................................................141
Coalfield Itinerancy ...............................................................................................141
Open Air Preaching ...............................................................................................145
Preaching Beyond the Coalfield and Visiting Preachers in Madeley ..................148

Chapter 4 Tensions in Church and Chapel.........................................................157
Ecclesiastical Tensions ..........................................................................................158
The Rev. Mr Prothero ...........................................................................................158
The Rev. William Hinton and Madeley Parishioners .........................................164
Tensions Between Fletcher and John Wesley ......................................................170
Fletcher’s Narrow Sphere ......................................................................................171
Wesley’s Preachers in Madeley ..........................................................................181
A Methodist Church of England? .......................................................................187

Chapter 5 Pastoralia ............................................................................................193
Pastoral Care ..........................................................................................................193
Pastoral Visits and Prayer for Parishioners ..........................................................193
Care for the Poor ....................................................................................................198
Pastoral Letters ......................................................................................................207
Parish Education ....................................................................................................212
Catechizing .............................................................................................................213
Charity Schools and Sunday Schools ....................................................................216
Educating Adults and Families .............................................................................221

Chapter 6 Conflict, Confrontation and Conciliation .........................................229
Protestant Nonconformity: Baptists and Quakers ..............................................236
Baptists ..................................................................................................................238
Quakers ..................................................................................................................241
The Quakers and Tithes .........................................................................................243
Fletcher’s Disputes with the Quakers in Madeley ..............................................244
Fletcher’s Conciliation with the Quakers ............................................................247
Catholics in Madeley ............................................................................................250
The Catholic Community in Madeley .................................................................251
Fletcher and the Catholic Community .................................................................254
A Slow Process of Conciliation ............................................................................265

Conclusion .............................................................................................................269
Map 1 Clergy of the Coalfield to c.1785.................................................................281
Map 2 Fletcher’s Extra-Parochial Preaching Journeys ........................................282
Map 3 The Shropshire Coalfield ............................................................................283
Map 4 Madeley Meetings 1760-1785 ..................................................................284
Appendix 1 Fletcher’s Sermons ............................................................................285
The Content and Style of Fletcher’s Sermons .....................................................285
Preaching Evangelical Religion ............................................................................285
Preaching Experimental Religion .......................................................................290
Appendix 3 Fletcher's Views on Children and Childhood
Appendix 4 Biographical Index
Appendix 5 Table of Visiting Preachers in Madeley 1760-1785
Appendix 6 Fletcher’s Works with Various Collected Editions Noted
Appendix 7 Fletcher’s Letters

Preaching Themes and Texts ................................................................. 292
Preaching Morality ............................................................................ 293
Appendix 2 Table of Fletcher's Sermons ........................................... 297
Appendix 3 Fletcher’s Views on Children and Childhood ............... 309
Appendix 4 Biographical Index ......................................................... 313
Appendix 5 Table of Visiting Preachers in Madeley 1760-1785 ......... 333
Appendix 6 Fletcher's Works with Various Collected Editions Noted .... 335
Appendix 7 Fletcher's Letters .............................................................. 339
Abstract

Church and Chapel: Parish Ministry and Methodism in Madeley, c.1760–1785, with Special Reference to the Ministry of John Fletcher

Submitted to The University of Manchester for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2010

David Robert Wilson

This thesis examines the ministry of John Fletcher (1729-1785), vicar of Madeley, Shropshire (vic. 1760-1785) as a case study on the Church of England and Methodism in the eighteenth century. Studies of Fletcher have tended to focus either on his contribution to Methodist theology or on his designation as Wesley’s successor as the leader of the Methodists. The parish of Madeley has been, for the most part, peripheral to Fletcher studies. The present thesis, however, has aimed to examine Fletcher in his parochial context; to study both what the parish tells us about Fletcher, but also what Fletcher tells us about the parish, and more specifically, about the church in the eighteenth century in a local context. The main argument of this thesis is that Fletcher’s ministry at Madeley was representative of a variation of pro-Anglican Methodism—localized, centred upon the parish church, and rooted in the Doctrines and Liturgy of the Church of England. Three recent publications have provided a triad for understanding Fletcher: (1) in his industrial context; (2) in his theological context; and (3), in his relationship with leaders in the Evangelical Revival. This thesis has sought to examine a fourth component: Fletcher’s work as an ordained clergyman of the Church of England, that is, in his ecclesial and ministerial context.

The main body of the thesis focuses on two primary aspects of Fletcher’s parish ministry: his stated duties and his diligence in carrying out other responsibilities and meeting other needs which arose, including addressing the various tensions which developed during his incumbency. Fletcher’s background and his call to parochial ministry as well as the religious history of Madeley are outlined first (Chapter 1). There are three chapters which examine his performance of stated duties: worship services and preaching (Chapter 2); pastoral care and education (Chapter 5); and confrontation of erroneous doctrine (Chapter 6). Fletcher’s ministry also included a scheme of church extension, represented primarily by his development of religious societies on which other aspects of his parochial duty built (Chapter 3). His evangelicalism and commitment to his parish simultaneously raised tensions between Fletcher and his parishioners (provoked by his ‘enthusiasm’ or zeal), and between Fletcher and John Wesley, whose variations of Methodism had similar aims, but different models of practice. A chapter is devoted specifically to these issues (Chapter 4).

Fletcher’s chapel meetings formed an auxiliary arm of the church, operating as outposts throughout his parish. His parishioners considered his ministerial model a ‘Methodist’ one even though it was not technically part of Wesley’s Connexion (other than the fact that his itinerants were guests in the parish). In all, it is the conclusion of this thesis that Fletcher’s pastoral ministry represents some of the best work of Anglicanism in the eighteenth century, demonstrating that despite the manifest challenges of industrializing society, residual dissent, and competition from the church’s rivals, the Establishment was not incapable of competing in the religious marketplace.
Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in this thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or institute of learning.

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The Author

David Wilson, prior to his research for this thesis, completed studies in Human Development and Family Science (B.S.) at Oregon State University and a Master of Divinity at George Fox University. He has recently presented papers at the American Academy of Religion, the Ecclesiastical History Society, and the Graduate Student Theological Seminary (Indianapolis, IN) on the theology and ministry of Mary Bosanquet Fletcher and the early ministry of John Fletcher at Madeley. His thesis research is largely based on the Fletcher-Tooth Collection at the Methodist Archive and Research Centre at the John Rylands University Library of Manchester and the Madeley parish records at the Shropshire Record Office, Shrewsbury, along with other collections in Britain and America which hold Fletcher manuscripts. He has recently completed a catalogue of the John and Mary Fletcher Library (at MARC) with an introduction, critical references and index, which is forthcoming from the Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester. He has recent publications in Wesleyan and Methodist Studies, The Arminian Magazine, and a forthcoming chapter in a volume on Madeley, Religion, Gender and Industry (Wipf and Stock). David has served in the Christian ministry in various denominations for the last eighteen years. He is an ordained elder in the Free Methodist Church of North America and an adjunct faculty member of George Fox University. He currently resides with his wife Lisa in Portland, Oregon.
Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge first my gratefulness to my supervisor, Jeremy Gregory, whose breadth of knowledge, expert advice and unswerving support have been indispensable. Gareth Lloyd has been of immense help both as a secondary supervisor and as Methodist Archivist, and I am grateful for his scholarship as well as an encyclopaedic knowledge of the Methodist manuscripts at the John Rylands Library. I am also grateful to Peter Nockles, both for sitting on my Ph.D. research panel and for his assistance in the Methodist Archives. I am much indebted to Peter Forsaith for his unequalled knowledge of the Fletcher corpus (particularly Fletcher’s correspondence), as I am for his friendship and encouragement. In various stages of my writing I have had the opportunity to discuss my research with John Walsh, Joanna Cruickshank, Suzanne Schwarz, Randy Maddox, and Bill Gibson, each of whose insights have been of enormous benefit. Phyllis Mack’s commitment to rigorous scholarship and her enthusiasm for the study of Mary Bosanquet Fletcher and the women of Methodism have been an inspiration for my work. Geordan Hammond has shared his acumen in eighteenth-century and Wesleyan studies as well as moral support. Much appreciation is due to Larry Shelton and Dan Brunner as scholars, friends, and pastors, and to the faculty of George Fox Evangelical Seminary of which they are a part. For all of the benefits to this thesis by this host of advisors and commentators, the errors which remain are mine alone.

I am also enduringly grateful: for the continual support of my church families in Oregon and in Manchester; for Marc and the Andresen clan, and Neal and Amy, who visited us in Manchester and made sure that the process was not without friendship and laughter; and for Chris Lyons whose friendship knows no limits. Brian Borin has been an enduring friend from long before a Ph.D. was ever considered and with his family has given unflagging encouragement. M. and P. and D. have walked with me through every aspect of the Ph.D. process; their inspiration silently runs throughout my writing. My parents and both my immediate and extended family have persevered with me through this process, and I consider myself blessed by their support. Finally, I am grateful to Lisa, supportive wife, faithful friend, and true companion. There were times too numerous to count that the process of writing this thesis seemed beyond impossible, yet her words of faith, hope, and unfailing love pushed me to be a better scholar, but more importantly, a better person.
Abbreviations


*AM*  *Arminian Magazine* (published after 1797 as the *Methodist Magazine* and subsequently *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, q.v. in this list below.)


*ASW*  Arthur Skevington Wood Archive, Cliff College, Calver

*BI*  Biographical Index (Appendix 1 in this thesis)

*BfRULM*  *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library, Manchester*

*BL*  British Library

*BM*  British Museum

*Bodl.*  Bodleian Library, Oxford


*Ches. Found.*  The Cheshunt Foundation at Westminster College, Cambridge

*CMFV*  *Christian Miscellany and Family Visitor*

*CH*  Selina Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon

*CW*  Charles Wesley
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EHR</td>
<td><em>English Historical Review</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>En.</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fl. Vol.</td>
<td>Fletcher Volumes (1 and 2), at MARC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fr.</td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCAH</td>
<td>General Commission on Archives and History of the United Methodist Church, Drew University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GW</td>
<td>George Whitefield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hill’s Arrangement</td>
<td>Hill, W. and J. Waller (eds.) <em>An Alphabetical Arrangement of All the Wesleyan Methodist Preachers on Trial in Connexion with the British and Irish Conferences</em>. 18th edn. London, 1896.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HJ</td>
<td><em>Historical Journal</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HRO</td>
<td>Hereford Records Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HMC</td>
<td>Historical Manuscripts Commission</td>
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</table>
This abbreviation is admittedly anachronistic as Mary Bosanquet was not married to John Fletcher until 1781. The reader is advised to keep this in mind, while for the sake of not adding one more abbreviation to this already extensive list I will use MF as an abbreviation for Mary Bosanquet Fletcher throughout the footnotes and references of the text.
PRO  Public Record Office, London

PWHS  *Proceedings of the Wesleyan Historical Society*


SCH  *Studies in Church History* (Publication of the Ecclesiastical History Society)

SCH Subsidia  *Studies in Church History, Subsidia Series* (Publication of the Ecclesiastical History Society)


SQS  Shropshire Quarter Sessions

SPCK  Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge

SRO  Shropshire Records Office (Shropshire Archives, Shrewsbury)

TSAS  *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological Society*


VCH  *Victoria County History of England*


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*2 There is no complete edition of the *Works* of John Fletcher and to fill the gaps, several editions are required, thus notated here as ‘A, B, C, and D’, respectively and are so referenced in the footnotes of this thesis.*


WMM *Methodist Magazine* or *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* (continuation of the *AM*)

WTJ *Wesleyan Theological Journal*
There is yet no complete collection of the *Works of John Fletcher*. Indeed, there have been numerous editions published since the 1790s, with the earliest indexed edition, edited by Joseph Benson, being issued from 1806-1809 in nine volumes, with a supplemental tenth volume. However, the dispersal of Fletcher’s various letters, treatises, and likenesses after his death made any kind of comprehensive anthology nearly impossible, not to mention the fact that many of his extant manuscripts were written in French and required translation if they were to be published for an English audience. Many of these remain untranslated and are, for the most part, not even referenced in some of the most significant studies on Fletcher (the works of Streiff and Forsaith excepted). Furthermore, even the most complete editions of Fletcher’s *Works* vary in their offerings with, as would be expected, formerly unknown works being added to later editions. Frustratingly, however, with each new issue of Fletcher’s works not everything from former editions was included, requiring reference to several editions varying from four to nine volumes between the 1806 and the 1873 editions. The reader of this thesis is referred to the abbreviations page which identifies the versions used in my references here. Also, a number of Fletcher’s writings (especially letters, but also a few sermons) were published only in periodicals but not in his collected *Works*. These have been referenced like any other periodical article in the footnotes but are listed with Fletcher’s *Works* in the bibliography.

Additionally, when Fletcher’s ‘Letters’ were published in the collections of *Works*, they were edited down from the fuller version printed in *Posthumous Pieces*, (ed. M. Horne, 1791) while some previously unpublished versions and some more complete editions of other letters were added. Thus, I have devised a rough hierarchy of sources when using Fletcher’s letters. First, where English holograph originals or verifiable manuscript copies are available, I have used these above all other sources. Second, where French holograph originals or manuscript copies are available, I have relied first upon the translations of these in Peter Forsaith’s recently published *Unexampled Labours (UL)* and only latterly upon my own translations if a letter was not part of Forsaith’s project and otherwise not translated. All quotations and references to Fletcher’s letters written in French to Charles Wesley, are cited in this thesis by their manuscript references to point the reader to extant sources, are
taken from UL. Third, there are two primary copy-book collections of Fletcher’s letters, some of which have not been published and for which no original is extant. These were transcribed by interested parties. One of these collections is to be found in the Everett-Tyerman volumes at the MARC, and these appear to be largely accurate based not only on the style of writing and meticulous detail in copying even the repetition of a word when repeated from the bottom of a manuscript page to the top of the next (presumably in the holograph) but copied in the main body in the transcriptions and also in the events related which can be confirmed by other sources.

The second of these collections was transcribed by one of Lady Huntingdon’s first biographers, A.C.H. Seymour. These transcriptions of letters from Fletcher to Lady Huntingdon were not printed as part of Forsaith’s collection due to his incredulity regarding their authenticity based on concerns expressed by Edwin Welch in his biography of Lady Huntingdon. Some of the letters were extracted in Seymour’s biography of the Countess. It should be noted, however, that the author of the present thesis has utilized the manuscript volume of letter transcripts used by Seymour, which is extant at MARC. Despite Welch’s claim that Seymour was generally unreliable, he seems to make an exception regarding the Fletcher letters, stating that Seymour had early nineteenth-century transcripts of Fletcher letters (i.e. not fabrications) and that there was more reliability concerning these than other of Seymour’s sources. Furthermore, Seymour’s transcripts demonstrate a significant correspondence between Fletcher’s dates and descriptions of events and those same dates and descriptions in Fletcher’s holograph letters to others such as the Wesleys, James Ireland, George Whitefield, and others, suggesting a more general if cautious expectation of reliability. The Seymour transcripts volume is shelved with the John Fletcher folios in MARC and referenced in this thesis as Fl. Vol. 2 [i.e. Fletcher Volume 2]. A number of letters from Fletcher, as well as letters from others concerning Fletcher and his ministry, are to be found in the recently published edition of the Countess’s correspondence, by J.R. Tyson and B.S. Schlenther. Also,

1 Everett/Tyerman Transcripts, 3 volumes, MARC: MAW 657 A.C.
3 Welch, *Spiritual Pilgrim*, 213.
4 MOEM.
I have been able to locate additional letters not listed in Streiff. A listing of these ‘additions’ can be found in the appendices to this thesis.

Fourth and finally, where only published editions but no holographs were available, I have relied upon: (1) the letters published in the eighteenth century in their earliest editions if available, including various collections of letters and letters published in the Arminian Magazine or its continuation, the Wesleyan Methodist Magazine and especially those published in Posthumous Pieces if not found earlier; (2) copies published in various editions of Fletcher’s Works as well as in various periodicals and journals, including most recently, some published in the Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society; and (3) letters published only in French and for which no holograph or copy manuscripts are extant. The above sources can be found in the bibliography to this thesis, and a full listing of Fletcher’s correspondence is in Appendix Seven. Due to the frequency with which Fletcher’s manuscript letters are referenced, only the sender(s), recipient(s) and date is listed in the footnotes (e.g. JF/CH, 19 Nov. 1760). Successive references to the previous sender/recipient are listed as ‘ibid.’ followed by the date of the letter. For full archival reference to Fletcher’s correspondence, the reader is referred to the complete listing in the appendices. Letters published in Posthumous Pieces are given with the same information as manuscript letters (in order to provide the reader a sense of the chronology of Fletcher’s letters) followed by a reference to the page numbers in the First Edition of this work, abbreviated as FL (for Fletcher’s Letters, the title by which Posthumous Pieces was commonly known in the eighteenth century and which was stamped on the spine of some early editions).

One further note is necessary regarding Fletcher’s letters. His correspondence with his parish when he was away was addressed variously to individual parishioners, to the curates, and to the societies. However, due to the extensive addresses, such as that of his letter of 30 October 1765,5 ‘To those who love the Lord Jesus Christ in, and about Madeley’, abbreviations have typically been used instead of the full address. For instance, this was Streiff’s convention. Unfortunately however, the abbreviations do not always translate well. Thus, Streiff lists this letter as being to the ‘Societies in and Around Madeley’, whereas, in both content and ascription it is clear that this was a letter to his parishioners more generally, not just those in the Madeley

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5 See note in Appendix 7 for the proper dating of this letter.
societies. I have also utilized abbreviated addresses in the footnotes for references to Fletcher’s pastoral letters (most of which are to be found in _FL_). However, due to the fact that this thesis is focused on Fletcher’s work in both church and chapel, it is important to be specific as to whom he was writing when he corresponded with his parish. Thus, I have created a different convention for abbreviating. Letters addressed in any variation to his parishioners in general are referenced as ‘JF→Madeley Parishioners’. Letters addressed specifically to the religious societies are referenced as ‘JF→Madeley Societies’. Letters to individuals follow the referencing described in the previous paragraph.

Due to the frequent reference to unpublished manuscripts, I have in most cases, omitted full manuscript references in the footnotes. Instead, the title or description of the manuscript has been referenced, followed by an indicator as to where the full reference can be found in the Bibliography, which contains a complete list of every manuscript used in the thesis. For example, the reference

JF, First Plan for a Sunday School (B1.9)

directs the reader to a manuscript draft of Fletcher’s plan for Sunday schools in Madeley, to be found in the Bibliography (B) in section (1.9), thus (B1.9) in which are listed the respective manuscripts at MARC. Where no clear title for a document exists, thus making a bibliographic reference difficult to indicate, the archival reference is provided in the footnotes.

With regard to the _Works_ of John Wesley (_WJW_), I have made use of the following conventions. I have used the _Bicentennial Edition_ (BE) for my research and any footnotes, prefaces, or comments within this thesis refer to this edition only unless otherwise indicated. With Wesley’s _Letters_, because the BE for these is still in the process of publication, I have used the BE for letters between 1721 and 1755 but have relied upon the previous _Standard Edition_, edited by Telford in eight volumes, for all letters subsequent to 1755. Letters from the BE are referred to as ‘_WJW_, 25 and 26’; The _Letters of John Wesley_ from Telford’s edition are referred to as ‘_LJW_’.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 1729</td>
<td>John William Fletcher born in Nyon, Switzerland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 1739</td>
<td>Mary Bosanquet born in Essex, England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. 1749</td>
<td>Fletcher arrived in Britain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 1754 (or 55)</td>
<td>Fletcher had an evangelical conversion experience and made a written covenant with God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar. 1757</td>
<td>Fletcher successively ordained deacon and priest in the Church of England; Fletcher appointed curate of Madeley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. May 1758</td>
<td>John Fletcher met the Countess of Huntingdon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1759</td>
<td>Fletcher appointed Chaplain to Lady Huntingdon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Dec. 1759</td>
<td>Fletcher released from duty as curate of Madeley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 1760</td>
<td>Fletcher inducted as vicar of Madeley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 1761</td>
<td>The first Anglican religious societies came together in Madeley Wood and Coalbrookdale under Fletcher’s leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 1762</td>
<td>Fletcher had conflicts with Catholics at Madeley Wood; Churchwardens in Madeley and local magistrates threatened to present Fletcher at the church court for holding conventicles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1764</td>
<td>Wesley sent Methodist itinerant preachers to preach in Madeley and the Shropshire coalfield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 1764</td>
<td>Fletcher began meeting with other evangelical clergy in a clerical society at Worcester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 1764</td>
<td>Fletcher exchanged pulpits with the curate of Tipton, Staffordshire (leaving his pulpit for the first time since his induction)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr. 1765</td>
<td>Fletcher preached in the open air for the first time (at Coalpit Bank, Wellington, Shropshire)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Event</td>
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<tr>
<td>1767</td>
<td>Fletcher established a charity school at Madeley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1768</td>
<td>Fletcher appointed president of Trevecca College, Talgarth, Brecon, Wales (Lady Huntingdon’s College)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. – c. May 1770</td>
<td>Fletcher visited his home in Switzerland and travelled through parts of Europe with James Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1771</td>
<td>Fletcher resigned from Trevecca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1771-1777</td>
<td>Arminian-Calvinist Controversy; Fletcher wrote and published his <em>Checks to Antinomianism</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1772</td>
<td>Fletcher published his <em>Appeal to Matter of Fact and Common Sense</em>, dedicated to the Madeley gentry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 1773</td>
<td>Landslip or Earthquake at the Birches on the Border of Madeley and Buildwas parishes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 1775</td>
<td>Fletcher wrote a plan for a ‘Methodist Church of England’ to be proposed at Wesley’s Conference</td>
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<tr>
<td>1776</td>
<td>Fletcher became ill with a lung disorder (probably tuberculosis)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1776-77</td>
<td>Fletcher built a meeting house in the parish (Madeley Wood) as a school for children in the day and a society meeting place in the evening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1778-81</td>
<td>Fletcher travelled to the Continent to rest and recover from his illness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 1781</td>
<td>Fletcher returned to Madeley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 1781</td>
<td>John Fletcher and Mary Bosanquet married at Batley Church near Leeds, Yorkshire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autumn 1783</td>
<td>John and Mary Fletcher made a preaching journey to Dublin, Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1784</td>
<td>John and Mary Fletcher with Abiah Darby establish Sunday schools in Madeley</td>
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Aug. 1785  John Fletcher died (14 Aug.) in the vicarage at Madeley; Thomas Hatton, Rector of Waters Upton preached Fletcher’s funeral sermon (17 Aug.)
Introduction

In 1775, John Fletcher, then fifteen years the vicar of Madeley, wrote a letter to John Wesley with a proposal intended to steer Methodism toward an irenic and auxiliary relationship within the Church of England—an intent which Wesley repeatedly asserted throughout his own life.\(^1\) Fletcher’s plan was for the forming of ‘a general society—a daughter-church of our holy mother ... the methodist-church of England’.\(^2\) Fletcher’s aspiration was to promote a reformation of pastoral diligence based upon evangelical principles, and he saw the possibility of Methodism acting as a catalyst. This thesis is an examination of the context of that aspiration, namely, the pastoral ministry of the Church of England and the relationship of Methodism to such aims, and the strategies Fletcher implemented to accomplish reform. Thus, it is a study of the Church of England, of Methodism, and of Church Methodism, informed by the evidence of a twenty-five year parish ministry in which Fletcher’s theology and philosophy of ministry and reform were implemented and tested.

Fletcher was a Swiss-born émigré, introduced to Methodism in London in the 1750s. He experienced evangelical conversion in 1754. He followed what he perceived to be a call into church ministry, was ordained in 1757, and inducted to the industrializing, Midlands parish of Madeley, Shropshire in 1760, where he served for the remainder of his life. He married Mary Bosanquet in 1781, and although their marriage was abruptly ended by his untimely death in 1785, she had a considerable share in ministry to the parish. Indeed, even though it is beyond the time period of this thesis (1760-1785), it is worth noting that she continued her residence in the parish after his death, carrying on an Anglican-Methodist ministry for thirty more years, until her own death in 1815.

Fletcher maintained a pro-Anglican stance throughout his life, advocating the role of Methodism as a leaven within the church. This was the model he was attempting to implement in his own parish. His concern for the reform of the church was rooted in pastoral care which went beyond simply carrying out the duties of preaching and administering the Sacraments. Pastoral care must include, Fletcher believed, an attentiveness to the social and religious needs felt by those who desired

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2 *JF* → *JW*, 1 Aug. 1775.
to ‘flee the wrath to come’. However, his championing such pastoral improvement (much as had some of his seventeenth-century forbears like Bishop Gilbert Burnet), was dialectical, for it implied there was something that was yet unreformed in the clergy.3 Indeed, in common with many of his contemporaries, Fletcher took a critical view towards what were considered clerical abuses or neglect. He was censorious of the root causes of these problems, whether theological, systemic, or simply arising from individual sloth or apathy. His primary concern was an evangelical one—‘the spread of the power of godliness’—which he believed was thoroughly consonant with the tradition of the Established Church.4

He was aware of the religious debates of his day and engaged in theological controversies for the sake of the church. It was however, primarily in his parish that he sought to bring about his ideal, rooted in the pastoral task: he conducted worship services, created religious societies, preached wherever he believed providence opened the door, carried out an energetic regimen of pastoral visits, implemented a variety of strategies for religious education, and confronted erroneous doctrine. In all of these pastoral activities his religious societies provided an extended foundation on which to build an expanding ministry of the church in the parish.

Fletcher maintained relationships with John and Charles Wesley and with Wesleyan Methodism, but his undying commitment was to the church. As John Nuelsen wrote in his study: ‘Für Wesley war die Welt sein Kirchspiel, für Fletcher war sein Kirchspiel seine Welt’.5 Indeed, Fletcher’s parish was his world. Wesley persistently tried to coax Fletcher out of parochial ministry into Methodist leadership and itinerancy, and the accretion of his disappointment with Fletcher’s declinations is apparent in Wesley’s statement, ‘he did abundance of good in that narrower sphere of action which he chose; and was a pattern well worthy of the imitation of all the parochial Ministers in the kingdom.’6

Fletcher’s wife, Mary Bosanquet, had, prior to their marriage, developed ministries to orphans and fostered a small community of women modelled after the

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4 JF/W, 1 Aug. 1775.
5 J.L. Nuelsen, Jean Guillaume de la Fléchère: Der Erste Schweizerische Methodist (Zurich, 1929), 11. Wesley’s statement was: ‘I look upon all the world as my parish; thus far I mean, that, in whatever part of it I am, I judge it meet, right, and my bounden duty, to declare unto all that are willing to hear, the glad tidings of salvation.’ WJW, 19:66-68.
6 J. Wesley, A Sermon Preached on the Occasion of the Death of the Rev. Mr. John Fletcher (London, 1785), 13, italics mine.
fashion of Halle pietism. Wesley praised her work, comparing her household to the renowned community at Little Gidding. In the 1770s she became one of the first Methodist female preachers. Significant in their own right, these spheres of ministry also helped prepare her for her joint ministry with Fletcher in Madeley, a partnership to which they committed in their marriage covenant. Mrs Fletcher was evangelically minded and a member of Methodist societies throughout her life, while firmly committed to the Church of England. In addition to visiting the sick and caring for the poor, she was particularly talented in her organizational abilities, and she helped to develop a variety of class and society meetings, building on and extending the work of her husband, and in her own day she became well-known. She probably preached in Madeley in the societies while John Fletcher was still alive, and it is certain that she led society and class meetings during this time. There is little doubt that all of this was done with her husband’s approbation.

Fletcher’s religious societies first met in various places throughout Madeley parish, from the vicarage kitchen to the homes of parishioners, superintended by Fletcher himself. As the need for space increased and as resources became available, John and subsequently Mary Fletcher, contributed funds to build meeting houses or ‘chapels’ in the parish. The first, constructed in the centre of the parish, was used as a school house during the day and a meeting place for the society in the evening. However, the buildings also served as de facto chapels of ease (though never formally consecrated), providing places for parishioners to hear a sermon in their own communities, which were separated by several miles from the church. Eventually, Wesley’s preachers included Madeley and the surrounding parishes in their preaching rounds. Fletcher clearly saw his pastoral work as being of the Methodist or evangelical type, but his model of Methodism, in its parochial form,

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8 SAJF, 142-43.
10 HLF, 25; SAJF, 139-40; F.W. MacDonald, Fletcher of Madeley (New York, 1886), 168-69.
12 See JF, MF, 12 Feb. 1779.
13 ‘Madeley’, WMM (1833), 876.
did not always mesh well with Wesley’s model, which emphasized itinerancy over residency, as well as insisting on his own authoritarian oversight of his Connexion. This sometimes brought tension into Fletcher and Wesley’s relationship.

The aims of this study arise from three concentric concerns of recent ecclesiastical historiography: first, the reassessment of the nature and parochial function of the church in the eighteenth century, particularly the pastoral ministry; second, the context of industrializing society, its challenges to the pastoral task, and the response of the church to those challenges; and third, the relationship between the church and Methodism, representative of debates over the relationship between ‘church’ and ‘chapel’ in the eighteenth century. As a ‘Methodist’ Anglican clergyman who served a single parish for a quarter of a century, Fletcher offers a unique yet largely unexplored look at these concerns. As an industrializing parish Madeley epitomized those areas in which the Established Church was supposedly most impotent in eighteenth century, when compared with its evangelical dissenting or ‘chapel’ counterparts. Yet Fletcher’s labours in Madeley, rather than demonstrating an ever-weakening church, were more akin to the work of the church in Oldham and Saddleworth, where, as Smith has shown, evidenced considerable pastoral creativity and energy in response to industrializing conditions.14

Fletcher’s Swiss background offers a continental perspective on Anglican-Methodist relations, particularly with regard to how the Huguenot situation and the response of the church to these persecuted Protestants influenced Continental perceptions of the English Church. This is of especial interest concerning the churchmanship of those like Fletcher who saw the Church of England as broad enough to include a range of churchmanship, not least of which included the irregularities of Methodism such as crossing parish boundaries, itinerancy, and preaching and praying extempore. Fletcher himself was a Protestant of noble descent, and his family was established in the Canton of Berne, which became a significant refuge for Huguenots fleeing France after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685.15 Contact between English divines and the clergy of Berne

contributed to an idealization of the English Church in the mind of Swiss Protestants, an element of influence observable in Fletcher’s own statements and his decision to pursue ordination in the Church of England. This context sheds new light on the question of how some Methodists could conceive that their irregularities might be accommodated within the Established Church. For Fletcher, Methodism was not a competing model of churchmanship, but a practical model of the truest form of Anglicanism in its idealization of the primitive church as supremely stated in the church’s own authorities, the Bible, Prayer Book, Articles, Canons, and Homilies.

**Methodology**

*Methodological Premises*

Two methodological premises guide this research. First, as Dreyer has shown of Wesley, the question we must ask regarding historical identities is not primarily where we should classify individuals but where they classified themselves. Gregory’s recent discussion of John Wesley’s relationship to Methodism and the Church of England and Lloyd’s reassessment of Charles Wesley demonstrate the larger historical implications for understanding the eighteenth-century church arising from a more inductive approach to religious identities. Second, an emphasis on the sources related to the parochial context of eighteenth-century Methodism is necessary to parse the relationship of church and chapel. This emphasis on context serves as a check to the anachronistic tendency in Methodist studies which anticipates Methodist separation from the Establishment, often misconstruing the devotion of the parish clergy to their spiritual duties and the participation of the laity in the religious life of the church. In a bold assertion of this anticipation of separation, Overton and Relton, two nineteenth-century critics of the Hanoverian

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Switzerland is recorded in a manuscript biography by J. Hocart, ‘Details of the Life & Family of John Fletcher’.


19 Gregory, ‘In the Church’, 147-78.

20 G. Lloyd, *Charles Wesley*.

church, wrote: ‘[I]t is impossible not to come to the conclusion that from the very first the Wesleyan movement, so far as it concerned organization, never was and never could have been a church movement.’ This view obscures bastions of what Lloyd has called ‘Church Methodism’ which was ‘aggressively pro-Anglican’ and which may in fact have provided a strong foundation for the success of Methodism after separation, if only by postponing schism until the movement was strong enough to succeed as a denomination, independent of a mother church. Pro-Anglicanism was also observable in clerical devotion to parish ministry, where Methodism could be observed not only in partnership with the church, but as an extension of Anglican worship and pastoral care. It became clear in the research for this thesis that any separation from the church by Methodists in Madeley took place, at the earliest, in the first decade of the nineteenth century (and probably much later), thus failing to conform to models portraying Methodism as a form of eighteenth-century ‘New Dissent’. Instead, Methodism in Madeley was manifested as a loosely organized, local, cooperative body of Anglicans, attendant at the services of the church. It functioned first and foremost as an auxiliary ministry of Christian fellowship, worship, and prayer, which reflected Fletcher’s attempt to extend the ministry of the local church.

The parochial context is beginning to receive more attention. Gregory and Chamberlain in *The National Church in Local Perspective*, assert ‘that any account of the way the Church of England functioned as a national church needs to take its

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25 As late as 1862 Phoebe Palmer, on a visit to Madeley, observed: ‘Never have we been at a place where the established Church and the Methodists seem to be so lovingly united.’ R. Wheatley, *The Life and Letters of Mrs. Phoebe Palmer* (New York, 1876), 382.
26 A.D. Gilbert, in his earlier chapters, describes ‘New Dissent’ within the ‘dissenting tradition’ as a ‘phenomenon analogous to that of Methodism within the Anglican tradition.’ *Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change, 1740-1914* (London, 1976), 36. Yet, later in the book, he quantifies the growth of new dissent, including Methodist numbers as separate from Anglican numbers, while leaving little room for the possibility that in counting Methodists there was the problem of duplicating counts for those (many) Methodists who remained committed members of the Church of England. Indeed, in his charting of the growth of evangelicalism within religious traditions, no quantification is offered for evangelicals within the church, Methodist or otherwise. (pp. 39ff; 144-74).
role in the localities seriously.\textsuperscript{27} Many of the existing studies, however, are regionally focussed on either counties, industrial areas made up of several parishes, or on the larger administrative units of the church, such as dioceses or archdeaconries. The question of how local a study needs to be is a valid one,\textsuperscript{28} for the overly local can all too easily digress into atomism, losing site of the connexions between the local, the regional, and the national. Gregory and Chamberlain have recommended a “dissolved boundaries” model, using which, historians examine points of integration of the central church structures and initiatives with the practice of the church in the localities in order to keep perspective on the relationship between micro and macro historical concerns.\textsuperscript{29} Spufford has creatively suggested that there is a comparison to be made between biographical work and local historical work, for the uniqueness that arises from the reconstruction of the sources in both, yet offers insights into other persons or localities respectively, so far as there remain comparable features.\textsuperscript{30} The present thesis takes seriously these concerns.

The focus on church and chapel ministry in the parish of Madeley and the religious identities of John and Mary Fletcher which shaped it, has a wider applicability to our understanding of church and chapel ministry in the eighteenth century more generally. For example, it is one aim of this study to enquire to what extent chapel ministry in Madeley was simultaneously a ‘grass roots’ movement and a movement within the Establishment, and to what degree Established religion was or could be ‘popular’ religion. Exploration of such religious practice in Madeley, then, is suggestive of what may have been possible in other similar (e.g. industrializing, Midlands, etc.) localities, and amongst other communities which were associated with the church, with Methodism, or with both. Categorizations of nonconformity and dissent, which make \textit{a priori} arguments that ‘grass roots’ movements exist only outside of the Establishment, resist such alternative possibilities deterministically by creating a false dichotomy between church and chapel, which clearly did not exist in all, and perhaps not even most, parishes.


\textsuperscript{29} \textit{National Church}, 13.

\textsuperscript{30} M. Spufford, \textit{Contrasting Communities} (Stroud, 2000), xxvii-xxviii.
The Sources

An important justification for limiting the study to a single parish, specifically ministry in Madeley, is the sheer volume of extant primary source material. The Fletcher-Tooth Collection at MARC, together with parish and diocesan records held in the SRO and the HRO, provide the primary sources for this thesis. The Fletcher-Tooth Collection covers the period from before John’s arrival and institution at Madeley until well after the death of Mary. Their ministry in nearly every aspect is remarkably well-documented. This collection alone comprises forty-three boxes containing manuscript letters, journals and diaries, poetry, devotional writing, indentures related to church and chapel, sermons, theological prose, and social, political, and religious polemical writing. John Fletcher’s correspondence provides significant insights into his pastoral ministry, and his letters written to his parishioners, when he was away from them in particular, shed considerable light on church and chapel religion in Madeley. All of his letters taken together provide a chronicle of his ministry. In his correspondence with Charles Wesley, John Wesley, the Countess of Huntingdon, and James Ireland, among others, he often described pastoral difficulties, new parochial initiatives, and the religious state of his parish. The Methodist Archives also hold the John and Mary Fletcher Library, comprising over 340 titles in 134 volumes. The scope of available source material, therefore, offers significant potential for the study of Anglican and Methodist ministry in an eighteenth-century industrializing parish.

Review of Literature

The majority of research on John Fletcher has been from a Methodist and often an hagiographical starting point, drawing conclusions based on anachronistic assumptions, and theological presuppositions. These studies have typically critiqued the eighteenth-century church for its torpor and inadequacy to meet the needs of its people, as well as presupposing the trajectory of Methodism towards separation from the church. The revitalization of interest in the eighteenth-century church over the last two decades has opened new avenues for study and has suggested possibilities for revising these largely pejorative appraisals which portray the age as one of moral.

31 On Ireland, see B.I.
32 D.R. Wilson (ed.) ‘An Annotated Catalogue of the John and Mary Fletcher Library at the Methodist Archives and Research Centre, John Rylands University Library of Manchester, and Other Repositories, with an Introductory Commentary’, BJRUL (forthcoming).
crisis, lacking both piety and organization, during which the Church of England stood ‘listless, gazing—a powerless and indifferent spectator—at the moral distress of her children’.33 Within the growing body of research on this period, there remains a call for attention to examine the religious life of the parish and the piety and the parochial function of the clergy in the care of their parishioners in all its forms.34 It is from this burgeoning body of research that this thesis arises.

**Religious History**

It is the alleged inability of the church to carry out parochial duties and the lack of infrastructure or pietistic concern which has drawn the critique of historians following what has been called the ‘pessimistic thesis’.35 For example, it has been asserted that:

> What we now know as a well-worked parish did not, of course, exist. Even the ordinary parts of parochial machinery were then wanting ... there was no zeal, no enterprise. The labouring classes were neglected. Parochial visitation was the exception, not the rule. Catechizing of children, and servants and apprentices on Sunday afternoons had fallen into disuse.36

With the increase of regional studies, however, it has become evident that there were considerable variations in institutional ideals, clerical diligence, and lay involvement from one place to another.37 The pastoral response of Fletcher in the parish of Madeley similarly resists broad generalizations regarding the state of the church as one of decline. In contrast, it appears to suggest a variation of ‘Church Methodism’ which reflected not only the continuity of a still-reforming church, according to the Anglican ideals of the sixteenth-century Reformation, but also optimism towards the possibility of carrying out such a ministry ideal.

In order to analyze the role religion played in the lives of parishioners, the function of the church and parochial machinery, and to assess the possibility of alternatives to pessimistic theories, it is important to understand the social and

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34 J.D. Walsh, C. Haydon, and S. Taylor (eds.) *The Church of England c.1689-c.1833* (Cambridge, 1993), 25; *RRR*, 2-4, 233-34. On the need for and the development of local studies, see *National Church*.
36 Overton and Relton, *English Church*, 64.
religious context of the parish in the eighteenth century. These theories tend to be wedded to the idea of decline,38 making the assumption that there was a clear distinction between church and chapel communities, especially where those forms of evangelical ‘new dissent’ operated as ‘popular religion’ against the backdrop of a weakening ‘cultural and institutional role of religion in English society.’39 Popular religion was, it is suggested, largely unique to evangelical nonconformity, where chapels were not adjunct to, but rather in competition with, the Establishment. It utilized the advantages of freedom allowed by nonconformist ecclesiologies that made the most of a new voluntary religious associationalism, ushered in by the Toleration Act, and offered increased lay involvement in its religious societies, Sunday schools, class meetings, and spontaneous forms of worship, all buttressed by growth stemming from Evangelical conversionism.40

In such analyses, these chapel communities not only operated outside the aegis of the church, but they had their own sub-culture with its own form of membership, rites and rules, that ‘did not belong in the familiar structure of vestry, churchwarden, and parson.’41 This extra-parochial liberty, it has been suggested, lent itself to a constituency of industrial labourers, while the Establishment was unable to adapt to the changing needs of society. It has thus been inferred that the increasing chasm between church and chapel was deepened by the overall decline of the traditional forms and structures of worship and parochial care, and broadened by the sense that church and chapel were not partners but rather competing alternatives, based on ‘two very different religious and social value systems.’42 Yalden’s thesis on North Shropshire43 attempts to establish the central characteristics of chapel communities and analyzes the changes from the middle of the seventeenth century to the end of the nineteenth century. His study resisted the polemics against the Established Church and in its focus on nonconformity rarely addressed the

38 D. Hempton uses the phrase ‘wedded to the idea of religious decline’, in *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven, 2005), 189.
39 Ibid. 53, 206.
Establishment at all. Even so, the assumption of religious decline and the dichotomy of church and chapel, following Gilbert’s typology, is explicit.44

The ‘success’ or ‘failure’ of the church and its reform efforts has been studied from a variety of angles. In the last two decades a number of studies have offered more optimistic revisions.45 By the early 1990s social and ecclesiastical historians were well embroiled in the debate over the accuracy of earlier claims that the church, by the time of the reforms of the 1830s, had lost its significance and impact as a centre of English life. Eighteenth-century churchmen had done far too little, much too late, and a progression of secularization had been set in motion beyond either control or repair. The more optimistic cadre has suggested that such negative views were shaped by denominational biases and anachronistic superimpositions of Victorian values on Georgian religion. Early in the debate, a seminal collection of essays was published, with several of which focussed on the local church. These included studies of counties, regions and cities, and their respective social, political, economic, and religious settings.46 Research had, until this time, focused largely upon data directly related to the church as an institution, inferring conclusions regarding the religious tenor of the times from church attendance, participation in communion, church-building, clerical incomes, pluralism, and non-residence. Thus, in addition to conducting more localized research, a methodology which allowed for other measurements of religion, social solidarity and its challenges, and the general participation of the people in religious life, was necessary.

Gilbert’s claim that ‘the best attempts to defend the pastoral work of the eighteenth-century parochial clergy remain somewhat damning in the faintness of their praise’47 has recently been offset by a number of studies which extend beyond statistical analysis.48 It is now, after nearly two decades of revisionist history, more generally accepted that evaluation of the church’s parochial function and religious practice must include, along with church-building activity and attendance at public worship, the other forms of both quantitative and qualitative measurement of religious life. This requires utilizing the records of parish churches, chapels, diocesan

44 Ibid. 5-8.
45 See Brown, *Death of Christian Britain*.
46 Walsh, Haydon and Taylor, *Church of England*.
47 Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, 70.
and county records offices, and the various Establishment and extra-Establishment sermons, letters, account books and many other such sources, which still remain largely unexplored. Jacob, in his superb study of early eighteenth-century lay piety, utilized such sources, particularly those of parish and diocesan offices. His findings substantiate and extend claims by Sykes and others that the laicization of the church in the eighteenth century did not reflect an increasingly secular church as the century went on. Rather, Reformation ideals of lay piety, enmeshed in religious practice in church and society, persisted. ‘In many instances [the laity] took the initiative in relatively uncomplainingly supporting the clergy, in developing their own spirituality, in maintaining Christian worship and discipline, in philanthropic works, and in building and improving churches’.

The Church of England

For many years, Warne’s *Church and Society in Eighteenth-Century Devon* was the standard reassessment of the eighteenth-century church in its local context, though it is more descriptive than explanatory. In Devon, the church remained central to community life and attentive to the spiritual needs of the people, and endeavoured to meet the challenges of a growing population. Dissent was in decline from the 1730s. Methodism experienced growth, but Warne’s interest was in the conflict with the Establishment, rather than in the reason for Methodist expansion. However, notwithstanding the various riots, accusations of enthusiasm, and theological controversies, there remained those whose religious activity included Methodist and Anglican religious practice into the first decades of the nineteenth century. McClatchey’s study of *Oxfordshire Clergy* published fifty years ago, explored the clerical office in its various functions, noting that there was considerable variance in terms of diligent service, but that there were also efforts to improve both clerical standards and remuneration in the later eighteenth century. Three more recent studies have offered reappraisals of the church in industrializing England in the eighteenth century. Comparison of these studies confirms a significant degree of regional variance, while showing how religious practice might be measured in different, yet equally valid, ways. Conclusions regarding the fortunes of the church

49 Ibid. 227.
51 Ibid.
can thus be drawn from comparisons of differing types of religious practice across the industrializing north. For example, Albers’s thesis examines religion in the county of Lancashire and dissent as well as Methodism are considered in the larger social, economic, political and religious context. Contrary to well-worn claims that Methodism’s success was built on the weakness of the Establishment, Albers’s analysis suggests that certain characteristics of Methodism, such as itinerancy, found a sympathetic audience among those immigrant labourers who were transient ‘itinerants’ themselves. In addition, her reassessment suggests that political factors, which broke down the fragile hegemony of the Establishment, were as causal of decline of the influence of the church, as an intrinsic or inevitable secularisation.

Smith’s work, similar to Jacob’s study of lay piety, focussed on the practice of religion in the church where it did exist. In Oldham and Saddleworth the parishioners were resilient to changes brought on by industrialization, and the clergy were both quick to recognize and creative in their attempts to meet the needs of these large industrializing parishes, including a clerical rota amongst the parochial chapels. In addition, he has shown that pluralism and non-residence were not necessarily signs of corruption or laziness; many of the clergy employed dutiful curates in order that non-residence did not prevent provision of worship services. The clergy generally provided two services on Sundays, and the focus on preaching stimulated improvement of sermons by the parochial clergy. It is of particular interest that in the later eighteenth century, the cooperation of Methodists with the church in developing and maintaining Sunday schools resulted in many Methodists participating in Anglican worship. Enlarging on this point, Smith notes that in addition to an evangelical consensus formed among nonconformists, the ‘strong, and increasingly preponderant presence of Evangelicals within the Church of England ... made possible the development of a wider consensus into which both nonconformists and Anglicans were increasingly integrated.’

Though it was beset by challenges, the religious persistence of the laity and the

54 Ibid. 564.
55 Ibid. 603.
56 Smith, Religion.
57 Ibid. 42.
58 Ibid. 229.
creativity and devotion of the clergy demonstrates that the church was not left on the road to irreversible decline at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

In contrast, Snape has illustrated how the church in the Lancashire parish of Whalley was frustrated in its attempts to reform individual piety and to draw parishioners to churches and parochial chapels for public worship. It is noteworthy that, as with Warne’s findings in Devon, Snape has found that there remained, at the close of the eighteenth century, local clusters of Methodists who ‘refused to acknowledge themselves as ‘Separatists’ while Methodists in Downham still worshipped at their parochial [Anglican] chapel’. Even so, he has shown that in at least one region of Lancashire, the challenges to the church were manifold, and factors stemming from industrialization did in fact encumber the parochial infrastructure, particularly in response to the needs and expectations of its plebeian constituency. These were needs to which evangelical nonconformity (including separatist Methodists) could more adequately respond. However, if in the parish of Whalley the Establishment ‘lacked both the competence and the resources’ to meet the changing needs of industrializing society, so it was also weakened by the success of Methodism, and a sense of decline was apparent by the last part of the eighteenth century. The divergence from Smith’s conclusions comes in part from the two historians’ differing methodologies. At the outset, Smith sought to study religious practice where it did exist and to examine strategies employed to accomplish the goals of the church. Snape’s work, on the other hand, aimed to ‘draw attention to the manifold and genuine shortcomings of the contemporary Church of England’. Yet both studies are valuable for their local focus on a small grouping of large parishes and chapelries and for their examination of the pastoral efforts of the clergy, rather than simply statistics of attendance, church-building activity, and participation in communion.

In the light of these studies, it becomes clear that there is still much historical work to be done. Fletcher’s work in Madeley provides another view into what was possible in the eighteenth-century church in industrializing parishes. Clerical strategies were developed to tackle the range of challenges, including even the Christianization of parishioners, who may have been de-Catholicized but remained ignorant in the Protestant faith. As Gilbert Burnet wrote, ‘It cannot be denied ... that

our reformation is not yet arrived at that full perfection that is to be desired’. 60 In Madeley, Fletcher clearly saw his work as having continuity with the aims of the Reformers from centuries past. This study is interested in religious practice, where it did arise in its own right. Central to this is the claim that many of the freedoms enjoyed by nonconformist ecclesiologies were actually available to the Established clergy and laity as well, and in many ways, Anglicans participated much as their rivals in attempts to fulfill the yet unrealized ideals of the Reformation, significantly, by the improvement of pastoral standards. In any case, distinctions between church and chapel were often much more ambiguous than has traditionally been assumed.

Hempton has suggested that ‘Religion ... sinks its deepest roots into popular culture when it helps give expression to the social, economic, ethnic and cultural homogeneity of populations facing rapid change or oppression’. 61 Following this conclusion, it is worth asking, where did religion in Madeley sink its roots? How was the Anglican pastoral ministry carried out, and what effect did this have on patterns of church and chapel religious practice? And, in general, what were the challenges to pastoral ministry in the eighteenth-century parish and how did Fletcher respond to them? Could the church compete in the voluntary religious marketplace? 62

Methodism

It is the slippery task of the historian when attempting to paint one picture bright to avoid unduly painting another bleak. That Methodism and the Evangelical Revival became in the nineteenth century a ‘stick with which to beat the eighteenth-century Church’ 63 has been shown through a number of recent studies. As J.C.D. Clark asserts:

Methodism and Evangelicalism have often been held up as evidence of the truth of such claims, and analysed as rejections of the corruption and spiritual inadequacy of the eighteenth-century church ... In the early and mid eighteenth century, Methodism and

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60 Quoted in E. Duffy, ‘Correspondence Fraternelle: the SPCK, the SPG, and the Churches of Switzerland in the War of the Spanish Succession’, SCH Subsidia 2 (Oxford, 1979), 251-80.
61 Hempton, Methodism, 63.
62 Gilbert, Religion and Society; 61.
Evangelicalism can better be understood as marks of the church’s strength and spiritual effectiveness.64

Case in point, Baker used Madeley to support claims of Anglican deficiency in industrializing England. Suggesting that Madeley was a characteristic parish of Anglican negligence, he explained that ‘It was typical of those areas most affected by the Industrial Revolution of the eighteenth century—areas where Methodism achieved its greatest success because the maximum spiritual need was too often coupled with minimum ministration by the Established Church’.65 However, given that Fletcher’s labours were ultimately and thoroughly parochial, it is difficult to find justification for describing a poor ministration of the church in Madeley.

The relationship between the Methodist Societies and the Church of England resists the simplified labels of either conformity or dissent. Clergy and lay relations could transcend these demarcations, and parish life did not always move in tandem with the institutions of the Established Church,66 nor with the institutional authority structures of the Methodist chapel and other denominational movements. As Malmgreen has shown of Macclesfield, ‘for many people, spiritual progress was a matter of experiment, with advances, side excursions, and retreats, frequently overstepping the boundaries of denomination or chapel.’67 Likewise, Lockhart’s examination of Fletcher as a proponent of the Evangelical Revival is also critical of historical studies that overemphasize the distinction between Anglican evangelicals and Methodists.68

Methodism was far from being a monolithic movement and stereotypical distinctions between church and chapel have prompted overgeneralizations like Williams’s statement that Methodism ‘came ... on the eve of the industrial revolution, when great communities were springing up in the sordid surroundings of the new factories, with no provision for any spiritual teaching save that given by the travelling [M]ethodists, whose chief business it was to seek out and feed the souls of such

neglected people." The present thesis is concerned with the relationship between the church and Methodism as it developed in the parish where such people lived. It might be said that if Methodism was strong in Madeley, then the church was strong, for the minister of one was the vicar of the other, and the distinction of one as an ‘other’ is actually in no way clear. In Madeley it is clear that Methodism did not arise as a reaction against clerical neglect, but as part of the pastoral strategy of the church. Thus, rather than Methodism making ‘inroads to the parish’ and causing loss of participation in the church, it in fact extended the church’s ministry to the reaches of the parish into the homes and workplaces of its parishioners.

The complexities that resist simple distinctions between church and chapel reveal the flexibility of eighteenth-century ecclesiology. H.D. Rack’s excellent biography of John Wesley introduces some central issues, such as Methodism’s function as an alternative organization that supplanted the parish system. He notes that ‘at the local level it adapted better than the Church of England to physical geography and population shifts, which had made nonsense of inherited parochial geography’. However, if John Wesley, as Ward has stated, ‘not merely created a religious community, but organised it rationally for purposes of pastoral oversight and evangelism’, so Fletcher accepted the confines of a pre-existing community formed by the bounds of an English parish and organized his own oversight by adapting methods of ministry, including what his contemporaries considered Methodist principles (e.g. extempore preaching, open-air preaching, focus on new birth and conversion, invitation of other preachers to his pulpit) to provide parochial care. Thus, we should ask: How did Fletcher adapt to the parish, and how did he work within Anglican ecclesiology? What was the response of parishioners to his initiatives, and what success was achieved in his various ventures? And, to what extent was the very localized work of the Fletchers similar to how Wesley developed Methodism ‘through a series of accidents and improvisations’? And finally, were there tensions between Fletcher’s model and the larger church or between Fletcher’s model and other models of Methodism, especially Wesley’s?

71 For example, see *RE*, 213-214.
72 Ibid. 249.
73 W.R. Ward, ‘Relations of Enlightenment’, 298.
74 *RE*, 237.
**Biography and Religious Identity**

The study of religious identities has demonstrated considerable usefulness in historical examinations of the church. Often this has taken the form of examining religious personalities and their churchmanship, religious habits, associations, and social and political networks. Although biographical studies are as much at a risk of taking narrow views and making *a priori* arguments as other forms of history, in the best instances, biographies can help historians to ‘focus on larger historiographical problems.’ Fletcher has attracted significant attention at different periods in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and there are several biographies to consider; of Mary Fletcher there are but few. This thesis is not a biographical study, per se, but rather seeks to use biographical data as a way of looking at the ministry of the church. Thus, some justification of this, albeit minimal, biographical focus is warranted.

The earliest biography of John Fletcher was a compilation of two letters written by his widow, immediately after Fletcher’s death. Mrs Fletcher’s focus was two-fold, focusing on his piety and his ministerial labours. This emphasis on his pastoral identity was not maintained by subsequent biographers. Fletcher’s second biographer was John Wesley, who wrote a eulogy several months after his death. Subsequently Wesley told Mary Fletcher of his desire to write a fuller biography and requested any information she could provide him. Both she and Fletcher’s friend, James Ireland, refused to supply Wesley with manuscripts of Fletcher’s unpublished works and letters because they were concerned that Wesley would be too prejudiced towards a strictly Methodist reading of Fletcher’s life. Wesley wrote to his brother in April 1786: ‘Mr. Ireland will give me no help with regard to writing Mr. Fletcher’s life, “because he intends to publish it himself”’ Wesley went ahead with the project anyway, publishing his *Short Account* in 1786. A month prior to finishing his draft, Wesley had to write to Mrs Fletcher to secure basic details, such as when Fletcher had come to England, when he began his incumbency at Madeley, and even when Fletcher had travelled with Wesley himself, demonstrating perhaps, the forgetfulness.

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75 Gibson and Ingram, *Religious Identities*, 1-7. For a listing of some important biographies of eighteenth-century religious figures, see page 5, n. 20.
76 Written 18 Aug. 1785; *HLF*.
77 Wesley, *Sermons*, No. 133 ‘Preached on Occasion of the Death of the Rev. Mr. John Fletcher. Wesley requested materials for the writing of this sermon from JB, who supplied them. JB→[JW], 1785 {B1.9}.
of old age or possibly suggesting that Fletcher was often farther from Wesley’s mind than has hitherto been suggested.\textsuperscript{79}

After Wesley had published his,\textsuperscript{80} James Ireland, with Mrs Fletcher, devised a plan to write a proper biography assisted by Joshua Gilpin.\textsuperscript{81} This work was never completed, though it may have been this plan that prompted Gilpin to write his addendum to Wesley’s biography (see below).\textsuperscript{82} Wesley prefaced his biography with the disclaimer that it was more of a compilation of sources than a comprehensive study. The account of his parochial ministry to the people of Madeley, which consumed Fletcher’s time, thought, and energy for twenty-five years is noticeably scant. This was partially amended in the 1798 edition of Wesley’s \textit{Short Account}, which was subjoined by biographical ‘notes’ written by Joshua Gilpin,\textsuperscript{83} erstwhile curate and clerical friend of Fletcher, and vicar of the Shropshire parish of Wrockwardine.\textsuperscript{84} Gilpin’s additions were first published as notes following the respective ‘traits in the moral character of St. Paul’ provided in his translation of Fletcher’s own pastoral theology.\textsuperscript{85} Gilpin’s work was a direct response to the concerns of Mary Fletcher and James Ireland, that Wesley’s account would be ‘for his [Wesley’s] own people only’.\textsuperscript{86} In the end, Wesley’s biography contained numerous errors which Mrs Fletcher wrote to Benson to have corrected in future editions.\textsuperscript{87}

Benson also had concerns with how Wesley would portray the vicar of Madeley, and it was he that pushed for Gilpin’s notes to be published in a single volume with Wesley’s.\textsuperscript{88} Gilpin, when he was a young man, had lived under Fletcher’s roof at the vicarage in Madeley. After Fletcher’s death, he continued to visit the parish, along with other Anglican evangelical clergymen, such as John Eyton...
and William Morgan. His account noted the harsh conditions of Madeley and Fletcher’s surroundings, with which Gilpin was himself familiar as a coalfield clergyman. Yet the parish itself and the particulars of Fletcher’s cure, again received little attention. In 1804 Benson wrote his own *Life of Fletcher*, in an attempt to provide an authoritative biography, which not only corrected Wesley’s mistakes (which Benson attributed to Wesley’s haste in writing the *Short Account*), but also added details and anecdotes omitted by Wesley, or Gilpin. Benson commenced his writing after receiving Mrs Fletcher’s permission in 1801. The first edition, however, was corrected in several places, following advice from Mrs Fletcher and reprinted as the second edition the same year, which became the standard for many printings in both Britain and America thereafter.

In 1822, the Anglican minister Robert Cox became the first biographer to emphasize Fletcher’s role as a parish priest, writing, ‘Some clergymen, who have been eminent for their public exertions, have been found remiss in other departments of their ministerial labour. But Mr. Fletcher was equally sedulous and effective in every office of the ministry, and particularly exemplary in his pastoral visits.’ Cox was also the first, and nearly the only biographer of Fletcher, not to place the Arminian-Calvinist Controversy of the 1770s as the pinnacle of Fletcher’s career. Rather, he expounded on Fletcher’s roots in Switzerland, his commitment to parish ministry, and his resistance to the persistent invitations from the Methodists to leave Madeley for itinerancy. In his preface to the first edition, Cox wrote:

> [I]t has occasionally been matter of regret ... that the narratives of Mr. Fletcher ... are not sufficiently adapted to the taste of general readers; and especially to that of the Established Church. This defect [Cox] has endeavoured to remedy ... [T]he writer is, he conceives, justified

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89 On Eyton, see BI.
91 JB→MF, 12 June 1804.
92 It is this second edition in a later printing (New York, 1833) which is used in the references in this thesis.
93 R. Cox, *The Life of the Rev. John William Fletcher, Late Vicar of Madeley, Shropshire*, 1st edn. (London, 1822); 2nd edn. (London, 1825); The preface, which explained Cox’s intention in writing, was omitted from the 2nd edn. Both editions are used in this thesis, as indicated. On Cox, see BI.
in this new attempt ... not without the hope of its affording a splendid instance of an exemplary pastor of a parish.\textsuperscript{95}

Cox noted Fletcher’s ‘inattention’ to some ‘regulations of the Church’, though he ascribed these irregularities to Fletcher’s foreign origins.\textsuperscript{96} The publication of Cox’s biography of Fletcher represents an important attempt by the church to reclaim one of its pastoral heroes of the eighteenth century. Where Wesley chided Fletcher for his insistence on confining himself to a parish, Cox lauds him as a standard bearer for the church. Though this is a useful and unduly neglected biography, it is unfortunate that it provides no explanation of Fletcher’s development of religious societies, his controversies within the church as a parish minister, nor his relationship to the Wesley’s and Methodism as a vicar in the Church of England. Cox seems to marginalize the chapel aspect of religion in Madeley where Wesley marginalized Fletcher’s parochial labours. This thesis aims to integrate the concerns of both church and chapel religion.

Since the publication of these early accounts, subsequent biographies have maintained a focus on any of three characteristics of Fletcher’s life: (1) His role within Methodism, (2) his piety and spirituality, and (3) his role in the Calvinist controversy of the 1770s. Tyerman’s \textit{Wesley’s Designated Successor}\textsuperscript{97} remains the most comprehensive biography. However, as the title suggests, his perspective was thoroughly that of a nineteenth-century Methodist painting Fletcher as the successor to an ever-separationist denominational movement.\textsuperscript{98} This became the model for early twentieth-century biographers who, like Tyerman, were more interested in using the parish to talk about Methodism than to look at the larger context of Fletcher’s role as priest.\textsuperscript{99} Yet Tyerman’s account is useful for its numerous extracts from primary sources and its chronological framework.

\textsuperscript{95} Cox, \textit{Life of Fletcher}, 1st edn., v-vi; also see Horne’s comment regarding Cox’s biography in the 2nd edn. (p. 121) that Cox might avoid the hagiographical errors of Wesley, Benson, and Gilpin by virtue of writing of ‘a man whom you did not know.’

\textsuperscript{96} In several instances, Cox revises the view by previous biographers that Fletcher was characteristically Methodist. \textit{Life of Fletcher}, 1st edn., 24, 35.

\textsuperscript{97} WDS.

\textsuperscript{98} On Tyerman’s deficiencies, see R. Heitzenrater, \textit{The Elusive Mr. Wesley}, 2 vols. (Nashville, 1984), 2:184-87.

\textsuperscript{99} Ibid. v-viii.
After Tyerman, several biographers took a more hagiographical approach. There are also several scholarly studies, most of which remain unpublished theses. With one exception, each of these has centred upon Fletcher’s theology from his development of the doctrine of Christian perfection to his ‘pastoral theology’ (by which is meant his work as a Methodist pastor). Lockhart’s study of Fletcher and the Evangelical Revival attempts to place him within eighteenth-century evangelicalism, but the larger context of the eighteenth-century church is still largely missing, apart from a brief description of its inadequacies in the introduction to the thesis. The most recent studies on John Fletcher are similarly theological in nature, emphasizing his contribution to Pentecostalism.

Skinner’s *Nonconformity in Shropshire* began as a study of Fletcher but quickly evolved into a treatise on nonconformity. His use of manuscript sources is an improvement upon previous studies. However, Skinner’s too-immediate connection of Fletcher and Methodism with nonconformity and dissent is based on an unfortunate presumption arising from his intent to study ‘the Shropshire Methodists’. Thus he wrote, ‘This led naturally to work on the origins of the dissenting bodies in Shropshire and their relationship to the Church of England’. Consequently, and perhaps unfortunately, he divides his study of Fletcher between two chapters: one on Methodism in Shropshire (which is really a study of Methodism in Madeley) in which Fletcher is central; and one on Fletcher as vicar of the parish. Despite the fact that he places Methodism firmly within nonconformity, he is conscious throughout of Fletcher’s dual role and invites further study, particularly of the Established Church noting that he made ‘no attempt to chronicle the history of the Church of England during this period’. Thus, his thesis at the outset confines Methodism to chapel ministry as an ‘other’ body, separate and distinct from the Establishment. The consequence is a portrayal of Fletcher as carrying out two distinct if loosely related

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100 See Bibliography.
102 Lockhart, ‘Evangelical Revival’.
105 Ibid. xi.
106 Ibid. xiii.
ministries: that of a parish priest, and that of a separating ‘new dissent’ movement within his parish.

Two biographies of John Fletcher now stand out as the point of departure for subsequent works. George Lawton’s thematic study focuses on ‘four main roles in Fletcher’s career ... parish minister, author, theologian, and director of souls.\textsuperscript{107} Lawton is lucid, yet brief, and the tone of the whole work is introductory to the possibilities of a more thorough study. It is based on Fletcher’s printed works and therefore lacks much of what might be gleaned from archive manuscripts, many of which remain unpublished. The second standard work, and certainly as significant, is Streiff’s theological biography of Fletcher.\textsuperscript{108} His book was a translated abridgement of his German thesis,\textsuperscript{109} akin to Schmidt’s classic biography of Wesley.\textsuperscript{110} Methodist intent can be seen in the original subtitle: \textit{Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Methodismus}. This being said, Streiff’s work achieves its aims with competence. His is the first biography to connect Fletcher’s education in Switzerland with his Arminian theology, which he defended during his time at Madeley. Streiff made extensive use of the manuscripts in the MARC. However, his primary concern was theological and Fletcher’s parish ministry receives limited attention. An ancillary accomplishment of Streiff’s work is a catalogue of Fletcher’s letters, the only such published resource to date. Many of the letters listed, specifically those to the Wesleys, Whitefield, or the Lady Huntingdon, have recently been published and edited by Forsaith as \textit{Unexampled Labours}.\textsuperscript{111} Many other letters yet remain in manuscript form as original holographs or early transcripts.

Forsaith’s study lays some of the groundwork for this thesis,\textsuperscript{112} particularly in his critique of commonly held notions and implications of Fletcher’s designation as Wesley’s successor. Similar to Lloyd’s thesis, Forsaith has shown that pro-Anglican attitudes were promoted by Methodist leaders, who throughout the eighteenth century, continued to see Methodism as a reform movement within the church. Furthermore, he has contrasted the close friendship Fletcher had with Charles

\textsuperscript{108} RS.
\textsuperscript{109} P.Ph. Streiff, \textit{Jean Guillaume de la Fléchère John William Fletcher 1729-1785} (Frankfurt, 1984).
\textsuperscript{111} UL
\textsuperscript{112} Forsaith, ‘Correspondence’.
Wesley to the tensions that always persisted between Fletcher and John Wesley. To John Wesley he was a close acquaintance and occasional helper, but he respectfully, yet repeatedly, frustrated Wesley’s dictates for him to leave his parish. Charles, on the other hand, maintained an attitude of support towards both John and Mary Fletcher, ever encouraging them towards their deep devotion to the people of Madeley and to the church.

Studies of Mary Fletcher’s role in Madeley are limited. In Madeley, she was first of all, a partner in the work of ministry with her husband. After his death, she remained in the vicarage and carried on ministries initiated by her husband, and founded new efforts of her own. Given the significance of her labours in three different regions (Essex, Yorkshire, and then with Fletcher in Shropshire), it is surprising how little has been published on her life. Among those biographies which have been published, none are scholarly treatments, and only one was written within the first decade of her death. Furthermore, the first biography, Moore’s Life of Mary Fletcher, while based upon her journal, was heavily edited. The biography reads as a first-person account of her spiritual experiences rather than as a description of her ministry. Subsequent biographies have relied upon Moore. Mrs Fletcher features both in journal and letter entries in Wesley’s Works, which, with Moore’s Life, have provided the primary sources for most published studies of her ministry. An entry by Hargreaves has now been added to the ODNB, though it focuses predominantly on her role as a Methodist. In several studies of Methodist women and women preachers, she is of significant interest. Of these, however, only the work of Paul Chilcote makes more than limited use of the primary sources. Taft’s Biographical Sketches of Various Holy Women contains several letters and documents otherwise unpublished or non-extant. In all, no study gives proper attention to her work in Madeley.

113 LMF. Moore was ordained by John Wesley as a Wesleyan minister.
116 e.g. E.K. Brown, Women of Mr. Wesley’s Methodism (New York, 1983); D.A. Johnson, Women in English Religion 1700-1925 (New York, 1983); S. Gill, Women and the Church of England from the Eighteenth Century to the Present (London, 1994); see Bibliography for others.
118 Taft, Biographical Sketches.
There are indications that interest in Mary Fletcher and her ministry is growing, and some of the most useful information can be gleaned from a few recent studies. Mack, for example, places Mary at the forefront in understanding gender and eighteenth-century piety, unveiling new sources from the Fletcher-Tooth Collection, and revealing the importance of physical reality affecting health, social relations, and especially spirituality and religious practice among early-Methodist women.  

Mack’s most recent book, *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment*, makes extensive use of Mrs Fletcher’s manuscripts to discuss her role among other women in sustaining ‘the [Methodist] movement during its formative years’, as well as to expound on the formative role she played in shaping Methodist identity as a religion of the heart, despite later biographers’ attempts to obscure this important aspect of her ministerial role.  

Mack utilizes accounts from Mrs Fletcher’s time in Madeley but most of these are from the period after her husband’s death. Other studies include those by Burge, Valenze, and Brown, but none of these take more than a brief notice of her first years in Madeley.  

Clearly, the primary source materials regarding the lives and ministry of the Fletchers are far from exhausted. Their role as leaders within church and chapel has yet to be examined. This thesis aims to contribute to our understanding of the Fletchers by utilizing the vast array of manuscripts and published documents to study the church and Methodism in the eighteenth century. Because this study ends with the year of John Fletcher’s death, 1785, that leaves just over three years of focus on Mr and Mrs Fletcher’s joint ministry. Rather than providing a separate chapter on these years, Mrs Fletcher is integrated into each section of the thesis.

**Industrialization**

While Randall’s histories of Madeley and Broseley provide many insights into the parish life and the ministries of the Fletchers, the first study to bring the

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industrial context to the forefront was Trinder’s *Industrial Revolution in Shropshire*.\(^{123}\) His chapters ‘The Mecca of Methodism’ and ‘The Religious Experience’ provide the best summations of the dual ministry of the Fletchers, as well as an introduction to the complexities surrounding the relationship between Methodism and the church. He has introduced questions about Fletcher’s choice of Madeley, and in his recent Third Edition, he provides an excursus on the relationship between evangelicals and popular culture in the region.\(^ {124}\) Trinder demonstrates a keen awareness of factors of church-chapel relations in the industrializing parish which have been hitherto ignored. While there have been several studies conducted on the Shropshire coalfield, Trinder’s study remains both the broadest and most current examination.

**Originality of this Study**

The originality of this study consists of three main elements: First, it brings together a biographical study with local religious history. However, unlike previous biographical studies of Fletcher, this thesis is focused on his ministry in Madeley and how it informs our understanding of the local church in its parochial context. Second, it offers a re-evaluation of the relationship between the church and Methodism, particularly in an industrializing parish, a context in which previous studies have claimed the Established Church was less capable than dissent in ministering to the needs of parishioners, and was therefore fated to decline in the industrializing market situation. Third, it makes new use of a still largely neglected archive—the Fletcher-Tooth Collection—which remains one of the largest in the Methodist Archives.

As a contribution to the study of the church and Methodism in the eighteenth century, this thesis examines what possibilities of churchmanship were available within Anglican ecclesiology and competing religious groups in the parish. Such possibilities not only included cooperation between church and chapel but demonstrated that the church in industrializing areas, like Madeley, could respond with both energy and imagination. While Methodism seemed deterministically separationist in some areas, it remained a faithful body within the church in others. Ollard and Walker’s well-known statement regarding the Diocese of York, that ‘on

\(^{123}\) IRS. Trinder’s most recent (3rd) edition (Chichester, 2000) is revised in both scope and approach; however, both editions contain relevant material to the present thesis (see Abbreviations).

\(^{124}\) IRS (3rd), 174-204.
the whole the strong impression left by the returns is that of a body of conscientious and dutiful men, trying to do their work according to the standard of their day’,¹²⁵ is quoted by Sykes in his generally favourable estimate of the eighteenth-century ecclesiastical administration. In contrast, the same statement is quoted by Gilbert to emphasize the weakness of the standards and the lethargy of the Establishment.¹²⁶ Despite these polar views, what is common between them is the implicit need for local studies of ministry in the parish. This thesis is a contribution to this need.

¹²⁶ N. Sykes, *Church and State in the XVIIIth Century*, (Cambridge, 1934), 6; Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, 70.
Chapter 1
Madeley in 1760

The study of Madeley in its own right as a parish of the Church of England has been largely peripheral to both historical and biographical accounts. The parish consisted of three relatively nucleated villages: Madeley (Town), where the church St Michael's was located; Madeley Wood, about two miles to the southwest near the River Severn; and Coalbrookdale in the western part of the parish, approximately three miles from the church. The latter two places had risen up around mining industries, iron founding, and river trade while the old town of Madeley was

1 *HofM* remains the most extensive study of the parish, but see Trinder's Introduction to the reprinted edition (Shrewsbury, 1979) for a critique of Randall's historiography. On Madeley, also see G. Lawton, 'Madeley in the 18th Century', *LQHR* 181 (1956), 142-48; M.E.R. Jackson, 'Notes on History of Madeley' (B1.10).

2 The use of 'village' follows P. Clark and J. Hosking, *Population Estimates of English Small Towns 1550-1851* (Leicester, 1993), iv, which is also consistent with contemporary usage. See JF→CW, 27 Apr. 1761.

3 The church was built in the Norman style. S. Bagshaw, *Directory of Shropshire* (Sheffield, 1851). The current building of St Michael's Church, designed by T. Telford, was built by subscription, 1794-97. MVM.
surrounded by agricultural land. This Chapter examines the background of the parish into which Fletcher was inducted, and his preparation for such a calling.

**Religious History**

The early eighteenth century was one of relative internal national peace in comparison with the turbulence of the civil wars of the previous century, yet fear of the enthusiasm represented by Puritanism persisted in both town and country parishes. Madeley was no stranger to such trepidation which was only compounded by its history as a centre of Midlands Catholicism and recusancy, as well as Puritan conflict. The purchase of the manor estate from the Crown in 1544 by Sir Robert Brooke, established a succession of Catholic lords of the manor until the early eighteenth century, with the exception of a brief but significant interruption to the economic and religious situation in Madeley during the Civil War. Madeley was garrisoned by parliamentary troops and Sir Basil Brooke, the lord of the manor, was deposed and imprisoned for being both a Catholic and a Royalist. The estate returned to the Brooke family in its dilapidated state in 1653. Bossy’s seigneurial Catholicism was exemplified in Madeley, with the Brookes exercising considerable influence over their tenants in the parish until the death of the last male heir of the Brooke family, Comberford Brooke, in 1710. Due to a degree of residential persistence, the Catholic community in Madeley was still the strongest in central Shropshire when Fletcher arrived in 1760.

There was a Quaker presence in Madeley from the arrival of Abraham Darby I in 1709. The Quarter Sessions reveal that two dissenters’ meetings were licensed in Coalbrookdale between 1747 and 1752. The three principal Quaker families in the parish—the Darbys, the Fords, and the Reynoldses—were related by intermarriage and severally employed in the iron and coal industry. Shropshire Quakers who faced persecution in the seventeenth-century found nominal peace in

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4 The eponymous village of Ironbridge was named around the time of the bridge’s opening in 1779, located near Madeley Wood.
5 See Chapter 6.
9 R.G. Venables (ed.) *Abstract of the Orders Made by the Court of Quarter Sessions for Shropshire*, 1741-1757 ([Shrewsbury], 1901), 107-115.
early eighteenth-century Madeley. They tended to be irenic and conscientious contributors to the well-being of the community, apart from their refusal to pay tithes, which brought some Quakers into difficulty with Fletcher’s predecessor.\textsuperscript{11} It was perhaps a religious as well as a business strategy for Abraham Darby III to purchase part of the manor of Madeley in the 1770s, from which position he held more influence in both parish and industry, carrying on the long dynasty of iron founding begun by his grandfather.\textsuperscript{12}

The parish neither had a Methodist society, nor was it apparently evangelically inclined at Fletcher’s arrival, but the connexion between the religious and secular functions of the church remained; and there is record of wakes and fairs, church feasts, churching of women, poor relief, Rogationtide perambulation of the parish bounds, and consistent—if occasional—conformity in that people continued to get baptized, married, and buried in the church. Even two Catholic priests were buried in St Michael’s churchyard. The church remained the most commodious gathering place in the parish. A Baptist congregation was active but small, apparently connected with a group of Baptists from Broseley.

\textit{Hereford Diocese}

The county of Shropshire was split between two dioceses, the northern part in the diocese of Lichfield and the southern part in the diocese of Hereford, to which the parish of Madeley belonged. Apart from triennial episcopal visitations (held in the parish church of Ludlow), there is little evidence of diocesan communication or direct administrative oversight with regards to Madeley parish.\textsuperscript{13} It was perhaps the parish’s remote location, not only far from the cathedral but on the border of another diocese, that partly accounts for this. The roads were rough, especially during winter. Difficulty of travel north and a mental sense of the distance posed at least a small obstacle. Even towards the end of the century the Bishop was unable to make the ‘hazardous’ trek north to Madeley for the consecration of the new church.\textsuperscript{14} The Diocese was divided into the two archdeaconries of Hereford and Salop; Madeley belonged to the latter.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid. 84.
\textsuperscript{12} Raistrick, \textit{Dynasty}; 65-100.
\textsuperscript{13} The bishop’s visitation records for Hereford in the eighteenth century are in a state of significant disrepair, lacking some years altogether. Call Books are extant. (B1.6).
\textsuperscript{14} Butler→Plymley, 28 Mar. 1797.
James Beauclerk was translated to the see of Hereford in 1745 which he served until 1787.\textsuperscript{15} He attended to his episcopal responsibilities—particularly oversight of the parish clergy—with diligence and concern. Though he tried throughout his career for further preferment, his lack of success did not seem to diminish service to his see. He carried out ordinations and visitations with consistency and was known for his particularly rigorous attention to and testing of candidates for ordinations, carried out with regularity in Hereford Cathedral.\textsuperscript{16} Beauclerk’s concern with the education of his clergy and his scrupulous tests were perhaps among the obstacles on Fletcher’s mind provoking his fear that his ordination would not be secured.\textsuperscript{17} Fletcher’s ordination documents, signed by ‘James Hereford’, are extant.\textsuperscript{18}

**Madeley Clergy**

Madeley had a steady line of vicars from 1645, most of them educated. Some were pluralists but appear to have resided in neighbouring parishes. Fletcher’s predecessor, Rowland Chambre, held two livings but employed curates to serve Madeley.\textsuperscript{19} The patron of the benefice from 1752 was Edward Kynaston, nephew of Thomas Hill, MP, who employed Fletcher as a tutor.\textsuperscript{20} Records of curates of Madeley are scarce due to the often unofficial filling of curacies, as was common in this period.\textsuperscript{21} Fletcher himself was appointed curate of Madeley upon his ordination, for which he was assigned a salary of £25.\textsuperscript{22} He served as curate from March 1757 until no later than December 1759.\textsuperscript{23}

In 1716 the advowson was held by Jeremiah Taylor, vicar of Madeley, who was responsible for rebuilding the vicarage (c.1716). It stands today much as it was then with only a minor addition to the back of the house.\textsuperscript{24} Controversy over tithes persisted from the late seventeenth century when Taylor, recognizing the growth of

\textsuperscript{15} *ODNB*.


\textsuperscript{17} JF → CW, 26 Dec. 1758; JF → CW, 26 Sept. 1760; Marshall, ‘Episcopal Activity’, 112.

\textsuperscript{18} Fletcher Certificates (B1.9).

\textsuperscript{19} See Table: Vicars of Madeley.


\textsuperscript{22} Fletcher Certificates (B1.9).

\textsuperscript{23} JF → CW, 26 Dec. 1758.

\textsuperscript{24} SRO: 2280/2/42; also see *VCH*, Shropshire, 10:60.
industry and particularly the mining of ‘minerals’ on glebe lands, petitioned successfully for his right to these in addition to more conventional agricultural produce. The case was resolved regarding tithes on coals due to the vicar in 1720. Coal from the glebe lands added to the benefice by £40 per annum. It was fortunate for the Madeley clergy that there was no modus in place of tithes, so they could still rise in proportion to inflation. In 1760 the living was worth approximately £100.

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<td>N/A</td>
<td>B. Brooke</td>
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<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacant</td>
<td>1704-1706</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Cooper</td>
<td>1706-1709</td>
<td>Pluralist.</td>
<td>C. Brooke</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeremy Taylor</td>
<td>1709-1728</td>
<td>Pluralist.</td>
<td>M. Taylor</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rowland Chambre</td>
<td>1753-1760</td>
<td>Pluralist. V. of Sheinton,1756-61; R. of Thornton, 1760-96; R. of Berrington, 1787-96.</td>
<td>E. Kynaston</td>
<td>Cambridge B.A./M.A.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>


**Parish and People**

Though geographically remote, situated away from the large cities and urban centres of England (London 140 miles to the south; Birmingham 32 miles to the southeast; Manchester 60 miles to the North), Madeley was, for two principal reasons, integrated with the larger national picture: first, the Severn river was a main artery of transport from Shrewsbury to Bristol, passing by the entire southern boundary of Madeley and bringing bargemen, suppliers, and workmen into the parish; and second, increasing industrial activity in the collieries and iron works

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25 SRO: 2280/3/5-6.
26 SRO: 2280/3/8-10.
27 *HoM*, 148.
began to draw strangers looking for better pay. While many iron masters were attempting to expand their market internationally, the works in Madeley Wood and Coalbrookdale steadily increased their sales within England at markets and fairs, extending the parish’s connection with other regions. Villagers made their way outside the parish to local fairs and markets as well. Often described by eighteenth-century contemporaries as large and populous, Madeley fits best within the definition of what Palliser refers to as a ‘parish of middling size, small enough to be served by a single parish church with resident clergy, yet large enough to have its own lay elite to fill the parish offices.’ The fact that the parish church was two or three miles removed from the villages presented the need for creative parish ministry to bring the cure of souls to parishioners.

*Landscape and Population*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1672</td>
<td>490</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1676</td>
<td>451</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1753</td>
<td>1512</td>
<td>336 Families (multiplied by 4.5, following Sogner)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.1758</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>Est. pop. of Coalbrookdale only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1760</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Madeley consisted of 2,809 acres, much of which was still arable farm land, though coal had been mined there since the early fourteenth century. The parish is situated on the north side of the River Severn southeast of the Wrekin in the industrializing county of Shropshire. The paradox of the natural beauty and man-made industry was described by numerous visitors to the area throughout the eighteenth century. The majority of the inhabitants upon Fletcher’s arrival lived in

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30 HofM, 340.


32 Palliser, ‘Parish in Perspective,’ 19.

33 HofM, 104.

34 Trinder, *Most Extraordinary District.*
Madeley Wood and Coalbrookdale.\textsuperscript{35} By 1756 a new process for smelting iron was introduced in Coalbrookdale and following trends of the previous century, industry and population were rapidly expanding as opportunities for new trades in support of industry arose.\textsuperscript{36} New housing in the form of barracks\textsuperscript{37} was being built for colliers and forge workers by their philanthropic Quaker masters, while others lived in the small crofts of squatter communities which dotted the landscape along the steep and mostly wooded slopes of the river.\textsuperscript{38}

Madeley had a market and an annual fair.\textsuperscript{39} The market was held near the parish town centre (Madeley Town) and near the borders of surrounding parishes\textsuperscript{40} in the northeast part of the parish, just over one-half mile from the meeting place of the roads to Bridgnorth, Wellington, and Shifnal. The market closed in the early eighteenth century but would be reopened near Madeley Wood in 1763.\textsuperscript{41} Broseley, a parish known for its clay pipes and pottery manufacture as well as being part of the coalfield, lay just across the river adjacent to the eastern half of Madeley’s southern boundary. ‘Brosely is a very large and populous Village on the Severn’, wrote one observer, ‘and if we take in Benthal and Madeley Wood, which are contiguous to it, we may affirm that it is equal in Number of houses to most towns in England’.\textsuperscript{42}

Fletcher estimated the population in 1760: ‘I seem to be a prisoner of Providence, who is going, in all probability, to cast my lot among the colliers and forge-men of Madeley. The two thousand souls of that parish, for whom I was called into the ministry, are many sheep in the wilderness, which I cannot sacrifice to my own private choice.’\textsuperscript{43} His estimate was not far off, nor his generalization of the character of the parish as the home of colliers and forge-men. The Darbys had set up their homestead near their forges in Coalbrookdale, and the workers they employed contributed to the increase of the population from just five households in the first decade of the eighteenth century to nearly 400 people living in the new mining

\textsuperscript{35} Ironbridge and Coalbrookdale are now separate parishes.
\textsuperscript{37} IRS, 322-23.
\textsuperscript{38} VCH, Shropshire, 11:28.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid. 2:38-47.
\textsuperscript{40} IRS, 8.
\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Universal British Directory}; (London, 1791).
\textsuperscript{43} JF→CH, 3 Oct. 1760; JF→CW, 26 Dec. 1758.
settlement in 1750s. The first decades saw a rapid expansion of settlements in the parish where births began to outnumber deaths and an influx of colliers, iron-workers, barge-men, and pottery workers was making Madeley one of the most populous parishes of the coalfield. In 1760 the population equalled roughly eleven percent of the total population of the coalfield. By the middle of the century, the incursion of migrant workers was increasing the administrative duties of the vestry and local employers, as well bringing the need for more housing; and with population growth came the need for increased poor relief. Despite exogamous population growth there was a high level of residential persistence amongst all levels of society, and some overcrowding due to lack of adequate housing was the natural result. The housing that was available was small with an average of 6.1 persons per household.

Leisure and Amusements

If industry and population were expanding, so were opportunities for the amusements that had already drawn scorn from Anglican clergy from as early as the 1650s and from various evangelicals from the 1730s. It has been observed that the alehouse was a centre of pre- and mid-industrial social life where ‘people repaired ... for companionship, warmth, games and entertainment and the exchange of news. Industrial cities like Birmingham and Manchester in general saw an increase of alehouses commensurate with population growth throughout the eighteenth century. Madeley followed this trend despite the fact that the county of Shropshire as a whole noticed an overall contraction in alehouses. The number of inns and alehouses in Madeley doubled from fifteen in the 1660s to thirty a century later. Barnabas Spruce, who served on the Madeley vestry for a number of years, was a brewer known for his particularly fine ale by the religious and irreligious alike.

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44 See VCH, Shropshire, 2:2.
46 On settlement patterns in the parish, see Wanklyn, ‘Catholics’, 210-36.
50 Malcolmson, Life and Labour, 98.
51 Clark, English Alehouse, 4, 55-59.
52 SRO: 1224/2/371, 389; HofM, Appendix; VCH Shropshire, 11:32-35; Alehouse Licences (B1.10)
Randall notes, for example, that Quakers would sometimes meet socially at Spruce’s public house.\textsuperscript{53}

The Madeley wakes and fairs described by Fletcher as ‘those Christian, or rather heathenish, festivals\textsuperscript{54} held annually in January, May, and September/October,\textsuperscript{55} drew people to the tippling houses from which many left drunk to entertain themselves with the various festivities. Malcolmson has shown that different forms of sports and recreation shaped regional culture, and Shropshire was, in particular, known for its rough sports like cocking and bull-baiting, which cut across class lines.\textsuperscript{56} The alehouse could and often did bring damage to the industrial businessmen as their workers upheld the tradition of drinking the cuckoo’s foot-ale, an excuse to take at least a day off work to drink when ‘the cuckoo’s voice that morning for the first time had been heard.\textsuperscript{57} Tensions created by such customs are reflective of the transition from ‘task-orientation’ time-consciousness to that of a burgeoning industrialism and its yet undefined values of labour-discipline and efficiency with a growing ‘distinction between their employer’s time and their “own” time.’\textsuperscript{58} The alehouse and various recreational activities provided diversion from the constant smoke and noise of the mines and furnaces where both life and limb were often endangered. Health concerns related to drunkenness were commonly viewed as relative to the danger of work life. The rate of accidental deaths among coalminers in Shropshire was ten times that of the general population of the county and not less than four times the accidental death rate of the adult male population in general.\textsuperscript{59}

\textit{Employment}

While the hamlet communities each had bakers, barbers, nailmakers, schoolmasters, blacksmiths and tailors, the majority of the workers were employed in coal, iron or clay industries. Those in the lower-paying trades sometimes held more than one job, such as John Share who was both a nailmaker and a schoolmaster. The

\textsuperscript{53} HoM, 292.
\textsuperscript{54} Appeal, 117.
\textsuperscript{55} The September fair corresponded to the Saints’ Day associated with the parish church (St Michael’s); the fair of 29 May corresponded with Oak Apple Day. See The Feasts and Fasts of the Church of England (London, 1732), 434-446. Cf. Malcolmson, Life and Labour, 24.
\textsuperscript{56} R.W. Malcolmson, Popular Recreations in English Society 1700-1850 (Cambridge, 1973), 49.
\textsuperscript{57} HoM, 88.
river trade also employed a considerable number of parishioners. Randall estimated that in Madeley Wood in 1756 there were ‘21 owners of ... 39 vessels’ and bargemen and their families made up a substantial part of the non-forge labourers. Pay was not always high but work was consistent all year. There remained a number of farmers in the parish. There was plenty of arable land, and non-arable land, while useless for crops, was good for husbandry. Neighbours lived close to one another within their villages and shared a market, struggled together when corn and grain prices rose, and celebrated together when times were more economically stable.

**Agriculture and Early Industrialization**

The rise of industry in Madeley and the coalfield has been a fruitful area of study. Particular attention has been given to the succession of the Quaker industrialist family of the Darby’s, the development of steam power, and the coming of the railways. In addition to coal mines and iron foundries, Madeley was a source of limestone and clay, which gave rise to the pottery industry across the river. Furnaces in Madeley Wood were established by Madeley townspeople, ‘principally charter masters at coal mines, in 1757-1758’. The industrial culture was one of innovation. Wooden rails—some of the first ever—were seen in the parish in the late seventeenth century; a system of inclined planes on which coal and supplies could be lowered to and raised up from the river was developed. The steam engine allowed new and more efficient methods of iron founding, and new applications were found all the time. The employment demographics as seen above reflected this industrializing picture made up of iron-masters, colliers, bargemen, bowmen, forgemen, and other labourers—those to whom the church has been said to have had the least to offer, incapable of competing with nonconformist religious alternatives.

At the time of Fletcher’s arrival, a confluence of economic and social factors was fuelling the mining industry in Shropshire, particularly at Coalbrookdale and

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60 The term ‘industrial’ is notably difficult to define, especially due to its anachronistic application to the eighteenth century. In this thesis, usage follows B. Trinder: those towns and regions in which notable shifts from agriculturally related labour and economy was shifting to ‘what early eighteenth-century writers meant by ‘mines and manufactures’ and the systems of transport associated with them.’ *The Making of the Industrial Landscape* (London, 1982), 4.

61 Abraham Darby I (1678-1717) moved to Madeley 1708/9; Abraham Darby II (1711-1763); Abraham Darby III (1750-1789). Abraham III was less successful in the trade than his father and grandfather. ODNB; also see Raistrick, *Dynasty, passim.*


63 Trinder, ‘Introduction,’ in *HofM*.

64 Gilbert, *Religion and Society,* 70-72.
While between 1757 and 1759 William Ferriday was building furnaces in Broseley and supplying armaments and pig iron to London, he was also a partner with the lord of the manor in the Madeley Wood Company to construct the so-called Bedlam Furnaces that shaped the landscape and provided the copper-and-gray-coloured skies that would be famously depicted on page and canvas in descriptions of the industrial revolution in Shropshire. Works like the Coalbrookdale Company remained local (in the hands of the Darby and Reynolds families), while the Madeley Wood works brought interest from outside the parish including as shareholders a Madeley grocer, a clergyman, and gentlemen and mercers from Bridgnorth, Much Wenlock and other surrounding parishes.

**Fletcher’s Call to the Church of England and to Madeley**

Fletcher’s ministry at Madeley became central to the development of Anglican evangelicalism in the region, which after his death became a place of pilgrimage for several generations. As Trinder commented: ‘[T]o many Victorians, Madeley was much more celebrated as the scene of the ministry of the Rev. John Fletcher and his wife than as the home of any ironmaster.’ Fletcher’s religious attitudes and ideals of ministry had eclectic origins. This section examines Fletcher’s background, his call to the ministry of the church, his education, the process of his ordination, and his path to institution as vicar of this industrializing parish.

He was born Jean Guillaume de la Fléchère, 12 September 1729, into a Protestant family in French-speaking Nyon, Switzerland. He anglicized his name sometime after his arrival in England circa 1750. As the son of Swiss nobility, he was set on the trajectory of a career in either the church or the military. The first of these options was his parents’ inclination as well as his own: ‘[A]t seven years of age, I resolved to give myself up to [God], and to the service of his Church, if ever I was fit for it’. Yet he was disappointed by his own lack of piety which he believed

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65 *IRS*, 39
66 See Trinder, *Most Extraordinary District*.
67 *IRS*, 39-40.
69 Hocart, Details of Fletcher Family (B1.9).
70 JF→C. Bosanquet, 22 Sept. 1781. Forsaith suggests his arrival was as early as 1749, *UL*, 11, 300, n.184; Streiff’s chronology puts Fletcher’s arrival at the summer of 1750, *RS*, 21.
71 MacDonald, *Fletcher of Madeley*, 20-23.
72 *JF*, 19.
73 *JF→JW*, 24 Nov. 1756; Cf. *JF→CW*, 10 May 1757. Wesley was mistaken in his suggestion in *SAJF* that Fletcher arrived in London before he had any intentions to enter into Holy Orders (p. iii).
to be necessary of one devoted to the service of the church. He described himself as ‘wanting both gifts and grace to carry me thro’ the duties of a Clergyman, which I saw not as they were but as they ought to have been practis’d’.\textsuperscript{74}

His predilection for the Church of England arose alongside that of many Swiss Protestants, who were not merely enamoured with the Church of England but saw it ‘as the guardian of the Protestant interest in Europe’.\textsuperscript{75} His exposure to Anglican theology and churchmanship probably originated in reports of the efforts of Protestantism in England via the work of the SPCK which was by 1702, ‘deeply committed to an extensive and quasi-official correspondence with the churches of Switzerland’.\textsuperscript{76} Nishikawa has shown that the idealization of the English Church and the impetus for reformation, emboldened by the work of the SPCK through its usual strategies of publication and correspondence, came into direct and regular contact with theologians Jean-Frédéric Ostervald and Jean-Alphonse Turrettini,\textsuperscript{77} the latter with whom Fletcher’s uncle, Théodore Crinsoz de Bionens, developed his own personal correspondence. As Streiff notes, all three men had considerable influence on Fletcher’s theological development.\textsuperscript{78} Frustrations arising from his scruples with the doctrine of predestination and the thought of resolving this theological obstacle to ordination in his home country by pursuing his vocation in the idealized English Church may have been a considerable enticement. In his \textit{Fifth Check}, Fletcher exhorted his Calvinist antagonists, ‘O ye considerate Englishmen, stand to your articles,\textsuperscript{79} and you will soon shake off Geneva impositions!’\textsuperscript{80} An openness by the English Church to his Arminian doctrines\textsuperscript{81} was only a part of his broader idealization, for he declared, ‘O England, thou centre of the civilized world, where

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[74]{JF$\rightarrow$CW, 10 May 1757; cf. JF$\rightarrow$JW, 24 Nov. 1756.}
\footnotetext[75]{S. Nishikawa, ‘The SPCK in Defence of Protestant Minorities in Early Eighteenth-Century Europe’, \textit{JEH} 56:4 (2005), 739.}
\footnotetext[76]{Duffy, ‘Correspondence’, 252.}
\footnotetext[77]{Nishikawa, ‘The SPCK’, 739. W.O.B. Allen and E. McClure suggest that Fletcher was unconnected with the work of the SPCK. \textit{Two Hundred Years: The History of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge 1698-1898} (London, 1898), 127-28. However, Fletcher was admitted as a corresponding member in 1775. \textit{Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge} (London, 1776), 106.}
\footnotetext[78]{RS, Chapter 1.}
\footnotetext[79]{i.e. ‘Thirty-nine Articles of Religion’, \textit{BCP}.}
\footnotetext[80]{\textit{WJF} (D), 3:220.}
\footnotetext[81]{RS, 5-9, 255-56.}
\end{footnotes}
deep-thinking wisdom, and polite learning with all its refinements have fixed their abode!  

After several years of study at the University of Geneva, Fletcher was led away from his first inclination by the persuasions of his peers to pursue a military career. The thought of service in the church was thereafter diminished, but never completely erased from his mind. In retrospect, Fletcher saw the providence of God in his own ‘secret design of Seeing that Country’, for which he studied ‘[a] great many words’. Once in England, he was able to refocus his attention on spiritual matters, especially his concerns for his own salvation. After spending a year studying English, he was employed as a tutor to the sons of Thomas Hill, MP for Shrewsbury. This employment allowed for him to devote his leisure time to religious studies, the formal course of which he had never completed at Geneva but which he had attended ‘with a design of going into orders’.

Evidence of call from God was essential to Fletcher’s decision to pursue a ministerial career: ‘Here [in England]’, he wrote, ‘I was called outwardly three times to go into orders; but upon praying to God, that if those calls were not from him, they might come to nothing, something always blasted the designs of my friends ... I have often admired the goodness of God, who prevented my rushing into that important employment’. While in his home country where he had gone to recuperate from a serious consumption from 1778 to 1781 and reflecting on his first eighteen years of ministry at Madeley, he turned his theological writing towards practical divinity and wrote a clerical handbook after the model of the Apostle Paul, wherein he articulated the necessity of a providential call to the ministry, and he wrote to ‘the earnest candidate’: ‘if, in the order of Providence, outward circumstances concur with his own designs; and if he solicits the grace and assistance of God with greater eagerness than he seeks the outward vocation from his superiors

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82 WJF(A), 2:88; also see JF→C. Bosanquet, 22 Sept. 1781; JF→Rev. Prothero, 25 July 1761; WJF(C), 4:460.
83 RS, 16-17.
84 On the effect of Fletcher’s Francophone background see Chapter 2.
87 Fletcher completed his Portrait on 10 Feb. 1781, shortly before his return from Switzerland to Madeley. See JF→V. Perronet, 10 Feb. 1781.
in the church by the imposition of hands; he may then satisfy himself, that [God] ... has set him apart for the high office to which he aspires.\textsuperscript{88}

Thus, while, as Rack has pointed out, ‘the clerical profession was a profession which many adopted as the best and most natural available without seeing the need for the divine call thought essential by later Evangelicals and Anglo-Catholics’,\textsuperscript{89} Fletcher criticized such attitudes of his contemporaries: ‘The minister of the present age is not ordinarily called to the holy ministry, except by carnal motives, such as his own vanity, or his peculiar taste for a tranquil and indolent life ... the real believer who consecrates himself to the holy ministry ... is perfectly assured that no man has a right to take upon himself the sacerdotal dignity ‘but he that is called of God,’ either in an extraordinary manner, as Aaron and St. Paul, or at least in an ordinary manner, as Apollos and Timothy’.\textsuperscript{90} Furthermore, Fletcher’s views on the necessity of a divine call were concordant with the Ordinal in which the Bishop asks the candidate for orders: ‘Do you trust that you are inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon you this office ... ?’\textsuperscript{91} There were some churchmen who theologically reduced the call to ‘an inclination, and, on that, a resolution, to dedicate all his studies to the service of religion’.\textsuperscript{92} But Fletcher resolutely affirmed the tradition of the church: ‘I am such an enthusiast as to believe our church is in the right for requiring that all her ministers should not only be called, but even MOVED by the Holy Ghost to take the office of ambassadors for Christ upon themselves.’\textsuperscript{93} Accordingly, when Lady Huntingdon’s college at Trevecca was established, of which Fletcher was the first president, in addition to the three qualifications for admission which might be ‘needful for only a private society [of Christians] ... it must be farther considered, [the applicants’] special call, to that work for the ministry of reconciliation between God & man’.\textsuperscript{94}

Fletcher at times thought he lacked the training and talents required by such an high ideal of pastoral care. He was anxious not to follow the pattern of some of

\textsuperscript{88} Portrait, 1:47.
\textsuperscript{89} RE, 17.
\textsuperscript{90} Portrait, 1:47.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{92} Quoted in Langford, Polite and Commercial People, 271-72.
\textsuperscript{93} FL, 342; WJF(C), 4:528; cf. 2 Cor. 5:20.
\textsuperscript{94} Description of the Foundation of Treveka (B1.9).
the ‘ministers of the present age’, as he referred to worldly-minded clergymen. Yet, he wrote to John Wesley, ‘from time to time, I felt warm and strong desires, to cast myself and my inability on the Lord, if I should be called any more, knowing that he could help me’. He also wrote that he ‘had often vowed to the Lord that if he would accept of me I should rejoice to be the least of his ministers’. Fletcher’s hesitation to return to his pursuit of a ministerial vocation stemmed from conviction that ministry in the church was to be undertaken with the highest level of skill and commitment. If he was going to pursue such a call, he would have to be diligent in his preparation in terms of both education and piety.

**Preparation for Ministry**

Fletcher’s renewed desire to enter the Christian ministry was prompted by his experience of evangelical conversion in 1754/55. While in London with the Hills, he was first connected with the Methodists and with Wesley. Shortly thereafter, Fletcher had a conversion experience. The one thing he had been lacking spiritually—which he perceived in the preaching of John Wesley—was the ‘forgiveness of Sin, and power over [it]’. He thus explained in a letter to Charles Wesley, ‘tho I had had repentance towards God and tho he had often forgiven my sins and made me taste the powers of the world to come, I was yet a stranger to the merits of him by whom I had receiv’d these benefits’. ‘I was enabled’, he wrote, ‘to cast my self upon Christ so as to have peace assurance and power over sin’. This impelled Fletcher to make a covenant with God in which he expressed not only his active commitment as a believer, but his abnegation, writing: ‘I give, I restore, I consecrate, I dispose to Thee [God] ... my talents, my knowledge, my health, my reputation ... all my plans, labours and pleasures’.

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95 The phrase ‘of the present age’, attached to the clergy in this case, was a colloquialism, indicating adherence to a culture of self-indulgence and godlessness, rather than a reference to all of the clergy, for Fletcher undoubtedly believed some of his clerical contemporaries were Godly and committed to their callings.
96 JF/JW, 24 Nov. 1756.
97 JF/CW, 10 May 1757.
98 Ibid.
which eventually led him to Madeley. In his covenant Fletcher consecrated himself to his 'present office or future', seeing it his duty in any office to glorify God and to teach and study religion. His conversion provided a new and evangelical lens through which he came to view the Christian ministry. Nearly two decades later, Fletcher wrote in his Portrait: ‘It is evident, from various passages in the different offices of our Church, that our pious reformers were unanimously of opinion, that Christ himself appoints, and, in some sort, inspires all true pastors; that he commits the flock to their keeping, and that their principal care is the same with that of the first evangelists, namely, ‘the conversion of souls.”

Preparing for so important a call, Fletcher devoted himself to rigorous study. This self-education, combined with his previously unfinished university studies, provided the core of his training for the ministry. He wrote in a letter to his future brother-in-law in 1781 that he had been sent in his youth to Geneva to study where he spent seven years. Though the records show that he was an astute student, he never actually studied theology at university, but only a partial course in Belles-Lettres. Fletcher was not ignorant of the learning that would be required of him by the church, were he to be ordained. His independent studies in divinity reflected his concern for meeting the prerequisites. Also, it is probable that his patron, whose family had in their gift a number of Shropshire livings, would have impressed upon him the prerequisites for a clerical career, and by the time of his ordination, Fletcher knew well the requirements.

During this time Fletcher began to build his personal theological library. He also had access to some theological works which were held by the Atcham

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102 Portrait, 1:42-43.
103 Coulton has noted: ‘His duties as tutor ended at eight and he could devote the rest of the evening to study, or he could visit his friends.’ ‘Tutor to the Hills’, 96.
104 JF → C. Bosanquet, 22 Sept. 1781.
105 J. Hocart, ‘Details of Fletcher Family’ (B1.9).
106 Among the benefices was that of Shawbury, Shropshire, to which the evangelical James Stillington (1729-1817) was presented in 1768 by Sir Richard Hill (cousin of Thomas Hill) who was converted under Fletcher’s influence. LJRO: B/A/1/21; also see DEB. Fletcher considered Stillington a ‘fellow-helper’ in the region. See JF → CH, 3 Jan. 1768. Skinner mistakenly ascribed this living to Edward Stillington, vicar of West Bromwich, who was in fact James’s cousin. On Edward Stillington, see BI. Nonconformity, 63. On Fletcher’s influence on Richard Hill’s conversion, see E. Sidney, Life of the Rev. Rowland Hill (London, 1834), 13-14; Life of Sir Richard Hill (London, 1839), 23; cf. B. Coulton, ‘Tern Hall and the Hill Family: 1700-175’, TXAS 66:3 (1989), 97-105.
107 e.g. The need for a title to a cure as a prerequisite for ordination.
108 JF → Students of Trevecca, Nov. 1770, enclosed in a letter to CH; Canons, 315.
109 Wilson, ‘Catalogue’. 

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parochial library, as well as the books in the vast collections of John and Charles Wesley. Books available to clergymen desiring to prepare themselves for their ministry were not nearly as scarce as Macaulay suggested. Diligent personal study was urged by some bishops, like Secker, who wrote that ordinands were to ‘take care not to be more remarkable for their Diversions than their Studies; nor indolently to trifle their time away, instead of employing it to good Purposes’, adding ‘it is quite necessary, that we make the original Language, at least of the New Testament, familiar to us: and were that of the Old more commonly studied, the Advantages would be very considerable’. Following such advice, Fletcher was an avid reader in divinity. Fletcher’s education is recorded in the Bishop’s Act Book only by reference to ‘Geneva’. However, between the date of his arrival in England and his ordination Fletcher had gained, in addition to his knowledge of Latin from former studies, a competency in Greek and Hebrew; he wrote his conversion covenant in Latin, and his handwritten copy of key New Testament verses in Greek. Although Fletcher did not record his plan of study, some indication of what it entailed can be gathered from the instructions he later gave to the clergy-in-training at Trevecca. Writing to Lady Huntingdon, he outlined a rough syllabus for the students which must have reflected his own preparation in the 1750s:

[A] plan of studies must be fixed upon first, before proper books can be chosen. Grammar, Logic, Rhetoric, with Ecclesiastical History, and a little Natural Philosophy, and Geography, with a great deal of practical divinity ... I would recommend ... Watt’s Logic and his History of the Bible by questions and answers, which seem to me excellent books of the kind for clearness and order. Mr. Wesley’s Natural Philosophy ... Mason’s Essay on Pronunciation ... Henry and Gill on the Bible, with the four volumes of Baxter’s practical works, Keach’s Metaphors, Taylor on the Types (printed at Trevecca),

113 Cf. Secker, Eight Charges, 15.
114 Bishop’s Visit. Book (B1.6).
115 Fletcher Certificates (B1.9).
116 Ibid.
Gurnal’s Christian Armour, Edwards on Preaching ... Mr. Wesley’s Christian Library, may make part of the little library ... together with Usher’s Body of Divinity,\textsuperscript{117} Scapula’s Greek Lexicon, and Lyttleton’s Latin Dictionary ... Cole’s Dictionaries, Screvielius’s and Pasore’s, for those who will learn Latin and Greek, may be a sufficient stock at first.\textsuperscript{118}

This outline written in 1768 demonstrates his considerable reading, not all of which, he necessarily undertook before his ordination but which were obviously part of his own course of study.

\textit{Ordinations}

Fletcher had thus kept his sights on the possibility of getting into orders, and his patron offered to procure a title for him on several occasions.\textsuperscript{119} He continued as a tutor, unsure of his prospects for obtaining a title, a prerequisite for ordination.\textsuperscript{120} When in October of 1756 he was offered a living by ‘a gentleman, I hardly knew’, Fletcher had been considering a return to his native country where he might preach ‘with more fruit’ and ‘in my own tongue’.\textsuperscript{121} However, he later came to a realization of the impracticability of ministry in Switzerland and wrote in a letter to Charles Wesley:

\begin{quote}
I should have no opportunity to exercise my ministry. Our Swiss ministers, who preach only once a week, would not look upon me with a more favourable eye than the ministers here, and would only cause me either to be laid in prison or to be immediately banished from the country.\textsuperscript{122}
\end{quote}

He summarized his position, ‘\textit{ubi Christiani ibi patria}’\textsuperscript{123} echoing a sentiment for primitive Christianity articulated by the Flemish mystic Antoinette Bourignon who wrote ‘Where are the Christians? Let us go to the country where the Christians

\textsuperscript{117} Cf. JF$\rightarrow$CW, 27 Apr. 1761.
\textsuperscript{118} JF$\rightarrow$CH, 3 Jan. 1768.
\textsuperscript{119} JF$\rightarrow$JW, 24 Nov. 1756.
\textsuperscript{120} \textit{Canons}, 212.
\textsuperscript{121} JF$\rightarrow$JW, 24 Nov. 1756.
\textsuperscript{122} Cited in \textit{WDS}, 45.
\textsuperscript{123} ‘Where there are Christians there is my country’.
live. That same month he was offered a title. Mr Hill’s relative, the vicar of Madeley, Rowland Chambre, offered Fletcher the title of curate. The following year Fletcher accepted the title and went with his testimonials to be ordained.

Fletcher was ordained deacon by Bishop Beauclerk in London on 6 March 1757. The fact that the ordination took place in London rather than in Hereford has been pointed to as a confirmation of the laxity of prelates in meeting the standard of Canon 31, which stated that the bishop was to perform ordinations ‘in the cathedral, or parish church where the bishop resideth.’ It is noteworthy, however, as Marshall has pointed out, that out of 57 ordinations conducted by Beauclerk before 1760, only one such service was performed ‘in London or in another location outside the diocese.’ Indeed, Marshall notes that Beauclerk actually ‘personally conducted almost every diocesan ordination ... and usually as often as four times a year’. In contrast to the claim that Beauclerk’s ordination of Fletcher with four others in London was a breach of church law, Burn’s note of the possibility of exceptions, emphasized that the issue was not one of episcopal diligence, but of jurisdiction. And, since bishops had to sit in the House of Lords and were thus often in London from October to May, the fact that Fletcher’s ordination (in March) was performed in London, is quite explicable. When convenience was aligned with expediency in pastoral provision, prelates were prone to exercise liberty. This was the case three years later with Fletcher’s institution to Madeley, which was expedited at the urging of Beauclerk so as to allow Fletcher to be instituted by him in Hereford, this time saving Fletcher a trip to London. The week following his ordination as deacon, Fletcher was ordained priest in London on 13 March, by the Bishop of Bangor, and

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125 On Chambre, see BI.
126 R. Burn, *Ecclesiastical Law* (London, 1763), 2:106. On the claim that this was a sign of ecclesiastical laxity, see W.R. Davies, ‘John Fletcher’s Georgian Ordinations and Madeley Curacy’, *PWHS* 36 (1968), 141.
128 Idem, ‘Beauclerk, James (1709–1787)’, *ODNB*.
130 Sykes, *Church and State*, 96-97; Davies, ‘Georgian Ordinations’, 141.
131 *JF* → CH, 28 Oct. 1760. Induction was the final step in the process of becoming a parish incumbent, following the clergyman’s presentation by the patron of the benefice and institution by the Bishop. See *ODCC*. 

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was licensed curate of Madeley the next day.\footnote{132} His curacy was short lived, for Chambre found Fletcher’s enthusiastic preaching suspect, and he was discharged.\footnote{133} Between this dismissal and his appointment to Madeley, Fletcher, still residing with his patron in either Shropshire or London, engaged in preaching as often as he could though unbeneficed.

**Appointment to Madeley**

The gravity with which Fletcher perceived the call to ministry resulted in his rejecting the several offers by Mr Hill to secure a living for him. There were numerous obstacles to his possibility of being instituted by the Bishop, even if a title was presented. Not having been naturalized, he was concerned that this would stand in his way,\footnote{134} not to mention the opposition of various clergy of Shropshire. At one point, he expressed concern that ‘the Bishop to whom I am, or shall be known for a Methodist may refuse to institute me after all’.\footnote{135} Intensifying his perceived difficulties, his patron’s sometimes capricious wife, vacillated in her support for Fletcher; first, demanding a prompt reply to her husband’s offer of a parish, then later, asserting that Fletcher would never be instituted.\footnote{136} If he was presented to a living, God would have to overcome the obstacles and he would not ‘resist providence’, but ‘follow the paths it opens’.\footnote{137} For Fletcher, providence was not merely an option or opportunity made available by the hand of God, but it was the personification of God’s will in human circumstances. It was this sense of providence which Fletcher would later use as an apologetic for his decision to accept the living of Madeley, when discouraged from doing so by John Wesley, to whom he wrote, ‘... I am undoubtedly call’d to labour in the Parish that is now committed to me [Madeley]; there I was first sent into the ministry, & there a chain of providences I could not break, hath again fasten’d me.’\footnote{138} His curacy had introduced him to the industrializing conditions of the parish where he found the people ‘as sheep scatter’d...
without a Shepherd, & mostly those who enter first into the kingdom, poor labourers, & colliers’. Interestingly, it seems to have been the industrializing nature of the parish and its correlative social conditions, and the relative success he had experienced in proclaiming the gospel to the parish when he was curate (despite Chambre’s issues with his evangelicalism), which moved Fletcher to finally accept one of his patron’s repeated presentments.¹³⁹

Regarding patronage, it is interesting to note that Methodists in the early nineteenth century viewed lay patronage in the previous century as ‘the greatest barrier to the introduction of evangelical ministers into the Establishment.’¹⁴⁰ Certainly there were Victorian clergy who felt the same.¹⁴¹ Hylson-Smith has taken up this negative view, suggesting that patronage in the eighteenth century worked only to ‘serve the ends of party politics, and the prevalence of polite touting or blatant subterfuge and intrigue in the strife for preferment’.¹⁴² It appears that this perspective is clearly exaggerated in light of the numerous exceptions. There were in fact a number of laity who used their rights of appointment to present dutiful clergymen.¹⁴³ Indeed, this was taking place many years before those like Charles Simeon began buying advowsons systematically to secure evangelical successors. As Carter has pointed out, the eighteenth-century evangelical Anglicans actually benefitted from lay patronage. Whereas the ‘tightening of episcopal control of clerical irregularity’ restricted Victorian Evangelicals’ efforts, the entrustment of such concerns to lay patrons over their appointments could prove less of an obstacle. Thus, as Carter notes, Fletcher’s presidency over the Countess of Huntingdon’s college at Trevecca prompted no censure by Fletcher’s bishop, whereas in 1809, Rev. Dr Draper was restricted from preaching in London for holding the same post. And, it should be noted, that evangelical clergy were presented for ordination and to their various livings by like-minded lay patrons like the Earl of Dartmouth,¹⁴⁴ as well

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¹⁴⁰ ‘Methodism, and Its Relations to the Church and the Nation’, WMM (1829), 381.
¹⁴³ See National Church, 18-20.
¹⁴⁴ See B.D. Bargar, ‘Lord Dartmouth’s Patronage, 1772-1775’, William and Mary Quarterly 15:2 (1958), 191-200; on Lord Dartmouth, see BI.
as by mainstream Anglicans such as Lord Gower,\textsuperscript{145} who did not necessarily share the enthusiastic tendencies of the ‘Methodistic’ evangelicals, yet were still concerned for promoting piety in the parishes. John Thornton of Clapham, for example, was known for his support of evangelicals as seen in his contributions to Lady Huntingdon’s college and his augmentation of John Newton’s living at Olney by £200, as well as his appointment of the evangelical Richard Conyers to St Paul’s, Deptford.\textsuperscript{146} Importantly, while various evangelical clergy disagreed regarding points of doctrine, especially following the Calvinist-Arminian debates, lay evangelicals like James Ireland and John Thornton helped unify evangelicalism within the church. For example, Ireland, a reconciling voice between the Calvinist and Arminian parities, established a trusteeship of Hatherleigh parish where he appointed the Calvinist evangelical Cradock Glascott,\textsuperscript{147} and while John Newton was revolted by Fletcher’s perfectionist preaching, Mr and Mrs Thornton were supportive of both Newton and Fletcher as evangelicals in the same gospel cause.\textsuperscript{148}

Especially in their concerns for an diligent body of clergy, there was less of a divide between the aims of evangelicals and mainstream Anglicans, and specifically among lay patrons, than has traditionally been assumed. Even though Thomas Hill was at one point concerned that his association with Fletcher might weaken the possibility of his re-election as MP for Shrewsbury,\textsuperscript{149} he and his family still made Fletcher’s appointment, as well as the appointments of other evangelicals like James Stillingfleet and Richard De Courcy.\textsuperscript{150} Indeed, even Fletcher’s recommendation of a title, by which De Courcy was able to apply for ordination, came by Hill’s influence. Hill’s evangelical great nephew, Richard Hill, pointed out that Fletcher’s ‘great learning, known integrity, and polite behaviour’ as well as his good work as tutor to Hill’s sons, Samuel and Noel, under which they ‘made such rapid progress

\textsuperscript{145} On Gower, see Bl; JF→[Lord Gower], n.d. (B1.9).
\textsuperscript{146} ‘Thornton, John’, and ‘Conyers, Richard’, ODNB. Thornton was gave £10 in support of Fletcher’s educational initiatives in 1777 and Fletcher occasionally corresponded with his wife. See JF→Mrs Thornton, 1777 (2 letters dated only 1777); JF→W. Wase, 18 Feb. 1777; JF→Rev. Dr. Conyers, 18 May 1778; JF and MF→Mrs Thornton, 3 Mar. 1783, and 21 Jan. 1785; also see J. Gilpin→J. Thornton, 19 Aug. 1785, in W. Fraser, The Melvilles Earls of Melville and the Leslies Earls of Leven (Edinburgh, 1890), 290-91.
\textsuperscript{147} J.G. Hayman, History of Methodism in North Devon (London, 1871), 113-114.
\textsuperscript{149} JF→CH, 6 Sept. 1760.
\textsuperscript{150} A succession of evangelicals were appointed to Shawbury by Hill, including Stillingfleet, Hallward, De Courcy, and Mayor. See ‘Memoir of Mrs. Harris’, WMM (1828), 799-800.
under his instructions’, induced Thomas to procure ‘for him the Living on which he at present so diligently labours, being an ensample to the flock over which he is appointed, but a dreadful eye-sore to all lazy ministers.’

When Mr Hill’s sons were sent to Cambridge, he had been for some time looking to secure a benefice for Fletcher. Initially, he offered to recommend Fletcher to the living of Shenstone in 1758, but Fletcher refused. Mr Hill subsequently offered him the living of Dunham, which was also in his patronage and worth £400 per annum, but Fletcher declined this also, famously replying that it was ‘too much money and too little labour.’ Persisting still, Mr Hill suggested that he might easily persuade Rowland Chambre to cede Madeley in exchange for the living of Dunham and that Hill’s nephew, the patron of Madeley, would present Fletcher to Madeley. Hill was known amongst French émigrés ‘as a friend of French expatriates’, but his preferential treatment of Fletcher was religiously motivated as well. He was actually critical of fox-hunting, insouciant parsons, and gentry who neglected their responsibilities and his inclination to find a living for Fletcher stemmed from a combination of his sense of duty as a patron, his sympathies with émigrés, and his own piety as a faithful churchman. In this respect, Hill’s ‘favouritism’ as a mainstream Anglican patron found commonality with the concerns of evangelicals’ ‘serious’ approach to religion.

Finally, Fletcher accepted the presentation to Madeley. He wrote to Charles Wesley that the arrangement ‘was immediately agreed to, as Mr. Hill himself informed me in the evening wishing me joy.’ Things moved ahead quickly, for only a month later, in a letter to the Countess of Huntingdon, he described the rapid succession of events leading to his call and institution to Madeley. He was inducted in October 1760 and entered upon his duty in the church immediately,

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152 JF→CW 26 Dec. 1758; cf. Letterbook of Thomas Hill (B1.10).
153 WDS 75.
156 Madeley Glebe Book (B1.10).
157 JF→CW 26 Sept. 1760.
158 JF→CH, 28 Oct. 1760.
writing shortly thereafter to Lady Huntingdon, ‘of what begins to be as dear to me as my own soul—my parish.’\textsuperscript{159}

\textsuperscript{159} Ibid.
Chapter 2
Church Services and Patterns of Worship

A central component of the Establishment’s alleged failure in the eighteenth century has been the indolence of ministers in performing even basic Sunday duty of morning and evening prayer and providing regular communion. This lack of minimal pastoral industry, Gilbert claimed, was, together with inadequate accommodation, largely responsible for a decline in attendance, as well as an overall impotence in the ability of the church to function ‘as a religious service organisation.’ Furthermore, the form and content of worship amongst ‘new dissent’, typically characterized by its evangelical conversionist zeal and emphasis on personal piety, it has been asserted, offered ‘spiritual and religious satisfactions’ with which the Establishment’s religious services failed to compete. Gilbert’s analysis allows that there were occasionally ‘small Evangelical and High Church minorities’ amongst churchmen, but he generalized that ‘the Church of the eighteenth century was not one in which specifically religious and cultic functions were prominent.’ Fletcher as an evangelical may in fact have been a minority amongst his Anglican colleagues, but it is important to examine the extent to which his assiduousness in conducting church services in Madeley was concordant with the aims of mainstream Anglicanism. The pattern of worship services in Madeley clearly indicates that Fletcher believed not only that the Established Church was broad enough to include evangelical churchmanship but that the evangelical focus on the new birth was firmly rooted in the Articles, Homilies, and Liturgy.

There were, of course, other important components of parochial duty; these will be examined in later chapters. Because worship has been considered a primary facet of pastoral provision and religious practice—not only historically, but also ideologically for the clergy—inquiry into church services in Madeley provides our point of departure. The Establishment pastoral ideal, as Rack has summarized, was a parish in which the ‘parson ... held two services on Sunday, preaching two sermons; and theoretically read morning and evening prayer daily or at least on Wednesdays,

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2 On accommodation, see Chapter 3.
4 Ibid., 71; cf. Russell, Clerical Profession, 89.
5 Gilbert, Religion and Society, 70.
6 WJF(B), 7:213, 232.
7 Cf. RRR, 234; Jacob, Clerical Profession, 173-74.
Fridays and Feast days ... Communion would be administered at least three times a year. The clerical handbooks, which proliferated in the eighteenth century, emphasized a wide range of clerical responsibilities, but the *Book of Common Prayer*, which as Russell has stated, ‘may be regarded as “the foundation charter” of [the clergyman’s] role’, clearly emphasized the preeminence of the services in the church. So it was for Fletcher. Worship in Madeley formed the trunk from which the other branches of parochial duty extended, and indeed, marked the onset of his parish activity. This chapter examines Fletcher’s conduct of services, patterns of worship in the parish, and Fletcher’s preaching.

**Sunday Duty**

*Frequency of Services*

The lack of visitation returns for Hereford Diocese would make it difficult to assess patterns of worship in Madeley were it not for Fletcher’s correspondence. Indeed, it is significant that so much of Fletcher’s writing focussed on his parish, for it demonstrates that concern for his parish was not merely a matter of responding to perfunctory visitation questionnaires that prompted such reflection. Rather, his pastoral work was a primary reference point when writing to his family, friends and colleagues. His parochial experience also supplied many of the examples he used in his publications. Thus, taken together, Fletcher’s writings reveal his constant concern to fulfil his priestly duty.

Fletcher was cognizant of the canonical requirement for two services—morning and evening—on Sundays, and that the laity expected him to fulfil this duty. The *Ordinal* reads: ‘Have always therefore printed in your remembrance, how great a treasure is committed to your charge.’ Fletcher could be quite the literalist at times, and it may have been these words which prompted him to transcribe this charge in its entirety on heavy parchment and post it on his study wall. His schedule at the beginning of his incumbency was similar to that of his

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13 Cf. Fletcher’s handwritten extracts of Burns’ *Laws* (B1.1).
14 ‘The Ordering of Priests’, *BCP*.
15 Fletcher Certificates (B1.9).
Shropshire neighbours; morning and evening prayer, with a sermon at the morning service.\textsuperscript{16} In several of the surrounding parishes it was typical for the clergy to preach at both services in the summer, while they preached only in the morning during the winter.\textsuperscript{17} Weather was an obstacle, but one that parishioners tried to overcome. Towards the end of November 1760 he wrote: ‘the weather and the roads are all so bad, that the way to the church is almost impracticable. Nevertheless, all the seats were full last Sunday’.\textsuperscript{18} The following year however, attendance was lower, and he explained that, in part, it was because the roads were impassable. The other reasons he gave are interesting because they demonstrate the way parishioners could protest by way of non-attendance. ‘The curiosity of some of my hearers is satisfied’, he wrote, and ‘the word has offended several others ... instead of saying that we are going up to the house of the Lord, they say why should we go to hear this Methodist?’\textsuperscript{19} The decline, however, was not permanent and, as will be discussed in Chapter Three, an expansion of services in Madeley was prompted in part by the expectations of his parishioners.

Even though Fletcher often spoke of the irreligion of his parish, it was not because of empty pews. Quite the contrary, it seems that his diligence in preaching was successful in drawing a large part of his parish to services, and he noted increases in attendance on several occasions.\textsuperscript{20} A surge in attendance from Easter 1761 prompted Fletcher to begin preaching a sermon at evening prayer; the afternoon service had been without a sermon until this point. The morning service was at 10:00 a.m. and the afternoon service at 2:30 p.m., after he had catechized the children.\textsuperscript{21} There is no evidence to suggest this was a divergence from his

\textsuperscript{16} Cf. \textit{WJW}; 23:299-300.
\textsuperscript{17} In Wrockwardine, a parish in Shropshire to the north of Madeley, this was the pattern under Stephen Panting, incumbent from 1765-82 (\textit{VCH}, Shropshire, 11:319). The same was true of Wellington to the northwest of Madeley, where there were also prayers on Wednesdays and Fridays and communion monthly and on four feast days, under Richard Smith, incumbent from 1751-73 (\textit{VCH}, Shropshire, 11:240). This pattern in the Archdeaconry of Salop in the Diocese of Lichfield seems to match that of the Archdeaconry of Salop in the northern part of the Diocese of Hereford. See Marshall, ‘Hereford and Oxford’, 197-222.
\textsuperscript{18} JF\textsuperscript{\textcopyright}CH, 19 Nov. 1760.
\textsuperscript{19} JF\textsuperscript{\textcopyright}CW, 12 Oct. 1761.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid. 10 Mar. 1761.
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{WJW}; 21:481; 23:481. The afternoon service may have been later during summer. See Jacob, \textit{Clerical Profession}, 174-75. On catechesis, see Chapter 5.
predecessor’s pattern, but the services during Fletcher’s incumbency were reputedly better attended than those of Chambre.\textsuperscript{22}

On one of Wesley’s visits to the parish, when the church was filled to overflowing, the people told him that the services were typically crowded, a noticeable improvement since Fletcher’s arrival, and an indication that the size of the congregation on that day was not merely due to a visit from the Methodist ‘celebrity’.\textsuperscript{23} Evening preaching offered an opportunity for those who did not attend the morning service to hear a sermon, yet some people attended both services, which Fletcher used to his advantage. By preaching twice on Sundays, he was able to bolster his morning evangelical preaching, which offended some of his auditors, by using sermons of Anglican divines or the Homilies of the church, in which he found support for his evangelical style and content: ‘Twice I have read a sermon of Archbishop U\[s\]sher and last [S]unday a homily taking the liberty of repeating and further elucidating those points which confirm what I put forward in the morning: which shut the mouths of several Adversaries’.\textsuperscript{24} This sheds light on the practises of reading sermons to congregations, borrowing sermons from other clergymen, and repeating sermons (discussed later in this Chapter).

\textit{Conduct of the Services}

Although no single source fully describes Fletcher’s conduct of any given worship service, much can be learned from his frequent references to the Liturgy and various aspects of the stated services of the church. His concern with the participation of the laity in worship was paramount. Yet he did not want parishioners merely to come out of habit, and he often spoke against the spirit of formality he observed amongst his people, especially when it became a substitute for evangelical Christianity.\textsuperscript{25} In one sermon he preached:

\begin{quote}
A careless sinner comes to Church as he has done a hundred times because it is the custom of the place on Sunday[,] not to be convinced, but to pray from his lips, stand, kneel, because others do
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{22} JF→CH, 6 Jan. 1761.
\textsuperscript{23} J.D. Walsh, ‘John Wesley: Celebrity and Holy Man’, Unpub. Annual Lecture, MWRC (Didsbury, 2006).
\textsuperscript{24} JF→CW, 27 Apr. 1761. Fletcher’s own copy of the Homilies is at MARC: MAW Fl. 12. On Fletcher’s eclectic approach of both preaching his own sermons as well as reading the sermons of others, see below in this Chapter.
\textsuperscript{25} e.g. JF→CH, 12 Apr. 1769; Portrait, 1:269.
so perhaps also to do[ze] and Gape or to stare about to see and be seen ...26

This did not imply, however, a diminished regard for propriety or formality in general. Quite the contrary, in Madeley, a degree of Laudian custom survived, and Fletcher held a high view of the Liturgy properly-led. For example, he encouraged kneeling for prayer and communion.27 As he wrote to James Ireland, ‘How sweet it is, on our knees, to receive ... this heavenly gift’.28 At the same time he was frustrated that so many of his congregation rested in the formality rather than in the spiritual reality it signified.29 He lamented that some kneeled ‘at the communion-table, holding out their hand to receive’, yet did not reflect ‘upon inward spiritual, sensible feeding, in the heart, on the heavenly virtue of Christ’s hidden flesh, and of Christ’s blood’.30 Paradoxically, there were also some who clung to popish superstitions. ‘To this day,’ he wrote, ‘the greatest part of [Christians] pray to dead men and women; bow to images of stone and crosses of wood; and make, adore, and swallow down, the wafer-god’.31 Fletcher attempted to moderate between the extremes of formality and superstition.

Even though he was wary of remnants of Catholic superstition, he still upheld the importance of propriety in services. An anecdote by Gilpin is suggestive of this. Gilpin (then Fletcher’s curate) had been summoned to the church by the announcement of a funeral. Fletcher had been visiting some of the sick in Madeley, and returned as Gilpin was ‘reading the office’.32 The clerk was not present, and the desk had been filled by a young man. Fletcher ‘instantly took his place, and went through the whole of the service with a degree of humility and composure that cannot be expressed.’ Fletcher told Gilpin that he was grateful for his taking on the duty, but that with regard to the young man who had entered the desk, ‘he could not observe the place of an inferior servant of the church improperly filled up, without attempting to supply it himself with a greater degree of decorum and reverence.’33 In preaching as well, Fletcher held himself and other preachers to a high standard. Like

26 JF, Sermon, Rom. 7:24 (B1.1); cf. WJF(B), 7:224-25.
27 See JF→Miss Hatton, 21 June 1766; JF→Madeley Societies, 15 Sept. 1780.
28 JF→JI, 21 Sept. 1773.
29 WJF(B), 7:468.
30 JF, Sermon, Matt. 5:20, (B1.1).
31 Appeal, 123-24; also see WJF(B), 2:4-5.
32 i.e. ‘Order for the Burial of the Dead’, BCP.
many eighteenth-century bishops,\textsuperscript{34} he thought that ‘the voice, the gesture, and every action’ should be animated to the edification of the congregation, arising not from repeated rehearsal, but from earnest piety of the preacher.\textsuperscript{35}

Fletcher’s high regard for the Liturgy can be seen in his reliance upon the \textit{Book of Common Prayer} and the Homilies to defend his evangelicalism, referring to both in his correspondence, polemical treatises, and notably, in his sermons. This is in contrast to Baker’s claims regarding Fletcher’s churchmanship. Baker viewed Fletcher as a Methodist first, and only secondarily as a parish priest, inferring that he was a Low Churchman who but loosely adhered to Anglican forms of worship, based upon a supposition that there was little correspondence between Fletcher’s sermons and the Lectionary.\textsuperscript{36} Even if it had been the case (and as we shall see it was not), that Fletcher did not take the set readings in the Prayer Book as the texts for his sermons, it would by no means have suggested a Low Churchmanship, for there was no liturgical nor canonical requirement to do so. A clergyman was at liberty to preach on any scripture text.

However, Fletcher preached with some frequency from the appointed readings in the Calendar of Lessons throughout his incumbency. It is impossible to say how often this was the case, but many of his dated extant sermons (both printed and manuscript) reveal that it was by no means uncommon. Indeed, he actually took for granted that his congregations were familiar with the set scripture readings from having heard them read at morning and evening prayer year after year. For instance, he once preached: ‘The greatest part of you Brethren are I suppose no strangers to these words ... and the contents of [the] chap[ter] from which they are taken since our Church has appointed it to be read one sund[ay] [sic] morning every year’.\textsuperscript{37} He wrote a sermon for 12 March 1762 specifically to correspond with the proclaimed fast,\textsuperscript{38} and even when he preached outside of his parish, he was no less likely to follow the appointed texts. Thus, he preached at Trevecca on 6 November 1768 from the appointed Psalm for that day (Ps. 34).\textsuperscript{39} Furthermore, Fletcher periodically

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\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{34} Jacob, \textit{Clerical Profession}, 175.
\textsuperscript{35} Portrait, 1:17; cf. Jacob, \textit{Clerical Profession}, 236.
\textsuperscript{36} i.e. ‘The Calendar: With the Table of Lessons’, \textit{BCP}; Baker, ‘John Fletcher’s Sermon Notes’, \textit{PWHS} 28:2 (1951), 30-32
\textsuperscript{37} JF, Sermon, 2 Sam. 12:7 (B1.1).
\textsuperscript{38} JF, Sermon, Ezek. 33:7-9, [12 Mar. 1762], \textit{WJF}(B), 7:313-28.
\textsuperscript{39} See JF➔CH, 10 Nov. 1768.
\end{flushright}
read from the Homilies to his congregation. (Such was the habit of the evangelical William Grimshaw at Haworth as well.\textsuperscript{40}) The Homilies were meant to be read in churches occasionally, especially when the service would be otherwise without a sermon.\textsuperscript{41} Fletcher saw this as a useful means of educating his congregation in church doctrine, exhorting his congregation to ‘walk with our reformers in the narrow path pointed out in the word of God, and in our Articles and Homilies.’\textsuperscript{42}

There are many other examples among Fletcher’s papers.\textsuperscript{43} The fact that Fletcher and others amongst his evangelical Anglican colleagues used the Liturgy and the Homilies with such consistency is significant. It has traditionally been claimed that the focus of the evangelical clergy and Methodists on praying and preaching extempore was a reaction against the dry formality of the forms of the Established church in worship. Those like Fletcher and Grimshaw, however (and there were many others),\textsuperscript{44} were not reacting against the church forms of worship (though they abhorred formalism), but rather used them as a foundation upon which to build.

Indeed, pastorally, Fletcher viewed the Liturgy as a spiritual cordial. When one of his parishioners wrote to Fletcher with news of his wife’s ill health, Fletcher recommended the ‘heavenly sugar [of the Liturgy] to be taken every half hour, day and night’. He explained that the Liturgy was as useful in personal matters as it was in church services: ‘Our Church has already extracted that divine sugar from the scripture, and put it into the Common Prayer-book, as the heavenly bait which is to draw us to the Lord’s table.’\textsuperscript{45} The Liturgy also served as a vehicle for defending truth against false teaching,\textsuperscript{46} true piety against dry moralism, and evangelical mysticism\textsuperscript{47} against misguided zeal. Thus, when charged with religious enthusiasm, Fletcher drew upon church tradition for his defence. ‘I have hid as well as possible behind the bulwarks of Scripture, of our homilies, and of our articles’, he wrote.\textsuperscript{48}

This remains in fact one of the most noticeable strategies employed by Fletcher in

\textsuperscript{40} J.W. Laycock, Methodist Heroes in the Great Haworth Round, 1734-1784 (Keighley, 1909), 55-56.
\textsuperscript{41} Canons, 213.
\textsuperscript{42} JF, Sermon, John 6:66-68, \textit{WFF} (B), 7:281-97; idem, Sermon, 1 Cor. 3:2 (B1.1).
\textsuperscript{43} e.g. Fletcher referred to the Articles in his sermons often. Cf. JF, Sermon, Matt. 5:20 (B1.1).
\textsuperscript{45} JF→W. Wase, 11 Feb. 1779.
\textsuperscript{46} See Chapter 6.
\textsuperscript{47} On Fletcher’s mysticism, see \textit{La Grace et La Nature} (London, 1785).
\textsuperscript{48} JF→CW, 19 Aug. 1761, translation mine.
his theological debates. That is, he sought whenever possible to use an adversary’s own tenets to demonstrate fallacies in logic while finding common ground in the Liturgy of the church.⁴⁹ A example par excellence is Fletcher’s defence of his evangelical doctrine of the ‘new birth’ to Rev. Prothero:

If [St] John speaks so often, as well as David & St Paul, of being born of God ... if Jesus himself enforced this doctrine ... if our Church (office for Baptism & collect for [A]sh [W]ed:) pleads for it as well as the Word of God; can we supersede it in ye pulpit as an unintelligible tenet, without wounding unawares X & his apostles, our Church, & the Compilers of her Liturgy[?]⁵⁰

Fletcher’s reliance on the Liturgy of the Church is also remarkable for what it implies about his parishioners. Underlying the various arguments in his Appeal to Matter of Fact⁵¹ was an assumption that a general familiarity with the Liturgy and acceptance of it as a faithful representation of orthodox doctrine, was a foundation already laid on which he could build. This seems to extend Jacob’s claim that ‘the practice of Christianity according to the formularies of the Church of England was central to most people’s lives well beyond the first decade of the eighteenth century,’ to at least the third quarter of the century.⁵² This unifying aspect of Anglicanism formed significant impressions on even occasional churchgoers. It is significant that the liturgical formalism associated with Anglican services in this period⁵³ which was supposedly so off-putting to those attracted to the spontaneity of Methodist or dissenting forms of worship, was actually often associated with a sense of solemnity and ‘serious’ religion, and indeed, the precursor in many cases to evangelical conversion. Indeed, attention to the fact that very many of the conversion narratives from the eighteenth century⁵⁴ begin with mention of an Anglican upbringing has rarely been noticed (though Hindmarsh’s recent study has aptly acknowledged this

⁴⁹ Cf. Letters exchanged Between Rev. Bridel and J. Fletcher (B1.9); RS, 120.
⁵⁰ JF[R]e[Rev. Prothero], 25 July 1761; also see JF[R][Lord Cavendish], [23 Nov. 1783] (B1.9).
⁵¹ See Chapter 5.
⁵³ See the several quotations to this effect in Snape, Church of England, 15-16.
⁵⁴ Many of these were collected and published by John Wesley to ‘test the validity of his own doctrines, and to give support to his readers.’ I. Rivers, Reason, Grace and Sentiment (Cambridge, 1991), 220.
pattern). For example, the Shropshire boy from Dawley, William Jones, who was raised in the Church of England by his parents and eventually became a Wesleyan minister, was impressed throughout his life with the services in the church:

Everything I saw and heard conspired to produce reverential awe, and to detach me from the world ... The minister appeared to me little less than an angel come down from heaven ... The venerable pile and all within it have seemed to tell me, that whilst there I was standing on hallowed ground ... What one has said of England, I can say of the English church and its service: ‘With all thy faults, I love thee still.’

In Madeley, Fletcher could rely upon the common ground of Anglicanism and centered his evangelical ministry around it. It is not surprising that his churchmanship has proved difficult for his biographers to place. While Davies considered him a Low Churchman, Lawton wrote: ‘There is no easy-going “low-churchmanship” in Fletcher. Neither is there any spiky high-churchmanship. If one has to use these cloudy terms we would have to say that he was an “Evangelical High Churchman”’. What is certain is that Fletcher esteemed both the Liturgy and the Sacraments, and that both were integral to his evangelical ministry. Fletcher conducted services until the very Sunday before he died, on which he took his text from the appointed Psalm. That service, being a Sacrament Day, lasted nearly four hours. Though he was exhausted from the illness that would soon take his life, he was neither willing to omit any part of the service, nor to relinquish his beloved duty to a substitute.

Worship Singing

There is perhaps less ambiguity regarding Fletcher’s view of music than Trinder has suggested. It is true that there does not seem to have been a ‘church

57 Davies, ‘John William Fletcher’, 555; Lawton, Shropshire Saint, 28.
58 Fletcher preached his last sermon on 7 August 1785 and died the following Sunday, 14 August. The Psalms for Morning Prayer on Day 7 are Ps. 37 and Ps. 36. Fletcher took Ps. 36:6,7 for his text. M. Fletcher, Some Account of the Death of the Rev. Mr. Fletcher (Dublin, 1785), 5.
59 On length of services, see Jacob, Clerical Profession, 175-76.
60 IRS (3rd), 204.
band’ or orchestra in Madeley and that it was only after Fletcher’s death that an
official ‘singers’ pew’ was added to one of the galleries in the church.61 Even so,
there is enough evidence of Fletcher’s appreciation for music in general to offset the
inference from his polemical writings against popular recreations, that he may have
taken an adversarial stance toward instrumentation or musical performance in
church services. In fact, anthems were sung in the church by the 1780s, and possibly
earlier. For instance, a few weeks prior to Fletcher’s death, the singers’ anthem was
Psalm 23. After hearing it, he commented to Mrs Fletcher ‘how uncommon a degree
these words had been blessed to his soul.’62 Furthermore, Charles Wesley Jr. was
learning to play the harpsichord in the 1760s, and Fletcher invited him to play at
Madeley, demonstrating that Fletcher was not against instrumentation on principle,
regardless of his negative view towards the recreations that attended popular fiddling
or harping.63

In terms of hymn-singing, the music in Madeley church services was not the
dull worship diseased by sloth, carelessness, insincerity, and a general ineptitude on
the parts of both clerk and congregation that Wesley thought characterized parish
churches.64 Instead of viewing his church as devoid of potential for heartfelt singing,
he entered the services with considerable sanguinity, and he included ‘singing of
psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs’ as a means of grace.65 Even before he was
ordained, Fletcher reflected on and memorized hymns as a preparation for the
Communion,66 and during his tenure as tutor to the Hills he took singing lessons.67
During services at Madeley, he was known to offer exhortations intermixed with
verses of hymns,68 and he recalled in letters to his parishioners times of their singing
specific hymns together.69 His church services appear to have been more like the
worship Wesley thought was only common among Methodists: Godly, fervent,

61 Ibid.
62 LJF; 246.
63 JF➔CW, 27 Apr. 1761; Aug. 1762; WJF; 7:320.
65 WJF (B), 7:260; Fletcher, ‘Doctrine of Salvation by Faith Alone as it is Preached in Madeley
Church’ (B1.9).
66 LJF; 28.
67 Ibid. 36.
68 Ibid. 348.
69 e.g. JF➔Madeley Parishioners, 28 Dec. 1776; 13 Jan. 1777; JF➔W. Wase, 18 Feb. 1777.
meaningful worship led by a variety of leaders and joined by the congregation, 'praising [God] lustily and with good courage.'

Like Augustus Toplady and John Newton, Fletcher wrote hymns for his congregation, and he encouraged devotional use of religious verse by individuals in their homes. It was not unusual that he asked Charles Wesley to send a volume of hymns for one of his parishioners, and he was especially impressed with Charles’s 'versification of the New Testament.' A manuscript packet of hymns—in part a compilation and apparently in part his own composition—reveals the overlap between his liturgical and educational concerns. Thus, he used what have typically been considered chapel initiatives to convey the gospel message in church services. The hymns in this packet reflect Fletcher’s three central emphases of an evangelical ministry: (1) Trinitarian belief; (2) Dispensational understanding of the work of salvation; and (3) Experimental Faith. Fletcher explained that he had compiled the hymns so ‘[t]hat you may form a clear judgment of your state and know how many stages you have past in your progress thro’ experimental X.

The forty-four page collection includes hymns borrowed from Wesley, Watts, Madan, and Sternhold and Hopkins, with interleaved transcriptions of scripture verses and devotional notes by Fletcher. Each section builds on the preceding one, advancing from an emphasis on the dispensation of the Father, to that of the Son, and concluding with the dispensation of the Holy Spirit, a schema he frequently used in his sermons. This manuscript bears in every respect a resemblance to his preaching ministry more generally and suggests that the music and singing were integral to worship services in Madeley.

Communion

Sykes wrote: ‘It is ... with regard to the infrequency of its administration of the Holy Communion that the Georgian Church has drawn upon itself more criticism

70 WJW, 20:400.
71 Lloyd, Charles Wesley, 75.
72 LJF, 33-34; Also see John Fletcher, ‘Hymns’ in MARC. E.g. ‘Cantique Pour une Personne appelée à confirmer Le Vœu du Baptême et participer à la Sainte Cène’, MARC: MAM Fl. 20/16.
73 JF CW, 12 Apr. 1765; On Sunday schools, see Chapter 5.
74 JF CW, 21 Jan. 1772; cf. CW, Short Hymns on Select Passages of the Holy Scriptures (Bristol, 1762).
75 Overton and Relton, English Church, 294; Gilbert, Religion and Society, 92-93.
76 JF, Packet of Hymns (B1.9).
77 e.g. FL, 311-86; WJF[B], 7:337-81.
and disfavour than in relation to any other aspect of its religious tradition.\textsuperscript{78} However, similar in practice to some neighbouring parishes, in Madeley monthly communion (celebrated the first Sunday of the month)\textsuperscript{79} was the rule, surpassing the canonical minimum considerably.\textsuperscript{80} Communion was also provided on three feast days each year. This was the pattern earlier in the century as well.\textsuperscript{81} Lawton makes an interesting speculation that a weekly celebration was normative in Madeley based on a comment by Fletcher in his \textit{Appeal} to a weekly recitation of the Nicene Creed.\textsuperscript{82} However, other than this one statement by Fletcher, there is not enough evidence to substantiate the claim, and Fletcher may have been using the Nicene Creed as an example of the weekly repetition of any of the Prayer Book creeds.\textsuperscript{83} A lack of records makes it impossible to determine the number of communicants over his long incumbency, but there is some evidence of how the laity viewed the Sacrament. Mather, quoting Archbishop Secker, has suggested that a reluctance to communicate in some regions stemmed from class divisions wherein ‘Some imagine that the Sacrament ... is a very dangerous thing for common persons to venture on.’\textsuperscript{84} If there were such obstacles in Madeley, they appear to have been removed early in Fletcher’s incumbency. Already in 1761 he reported: ‘[T]he number of Communicants is increased from thirty to above a hundred, and a few seem to seek grace in the means’.\textsuperscript{85} He impressed upon his flock the need to ‘beseech the Lord to excite your hunger and thirst for Jesus’ flesh and blood, and increase your desire of the sincere milk of the word.’\textsuperscript{86} His exhortation extended to his child communicants as well.\textsuperscript{87} The importance of communion to his flock was evident by the 1770s. In a letter to his parish in 1777, he encouraged them to love one another reminding them

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{78} Sykes, \textit{Church and State}, 250; see also 251-54.
\item \textsuperscript{79} This is inferred from those of Fletcher’s letters which mention Sacrament Sundays, as well as from records in Madeley which clearly indicate that first Sundays were Sacrament Days beyond the end of the century. See JF\textrightarrow CW, 4 Dec. 1775; JF\textrightarrow Mrs Thornton, 3 Mar. 1783; Pocketbooks of Mary Tooth (B1.9).
\item \textsuperscript{80} See LJRO: Parish Returns 1772. Mather, following A. Everitt, has pointed out that there was considerable regional variance in the standard of communion frequency maintained in the parishes. ‘Georgian Churchmanship’, 273-74.
\item \textsuperscript{81} Skinner, \textit{Nonconformity}, 82-83.
\item \textsuperscript{82} Lawton, \textit{Shropshire Saint}, 23-24.
\item \textsuperscript{83} Apart from the Ordinal and the Communion service, which prescribed the Nicene Creed, the Apostle’s Creed is standard for most other services. Certain feast days prescribed the Athanasian Creed. \textit{BCP}.
\item \textsuperscript{84} Mather, ‘Georgian Churchmanship’, 273; cf. J. Tillotson, \textit{A Persuasive to Frequent Communion ...} (London, 1685), 2-3, 13-14.
\item \textsuperscript{85} JF\textrightarrow CH, 6 Jan. 1761.
\item \textsuperscript{86} JF\textrightarrow Madeley Parishioners, 30 Apr. 1766.
\item \textsuperscript{87} JF\textrightarrow W. Wase, 11 Feb. 1779.
\end{itemize}
of their times of sharing Communion together in ‘the pledges of redeeming love, which I have so often given you, while I said in his name, “The body of Christ which was given for thee” – “The blood of Christ which was shed for thee”’. That same year, when he was trying to secure an ordained priest for a curate, his overarching concern was for the maintenance of monthly communion expected by his flock. Thus he wrote to the Bishop of Hereford:

   My chief assistant has been Mr Greaves who is only in Deacon’s orders, & who ... has kindly left His Curacy to ... help me. I give Him a Title ... begging You wou’d admit Him to the holy Order of Priest, without which, He cannot properly supply my Church, My Parishioners having always been us’d to a Monthly sacrament, & dying People, in so populous a Part of the Diocese frequently wanting to have that Ordinance administer’d to Them.

Fletcher’s claim that his parishioners had always been used to a monthly Sacrament and that they frequently wanted the Ordinance, suggests that in contrast to areas where it appeared that many Anglicans in the eighteenth century ‘remained largely unconvinced that they were eligible to partake in so holy a sacrament’, Madeley parishioners viewed Communion as a regular part of their worship. Indeed, Fletcher’s reference to his parishioners as a ‘dying people’ might be an indication that the industrializing context led them to view it as more necessary. Fletcher’s letter to Beauclerk also reveals his awareness of his parishioners needs, and he aimed to shape his ministry accordingly. After their marriage, Mary Fletcher was also keen to encourage attendance at the sacrament in her addresses to the people. Indeed, one of her exhortations was wholly devoted to ‘The Duty of attending the Sacrament’. The address encouraged not only regular attendance at the Lord’s Table but devotional preparation for communion:

   Let us then meditate on [Christ’s] holy life the Entire submition & perfect obediance with which he performd his father s Will the Earnestness of his prayers in w[h] he spent whole nights.] Then Let us

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88 JF Madeley Parishioners, 13 Jan. 1777.
89 On Greaves, see BI.
look on his bloody passion both in ye garden & on the cross. [H]is
glorious resurrection for our justification his power & authority at
Gods right hand w[h]ere his heart is still the same towards us.93

This address was probably given in one (if not all) of Mrs Fletcher’s various
meetings with the Madeley societies.94 It appears that society members were
exhorted to the pattern typified by the Cranages, in whose house the first
Coalbrookdale society met. William Cranage attended society regularly and always
communicated ‘at Madeley Parish Church on Sacrament Sundays.95 Indeed,
attendance of the church services and receiving the sacrament as often as possible
were among Fletcher’s religious society Rules. On the Sunday before his death, the
church was very crowded and Fletcher served more than two-hundred
communicants (nearly a 100 percent improvement from his first year in Madeley).96
Mary Fletcher recorded his pastoral devotion on this his last Communion day:

how did he walk up & down the study that ... morning ... saying ‘Polly
the Lord hath given me a test today-then['] ... & when seeing his great
weakness & dying looks I begd him to refrain this one day—he
answerd with a firm sweetness peculiar to himself ‘my dear these 25
years however ill I have never once omited my duty in the church if
at home & shall I miss them this day? then wh a smile he added no
no not this day fear no the Lord will bring me thro:’97

There were, however, some parishioners who complained of Fletcher’s zeal.
These he challenged in a sermon: ‘Are you not yourself one of those’, he asked
rhetorically, ‘who say, that “for their part they see no need of so many sermons,
lectures, and sacraments in the church ... no need of such strictness in keeping the
sabbath-day holy,” &c.?98 Thus, while some parishioners received Communion as a
regular part of their worship, others viewed it with relative apathy. Fletcher affirmed
the former and exhorted towards improvement in the latter. In order to promote

93 [M. Fletcher], Duty of Attending the Sacrament (B1.9); see also her ‘Watchwords’ on ‘Bread’ and
94 On religious societies in Madeley, see Chapter 3.
95 HofM, 284.
96 J.B. ‘Dying “In the Harness”’, WMM (1854), 1106-1110.
97 Anon. Eulogies (B1.9).
98 WJF (B), 2:395.
attendance at church and sacrament Fletcher employed several strategies, to which we now look.

Remembering the Sabbath

Although there was a considerable response to Fletcher’s preaching—his church sometimes, if not often, being overfull—he would have found Jacob’s recent statement that ‘the majority of [eighteenth-century] parishioners attended their parish church’ to be somewhat exaggerated. For even with a full church, there were those parishioners who attended only occasionally and some who did not attend at all. Yet, Watts’s statement ‘that, until the nineteenth century the majority ... were reluctant to attend church on a regular basis and that the only thing that could induce most of them to worship in their parish churches ... was the threat of fines or imprisonment,’ over-generalizes the national picture at the other extreme, obscuring local variations of attendance and neglecting to acknowledge the increase in religious practises that were stimulated by pastoral activity. Even a full church did not slacken Fletcher’s continuing concern with attendance at Sunday services, and his diligence in getting people to attend church was commensurate with the energy he put into the services themselves.

Fletcher’s understanding of the importance of attendance lay in the promotion of true faith as testified to by the Liturgy and Sacraments and the exposition of the Scriptures. Church services were the means by which public praise was to be offered to God. Fletcher emphasized fellowship as a purpose of church services as well. Indeed, he understood worship in the church to be the precursor to the formation of religious societies, which gathered to continue a process of spiritual growth that had begun in their attendance on ‘public ministry of the Word.’ That the church was a long walk from the homes of many actually fostered a sense of community as people travelled together to church. Because it was impractical for many of those who came so far to go home in between services, some ‘brought their dinners with them, that they might attend morning and afternoon

99 Jacob, Clerical Profession, 173.
100 See JF, A Dreadful Phenomenon Described and Improved (Shrewsbury, 1773), 32.
102 On the ‘Sabbatarianism of Protestantism’, cf. Warne, Church and Society, 44; RRR, 258-60.
103 WJF (B), 2:394-95.
104 See Fletcher, Rules, 9-10; idem, Phenomenon, 43.
105 Fletcher, Rules, 10.
services’, and Fletcher ‘sometimes provided dinners for them in his own house.’

For parents whose children attended catechism, remaining there through the day
with other parishioners would have been an added convenience. He thus
encouraged them to make Sundays a day that was spent at the church.

Smith has noted that it is difficult to assess why some attended while others
stayed away, although the evidence is more readily available for the latter. The
non-attending parishioners of Madeley would have been hard-pressed to explain
their absence by the lethargy of their pastor, but they did offer him other excuses.
For example, there are reports from both the beginning and end of the century that
Madeley labourers at the furnaces were required to work on Sundays. Mary
Fletcher, who was witness to her husband’s parochial labours from 1781, wrote that
there were some who claimed not to attend services because they did not wake early
enough on Sunday mornings, so Fletcher ‘promised to be their Watchman ... taking
a Bell in his Hand, he was accustomed, at five in the Morning, to go round the more
distant Parts of the Parish, reminding the Inhabitants of their Invitation to God’s
House.’ He was just as keen to call upon instances of God’s providence to urge
churchgoing. In his sermon after a minor earthquake in Madeley he declared that
the occasion offered a reminder not to provoke the Lord by neglecting church. He
explained:

[T]he return of the Lord’s day invites, the bells call, our baptismal
vow binds, our Christian name reminds, the canons of the Church
bid, the law of the land compels, the fourth commandment enjoins,
conscience urges, the day of judgment rushes on, and greedy death
stalks about: all say, ‘Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, and
go up to the house, to the table of the Lord.’ ... but what answer do
most of us return? ... We will neither seek the Lord in his appointed
ways nor edify our ignorant neighbours by setting them a good
example: ‘We will not come up.’

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106 HofM, 145.
108 IRS, 355-56; WXS, 528; R. Williams→MT, [c.1797] (B1.9).
109 HLF, 14; MF→JB, n.d. (B1.9).
110 Fletcher, Phenomenon, 43.
Sharpening his focus on wealthy persons who absented themselves from worship, Fletcher proclaimed:

O ye ... ‘famous in the congregation, men of renown,’ the eyes of this populous neighbourhood are upon you, especially the eyes of your poor illiterate colliers, wagoners, and watermen. Do you not consider that they mind your examples rather than God’s precepts? ... Because they cannot read the sacred pages, or even tell the first letters of the alphabet ... And suppose ye they cannot make out, Open pollution of the Sabbaths, when they see the remarkable seats which you so frequently leave empty at church?

These two passages confirm Jacob’s statement that ‘[p]reachers were aware that their teachings were directed at much of the better sort and their obligations to set an example as to the poorer sort.’ At a funeral when one of his ‘warmest opposers’, a Benjamin Hotchkiss, attended the grave side but refused to enter the church, Fletcher went over to him to offer an exhortation. Hotchkiss had ‘bound himself never to come to church’. Fletcher replied: ‘I am clear of your blood; henceforth it is upon your own head; you will not come to church on your legs, prepare to come upon your neighbour’s shoulders.’

Despite his exhortations, ‘practical atheism’, as Fletcher termed the irreligion of his baptized yet unbelieving parishioners, represented one of several threats to non-attendance. Vice was another, typified by the popularity of the public house. The tension between church and alehouse mirrored the tensions between industry and alehouse, and in Fletcher’s own estimation, the situation was dire. He even wrote a letter to Parliament explaining the magnitude of the problem: ‘I cannot easily describe ... the various evils attending the exorbitant number [of alehouses in Madeley] ... which far exceeds that number of the Alehouses in this kingdom or any kingdom in Europe.’ In 1768 he complained of the ‘thirty ale-houses’ which the

111 Ibid. 46.
112 Jacob, Lay People, 3.
114 JF—Miss Hatton, 13 Jan. 1766.
115 See JF, Sermon, 1 Cor. 3:2 (B1.1).
116 Cf. Smith, Religion, 33, and RRR, 258.
117 JF—[J. Cavendish], [23 Nov. 1783].
gentry ‘drown their convictions in.’ Tippling in the parish created problems both for farmers and industrial employers as well, but Fletcher was more concerned with the concomitant problems, like the neglect of families and heathenish revelry. He preached against drunkenness and the pollution of parish festivals on Wake Sunday 1761. Consequently, while Fletcher’s evangelical style of preaching had prompted an increase in attendance the first year, attendance declined after his Wake Day sermon. The publicans of his parish were particularly turned against him. ‘[T]he animosity of my parishioners was strengthened ... against me’, he wrote, ‘The Innkeepers and Maltmen will never forgive me; they imagine that preaching against excess and cutting their purse is the same thing’, but Fletcher saw drinking as a cause of irreligion in general.

The problem extended back into the early seventeenth century. Fletcher clarified that he understood that ‘[s]ome public houses are undoubtedly necessary’, but also that ‘Hospitality might in some degree supply the want of them and actually does so in some countries.’ Fletcher was aware of the needs of an associational society but thought that the effect of true religion would be that people would open their homes to one another to meet those needs. A part of his concern was with the commercialization of this associational culture, for he assigned blame not only to those who frequented the alehouse, but also to the tipplers who ‘think they have a right to pick up a maintenance by ministering to the idleness and cruelty to their neighbours because ... they cannot live by it without encouraging drunkenness’. By the time of Fletcher’s death, the situation had improved considerably. Thus, in 1786, Mary Fletcher wrote:

We have, I believe, in this Parish about eighteen Ale-houses, which have ever been great Nurseries for Sin on Sabbath-Day Evenings. To reform these Abuses, has been for many years [Fletcher’s] unwearied

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118 JF→CH, 10 Sept. 1763.
119 JF→CW, 12 Oct. 1761.
120 Watts, ‘Why Did the English Stop Going to Church?’, 5-6.
121 Ibid.
123 JF→[J. Cavendish], [23 Nov. 1783].
124 A considerable reduction since Fletcher’s earlier frustration that there were thirty alehouses in Madeley. In 1793, Archdeacon Plymley recorded that there were twenty-four alehouses. J. Plymley, et al. ‘Ecclesiastical Notes and Descriptive Accounts of Parishes within the Archdeaconry of Salop’ (B1.2).
Endeavour; but seldom finding a Church-Warden willing to second him therein, his Attempts were too often rendered ineffectual.125

From 1783 to 1785 the Madeley churchwarden’s ‘Heart was in his Duty ... and [he] desired to adhere to the oath he had taken’. Thus he supported Fletcher’s efforts at combating the alehouse and encouraging attendance at worship.126 In this same period Fletcher found advocates in some of the gentry, including the Quaker lord of the manor and Coalbrookdale Company manager Richard Reynolds, who had laid ‘out walks in the woods’. These ‘were a source of much innocent enjoyment, especially on Sunday, when the men, accompanied by their wives and children, were induced to spend their afternoon or evening there, instead of at the public house.’127 Fletcher was encouraged by the unity in concern for reform between the vestry and the gentry and focussed his attention on those who absented themselves from worship. ‘He then renewed his Endeavours with Vigor’, wrote his widow, ‘and added to his Sabbath-Day’s Labor, that of visiting several of these [ale-] Houses ... bearing his Testimony in every one’.128 Although attendance numbers are unknown, reports of an increase in the size of the congregation were made on multiple occasions. If some refused to attend church, it was not for lack of exertion on the part of the vicar.

**Fletcher’s Preaching in Madeley**

If worship was the centre of parochial duty, the sermon was its most prominent feature, a characteristic of both evangelical and mainstream varieties of Anglicanism.129 In consideration of the reluctance of parishioners throughout England in the eighteenth century to attend services where there was not a sermon,130 it is not surprising then that preaching was Fletcher’s top priority. ‘[I]f I am called at all’, he wrote, ‘I am called to preach’.131 And again: ‘E]very minister should be able to say, with St. Paul, Christ sent me not, principally to baptize, but to

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128 *HLF*, 16.
preach the Gospel. He had spent the majority of his pastoral efforts since his ordination on this task, and it was his preaching in Madeley church that first year for which he was called an enthusiast leading to his dismissal from his curacy.

As a guest in Church of England pulpits around Shrewsbury, he earned the same reputation with other clergy as he had with his predecessor in Madeley. Fletcher first preached in Shrewsbury on 19 June 1757 in the Atcham parish church on James 4:4, ‘Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of this world is enmity against God?’, to the consternation of the congregation. He was allowed into the same church to read prayers in 1759, but was not allowed to preach. When in London (where he lived with his patron for several months each year), he preached in French to Huguenot congregations in Spitalfields, to the congregation at Wesley’s West Street Chapel, and to the ‘French prisoners on their parole, at Tunbridge’ (until the bishop of London interfered). When Fletcher returned to Shropshire with the Hills in August 1758, he had hoped to continue his preaching ministry there. However, he was disappointed:

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\text{[O]n my arrival I found everyone prejudiced against me, and above all the Clergy ... I let them be and keep myself closeted in my room, waiting for the Great door-keeper himself to open the gate to preaching.}\]

When in autumn 1760 his clerical adversaries—those Shropshire clergymen who had closed their pulpits to him—to his surprise, offered to support his appointment to Madeley, it generated nearly as much anxiety as it did comfort. Thus with some

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trepidation but with a confidence in providence, Fletcher entered his pulpit immediately after his induction to Madeley, preaching his first sermon on Sunday morning, 26 October.

The Canons required at least one sermon ‘every Sunday of the year’, in which the clergyman was to ‘divide the word of truth, to the glory of God, and to the best edification of the people’. A particular hermeneutics or homiletics, however, was not specified, giving freedom to the clergy to preach according to their own style of exposition. Such liberty makes the general homogeneity of sermon styles and content among mainline Anglicans and evangelicals all the more remarkable, with the Liturgy of the church framing the sermon, and suggesting (though not mandating) the texts chosen for the day. Hermeneutics and homiletics were hotly debated in the eighteenth century, with no general consensus. Yet some content was prescribed. For example, the clergy were to preach at least twice a year at services where they would ‘positively and plainly preach ... that the rites and ceremonies [of the] Church of England are lawful and commendable ... and that the people ... ought willingly to submit ... unto the authority and government of the church as it is now established’.

Given the range of methodological options, ecclesiastical liberty, varying degrees of homiletical education, and the developing emphasis of practical divinity, some eclecticism would be expected.

Fletcher’s own approach reflected this eclecticism and it is worth looking at how his preaching developed over time as he became accustomed to parish ministry. Hundreds of his sermon outlines and several manuscript-style (i.e. written-out) sermons have survived, along with some testimonies regarding his preaching by his contemporaries, and his own descriptions of his preaching in letters. These sources help to elucidate what formed so significant a portion of his ministry. There are several aspects to be examined here: first, how did the fact that English was his second language affect his ability to communicate effectively in his preaching in Madeley? Second, what was the form of his preaching in terms of the medium (e.g.

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142 Fletcher’s pulpit was a three-decker, with a flat-panelled, wood design (only the top portion remains today). It is not clear where this stood in relation to the altar, but it is known that private pews increasingly encroached upon the chancel from the late seventeenth century. VCH, Shropshire, 11:59-66; Hereford Episc. Reg. (B1.6); cf. Mather, ‘Georgian Churchmanship’, 264.
143 JF CW, 7 Nov. 1760.
144 Canons, 572.
Language and Presentation

Several references have been made already to Fletcher’s French-Swiss background. Was language, however, an obstacle for him in Madeley? There is much to suggest that he had achieved competency in English by the time he was ordained. But his French accent and way of speaking he never fully shed. One of his early Methodist auditors wrote after hearing him at West Street Chapel: ‘He could not well find words in the English language to express himself, but he supplied that defect by offering up prayers, tears, and sighs.’ This did not, apparently, render his preaching ineffective over the long term. In the estimation of some, Fletcher’s oratorical abilities quite matched those of his writing. One hearer wrote that he would rather have heard one sermon from M. de la Flechere, *viva voce*, than read a volume of his works ... His words were clothed with power, and entered with effect. His writings are arrayed in all the garb of human literature. But his living word soared an eagle’s flight above humanity ... In short, his preaching was *apostolic*; while his writings, tho’ enlightened, are but *human*.

It is uncertain when he heard Fletcher, but it is clear that for this person, no impediment of speech interfered with either medium or message. However, Fletcher’s French-speaking background seems to have been, in his own mind, a cultural distinction which demonstrably affected his writing style, and undoubtedly his speaking as well. Thus he referred to his ‘brogue’, his ‘blunt honesty’ and his ‘plainness’ as Swiss characteristics and he was occasionally self-conscious of his ‘suisse reason’ in his theologizing. Evidence that his French accent and manner of preaching disposed him to the same stylistic liabilities as his writing was provided by

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147 A detailed examination of the content of Fletcher’s sermons can be found in Appendix 1.
148 Lawton, *Shropshire Saint*, 35-65. A (simplistic) rendering of Fletcher’s French accent can be found in *WMM* (1841), 746.
149 MacDonald, *Fletcher of Madeley*, 49.
150 Quoted by Gilpin in ‘Notes’, 1:67.
151 JF→CH, 12 Apr. 1769.
one of Wesley’s preachers, who heard Fletcher preach in Bristol in 1772. In contrast to the correspondent who would have rather heard Fletcher preach than to have read his works, Pawson wrote:

[H]e is a lively, zealous preacher ... yet I admire him much more as a writer than as a preacher. He being a foreigner, there is a kind of roughness [which] attends his language that is not grateful to an English hearer; and the English not being his mother tongue, he sometimes seems to be at a loss for words.¹⁵³

If this was the case in 1772, it is likely that the problem would only have been amplified in his preaching in Madeley twelve years earlier. There is nothing to suggest his congregation responded negatively to his accent, but only to his bluntness. His accent became less pronounced the longer he was in England. He noted in 1770 that he had even lost some of his native ability to speak French.¹⁵⁴

And, in a preface to a published sermon preached first in 1762, but revised and preached again in 1773, Fletcher wrote apologetically regarding his editorial changes to the published version: ‘as I understand English a little better than I did twelve years ago, I shall be permitted to rectify a few French idioms, which I find in my old manuscript; and to connect my thoughts a little more like an Englishman’.¹⁵⁵ His brogue was not always as off-putting as Pawson’s comment might imply. Wesley wrote: ‘I do not wonder [Fletcher] should be so popular; not only because he preaches with all his might, but because the power of God attends both his preaching and prayer.’¹⁵⁶ Gilpin was perhaps the most laudatory:

[H]is first care was, in simplicity and godly sincerity, to declare the truth as it is in Jesus ... There was an energy in his preaching that was irresistible. His subjects, his language, his gestures, the tone of his voice, and the turn of his countenance, all conspired to fix the attention and affect the heart.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ JF→JI, 30 Dec. 1769; 13 Jan. 1770.
¹⁵⁵ WJF (C), 1:428.
¹⁵⁶ WJW; 23:218.
Given such verve, the early growth of his congregation in Madeley is not surprising. His preaching style, however, as would be expected, did evolve, with some of the most significant changes in his sermons occurring quite early on.

The Form of Fletcher’s Sermons

As alluded to above, Fletcher demonstrated a marked eclecticism in the forms of his preaching. He preached at various times by reading the Homilies of the Church of England,\textsuperscript{158} reading other sermons by English divines (esp. Bp. Latimer), reading his own manuscript sermons, preaching from his own sermon outlines, and preaching fully extempore expositions. The first three of these have often been associated with non-evangelical styles of preaching, dominant among mainstream Anglican clergy, and traditionally taken to connotes either sloth (the clergy being too lazy to write their own sermons), or ineptitude (the clergy being inexperienced or untrained in hermeneutics or homiletics). In contrast, the preaching of Methodists and evangelical dissenting preachers, it has been suggested, was primarily extempore, fresh, ‘energetic and colloquial’, and ostensibly popular compared to that of the Establishment, thus giving chapel religion an evangelistic edge over the church.\textsuperscript{159} Some have even (incorrectly) assumed that Fletcher’s practice was to preach exclusively from an outline or extempore. For example, Shipley claimed Fletcher was a model of the ‘Methodist clergymen’ of the eighteenth century who ‘meant to preach[,] not to read sermons prepared by others or themselves.’\textsuperscript{160} (It is an interesting irony that while reading sermons from the pulpit was supposedly condemned by the Methodists and evangelicals, it was, as Smollet’s ‘Henry Davis’ alleged, individuals from these groups who bought and read sermons privately in their homes or meetings.\textsuperscript{161})

In truth, Fletcher did not see preaching extempore as some sort of magical medium intrinsically more prone to gospel success. He was actually critical of extempore preaching when it was done irresponsibly. When he heard Rev. Talbot\textsuperscript{162}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[158] According to the Canons, reading the Homilies to a congregation was not, technically speaking, ‘preaching’, for even those clergy who were unlicensed to preach were allowed to do this. \textit{Canons}, 335.
\item[161] [Tobias Smollett], \textit{The Expedition of Humphry Clinker}, 3 vols. (London, 1771), 1:xii.
\item[162] i.e. Rev. William Talbot.
\end{footnotes}
preach ‘partly Extempore’ at the Shrewsbury Assizes he thought that the sermon ‘needed more meditation prior to its presentation.’ Even Wesley recommended that his preachers might read or expound the sermons of others as a means of maintaining sound doctrine. He commented in his *Journal* on 13 May 1754: ‘I began explaining, to the morning congregation, Bolton’s ‘Directions for Comfortable Walking with God.’ I wish all our Preachers ... would herein follow my example; and frequently read in public, and enforce select portions of the *Christian Library*.’ At the same time, Fletcher was critical of those who merely read ‘over a variety of approved sermons’ as if that were the same thing as ‘preaching the Gospel.’

Fletcher saw the liabilities of both extremes. In those who preached extempore, he saw the temptation to enthusiasm. In those who read their own sermons or those written by others, he saw the temptation to oratorical art in place of heartfelt conviction. To moderate these extremes, Fletcher was himself guided by and recommended to other clergy several principles. First of all, Fletcher insisted that all good preaching must be preceded by meditation and study, especially extempore preaching which required a thorough knowledge of the bible. He saw an advantage in this. If a preacher was so well acquainted with his subject matter, then the discourse whether written or extempore would flow more naturally, and would be more representative of experimental faith. Regarding reading from a manuscript sermon, Fletcher was not critical of this as a mode of expounding, but rather saw that some pastors used this as an excuse of neglecting other duties while they were busy trying to compose a work of ‘learning and art’ rather than one of ‘conviction and zeal’. Likewise, Fletcher was clearly not opposed to reading sermons written by others on principle, but rather was critical of those who did so out of sloth or habit instead of doing so as a reflection of their own religious experience. And lastly, like Wesley, Fletcher emphasized a ‘plain style’ of preaching aimed at conversion over the ‘ornaments of theatrical eloquence’ designed to draw the applause of ‘the wise and the learned’.

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163 JF→CW, 22 Aug. 1762.
164 *WJW*, 13 May 1754.
165 *Portrait*, 1:364.
166 Ibid. 1:359-60.
167 On ‘experimental religion’, see Appendix 1.
For most of his ministry, Fletcher preached many of his sermons partly extempore—that is, they were not completely spontaneous expositions of texts chosen in the moments before the discourse was begun, but expansions upon previously-composed outlines.\textsuperscript{169} This was not always the case. There was a significant transition in his sermon-writing between his ordination, and the end of his first quarter of preaching after his induction to Madeley three-and-a-half years later. Mr Vaughn, who was his close friend and who lived with the Hill family at Tern during Fletcher’s time as tutor, wrote of Fletcher’s sermon preparation in the early days after his ordination that, ‘being not perfect in the English tongue, [Fletcher] wrote down all the sermons he delivered’.\textsuperscript{170} Those which are extant from before 1760 confirm this testimony.\textsuperscript{171} Yet the majority of Fletcher’s holograph and published sermons consist only of brief outlines,\textsuperscript{172} and his transition from writing sermons out fully to allowing these abbreviations to suffice was primarily a matter of practicality.

His opportunities to preach before he was beneficed were limited, and therefore had more time to prepare manuscript discourses. Once inducted to Madeley, however, and as his preaching ministry expanded during the first few weeks, he found this practice to be inexpedient.\textsuperscript{173} Furthermore, in crafting his message, he often found himself wanting to expand upon his points. He explained to Lady Huntingdon, ‘I have hitherto wrote my sermons, but am carried so far beyond my notes when in the pulpit, that I propose preaching with only my sermon-case in my hand next Friday’.\textsuperscript{174} Streiff has judged by the number of extant outlines that these formed his primary form of sermon.\textsuperscript{175} However, there is some evidence which points to his practice of circulating his sermons after he preached them, which would

\addcontentsline{toc}{section}{Notes}

\textsuperscript{169} Cf. \textit{HofM}, 146; Baker, ‘Fletcher’s Sermon Notes’, 30-32; Tyerman’s claim that ‘Fletcher seldom wrote his sermons, and more rarely read them, is, judging form the manuscript evidence, an exaggeration. \textit{WDS}, 67.

\textsuperscript{170} \textit{Lff}, 43; \textit{JFCH}, 19 Nov. 1760.

\textsuperscript{171} See Appendix 2; There is also, printed in E.S. Tipple, \textit{Some Famous Country Parishes}, (New York, 1911), a plate labelled ‘Manuscript Sermon of Fletcher’s’. This, however, is not one of Fletcher’s sermons. The manuscript from which the plate was made is at GCAH, and is part of a larger collection, many others of which are at SRO: 2280/16/4-67. Internal evidence confirms that these were written no earlier than 1817.

\textsuperscript{172} See Appendix 2.

\textsuperscript{173} Compare Newton’s reverse transition at Olney from extempore to manuscript. H.M.C. \textit{Manuscripts of the Earl of Dartmouth} (London, 1887-96), 175.

\textsuperscript{174} \textit{JFCH}, 19 Nov. 1760.

\textsuperscript{175} \textit{RS}, 85.
indicate that more were written-out than the archives suggest.\textsuperscript{176} If this was so, it could explain why fewer of them are extant (having been circulated rather than kept with Fletcher’s own records). Sometimes Fletcher wrote down some of his sermons in fuller versions after they had been preached, as he did with his sermon at the Birches.\textsuperscript{177} His concern for the true repentance of his hearers was paramount and he went to great lengths to render his parishioners without excuse for their lack of response to the gospel message.\textsuperscript{178} He was just as keen to educate them in sound doctrine (see Chapter Five), and it was not uncommon for him to write out the substance of a sermon in a letter to his parishioners,\textsuperscript{179} or to make several copies of a sermonic tract or treatise by hand for circulation in the parish.\textsuperscript{180}

There was at least a small readership for Fletcher’s printed sermons in Madeley, even if they were hand-written copies, which might indicate the approbation of his parishioners concerning his preaching. For, if people wanted to read sermons after they had already heard them preached, it was surely not a sign of complaint, but of satisfaction in at least the content if not their preacher’s performance. It would thus appear, that while there have been some who complained about recycling messages in the pulpit,\textsuperscript{181} some people viewed sermons as they did religious books, not to be read once and thrown away, but to be shelled and read again or passed on to friends for spiritual edification. As Jacob has pointed out, repeating one’s discourses may have been indicative not of clerical idleness, but of pastoral sedulity, faithfully declaring orthodox doctrine.\textsuperscript{182} In any case, Fletcher’s repetition of sermons or themes of sermons, as Gregory has suggested of the eighteenth-century practice in general, served in part to inculcate essential religious truths amongst ignorant parishioners.\textsuperscript{183} Furthermore, at least in Fletcher’s case in Madeley, repetition of sermons was also indicative of his self-conscious attempts at improving upon a discourse previously preached. As early as 1760 both he and

\textsuperscript{176} By this means, one of his sermons came into the hands of a critic eleven years after it was originally preached.
\textsuperscript{177} Fletcher, \textit{Phenomenon}, 1-34.
\textsuperscript{178} JFÆMiss Hatton, 13 Jan. 1766
\textsuperscript{179} See JFÆMadeley Parishioners, 30 Apr. 1766; 23 Sept. 1766.
\textsuperscript{180} See JFÆSermon, Eph. 2:9, (B1.9). This practice seems to have been his \textit{modus operandi} for sermons and tracts against dissenters. See JFÆSermon, 1 Tim. 4:1-3, \textit{HJF}(C), 4:211-14; JFÆCW, 5 Jan. 1763; JFÆA. Darby, 22 Nov. 1764.
\textsuperscript{181} P. Doddridge warned preachers not only against repeating sermons, but against using the same text in different sermons and against plagiarism. \textit{Lectures on Preaching} (Boston, 1805), 73-74.
\textsuperscript{182} Jacob, \textit{Clerical Profession}, 262.
\textsuperscript{183} \textit{RRR}, 239.
Charles Wesley changed their ‘manner of preaching’ to emphasize experiential faith over mere verbal declarations of faith when they saw that there were many ‘professors’ of religion who did not live up to their professions.\(^\text{184}\)

Thus, when in April 1773, he preached his sermon ‘Salvation by Grace’ (Romans 11:5ff.), which he had first preached in 1762, it gave him opportunity to correct it in several ways, which he noted: First, it allowed him to refine his theological position, strengthening his proclamation of ‘free grace’. His correction in this case was to better tread a middle way between ‘free grace’ and ‘faithful obedience’. Noting his earlier lack of moderation between these doctrines in his earlier sermon, he wrote: ‘A preacher should do justice to every part of the Scripture: nor should he blunt one edge of the sword of the Spirit, under pretence of making the other sharper. This I inadvertently did sometimes in the year 1762. May God endue me with wisdom that I may not do it in 1774!’\(^\text{185}\) Second, he was able to expunge ‘unguarded expressions’ he had used in his early days as a preacher in Madeley. And finally, he was able to craft it better to suit ‘an audience chiefly made up of colliers and rustics,’ suggesting that his earlier sermon had been, perhaps, too high minded for that part of his congregation.\(^\text{186}\)

It was mentioned above that on several occasions during his first year in Madeley, Fletcher preached his own sermons in the morning, but read either one of the Homilies or sermons by other English divines (such as Bishop Hopkins and Archbishop Ussher) in the afternoon. His primary reason for doing this was to quell the concerns of his parishioners regarding his ‘enthusiasm’ or ‘Methodism’ which they associated with his conversionist sermons and the zealousness with which he preached them. It is significant that his strategy seemed to have worked. For as much as the vibrant preaching of the Methodists and dissenters has been hailed by historians over and against the droning readings of sermons by the clergy of the Establishment, from which it has been generally inferred that Methodism was ‘popular religion’,\(^\text{187}\) the fact that Fletcher's congregation was somewhat pacified by hearing that his evangelical doctrines were to be found in the teachings of the church, suggests that Anglicanism had its own popular appeal at the parish level.

\(^{184}\) CW→S.W., 15 Mar. 1760 (B1.9).
\(^{185}\) WJF (B), 2:317-23.
\(^{186}\) Ibid. 1:450.
\(^{187}\) Russell, Clerical Profession, 89.
The structure of his sermons, both written-out and outline, generally followed a pattern of introduction, main points (with any number of sub-points), and application, though he rarely labelled the sections as such. They were often written, however, on very small pieces of paper, some only two inches by four inches, and his script would easily have fit Swift’s description of preachers who wrote, ‘in so diminutive a Manner, with ... frequent Blots and Interlineations’. His natural skill as an extemporaneous speaker, however, compensated for his rudimentary notes, and he seems to have represented the ideal of Goldsmith who wrote on the nature of true eloquence in preaching:

’T’he good preacher should adopt no model, write no sermons, study no periods; let him but understand his subject, the language he speaks, and be convinced of the truths he delivers. It is amazing to what heights eloquence of this kind may reach!

While Fletcher’s sermons were notably prolix, they were organized, and preaching from an outline gave him the liberty to expand or contract his sermons as he saw fit. It also allowed him more freedom of expression that he might suit his discourse better to his audience, being unconstrained by a manuscript. It is notable that he associated the expediency of outlines with the practicality of reserving time during the week, (which would have otherwise been spent on writing out sermons), for his other pastoral duties. In addition, some qualification of the term ‘extempore’ preaching is necessary, for the term seems to have at once evoked a particular image in the minds of those who had experienced it, and at the same time offered a range of possibilities from preaching spontaneously with little or no preparation to reciting a memorized manuscript, with variations in between.

There were those clergy for whom their ‘sermons, carefully composed, were read from the pulpit as literary exercises’, reading ‘his lucubration without lifting

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188 Cf. RS. 85-87.
190 O. Goldsmith, The Bee and Other Essays (London, 1739), 205.
191 LJW, 6:146.
193 See for example the anecdotes comparing the preaching of the Anglican Rowland Hill with that of the erstwhile Anglican turned Nonconformist minister, Thomas Clayton (b. 1754), in T.W. Aveling (ed.) Memorials of the Clayton Family (London, 1867), 118-122.
194 Quoted in Hart, Country Parson, 41.
his nose from the text, and never venturing] to earn the shame of an enthusiast’,
but Fletcher was not among them. He, on this point, was more in agreement with
Sterne’s ‘Yorick’, who colloquized: ‘To preach, to show the extent of our reading or
the subtleties of our wit ... with the beggarly accounts of a little learning tinselled
over ... but convey little light and less warmth—is a dishonest use’. Fletcher
instructed that preachers should not in fact work their sermons over ad nauseam,
and insisted that they should be so well-studied and ready to declare the gospel at a
moment’s notice. In a note of sarcasm, he wrote that if St Paul had wanted preachers
to imitate public orators, he would have written to Timothy, ‘I advise thee to write
over thy sermons as correctly as possible. And after this, do not fail to rehearse them
before a mirror ... so that ... thou mayest effectually secure the approbation of thine
auditors ... The idea of such a passage ... is too absurd to be endured.’ Chidingly,
he added,

After perceiving the house of our neighbour on fire, we do not
withdraw to our closet to prepare a variety of affecting arguments ...
In such case, a lively conviction of our neighbour’s danger ... afford
us greater powers of natural eloquence, than any rules of art can
furnish us with.

He articulated the correlative responsibility of his congregation at Madeley,
exhorting them to listen attentively to sermons. He wrote to his flock with specific
instructions regarding this theme. He advised them to grow under whomever their
preacher was and to pray before going to church to be better prepared to receive the
message. But the final point brought the former two into a specific focus on how they
were to apply these principles: ‘When you are under the word, beware of sitting as
judges, and not as criminals. Many judge of the manner, matter, voice, and person of
the preacher. You, perhaps, judge all the congregation, when you should judge
yourselves worthy of eternal death; and yet, worthy of eternal life’. In this way,
Fletcher was countering preachers who pandered to polite society by polishing their
orations rather than speaking plainly and reasonably, yet with urgency. Likewise he

195 Goldsmith, Bee, 201.
197 Portrait, 1:359.
198 Ibid. 1:360.
199 JF→Madeley Parishioners, 23 Sept. 1766.
was correcting hearers who preferred such polish to a plain message received resulting in an actual change in their own spiritual disposition.

In sum, Fletcher’s sermons were eclectic in form, shaped according to foundational principles of preparedness, humility, and earnest evangelical concern for those in his congregation. The frequency with which he preached facilitated constant meditation on religious subjects and regular practice. Improvement was partially a matter of experience and partially a matter of self-conscious discipline, which Fletcher applied as well to the subject matter of his discourses to which we now look.

**Effect of Fletcher’s Preaching**

Fletcher was characteristically melancholy regarding the effect of his preaching. As when he wrote to Charles Wesley: ‘[M]y preaching seems to be like the tinkling of a cymbal. No sinners seem to me to cry out, What shall I do to be saved? and few professors grow in grace.’

Similarly he wrote to Walter Sellon: ‘I preach much see little fruit.’ Nevertheless, people were converted as a result of his preaching. Indeed, there is a recorded instance from when Fletcher preached in Sellon’s church at Breedon.

Jane Sansom, a parishioner there, ‘heard him preach ... and under his powerful ministry she was enabled to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ’. The effect was the same on some of his own parishioners in Madeley as well. One parishioner, still living in 1804, expressed her gratefulness for Fletcher’s preaching: ‘[G]lory be to God, that ever Mr. Fletcher came into this parish, for under one sermon that he preached, the Lord opened my blind eyes, and I roared out for the disquietude of my soul; under another sermon ... a new song was put into my mouth on even praise and thanksgiving to God.’

In 1782, another Madeley congregant, George Perks was ‘struck’ one Sunday ‘with some of Mr. Fletcher’s expressions’ in a sermon, and resolved to go speak to him at the vicarage the next day. Perks remembered later that ‘he received me with open arms; and rejoiced that

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200 JF→CW, 24 Aug. 1773; also 26 May 1771.
201 JF→W. Sellon, 7 Jan. 1772.
202 Fletcher exchanged pulpits with Sellon in 1765 and again in 1770. On Sellon, see BI.
203 *WMM* (1825), 583.
I was come on such an account', and Perks was eventually (though not immediately) converted under Fletcher’s teaching. 205

There were of course times that ‘his word was not ... attended with so much power’, 206 but he was certainly more effective in his evangelistic proclamations than his own reports would suggest. Fletcher himself was sometimes genuinely uncertain of this. Because of his eclectic approach to preaching, he was curious how different forms (i.e. extempor, from a manuscript, etc.) altered the reception of a sermon. On one occasion when he was in the pulpit and had no notes and could not even remember his text, he decided to preach upon the First Lesson for Morning Prayer which was Daniel, chapter three, 207 which contains ‘the account of the three children cast into the fiery furnace’. ‘I found in doing it’, he wrote, ‘such an extraordinary assistance from God ... that I supposed there must be some peculiar cause for it.’ When he finished preaching, he asked his congregation to speak to him of any effect his providential may have had. The request appears to have been in earnest, but it is without question that it served a rhetorical purpose as well, for by asking his auditors to give an account, he was also encouraging them to apply his words to their daily lives. A woman from his congregation came to him that week and told him that the sermon had special significance for her. Her husband was not a churchgoer and had previously threatened her that if she would ‘not leave off going to John Fletcher’s church ... [or] any religious meetings whatever’, he would cut her throat, then changed the threat, saying that he would throw her into the oven. Screwing up her courage, she went to church, ‘praying all the way, that God would strengthen me to suffer whatever might befal[l] me’. Upon hearing Fletcher’s extemporaneous exhortation, she went home heartened to face her husband, but when she got there she found her ‘husband upon his knees, wrestling with God, in prayer for the forgiveness of his sins.’ 208

Like the ‘furious’ husband in this anecdote, there were others who took umbrage at Fletcher’s evangelical preaching. 209 However, like or dislike of the

205 MT, ‘Memoir of George Perks’, WMM (1835), 895-900. Also see ‘Hymn to John Fletcher’ [transcribed by JF], MARC: MAM Fl. 20/14/1.

206 Macdonald, Memoirs of Benson, 131.

207 First Lesson for Nineteenth Sunday After Trinity, BCP.

208 This and the preceding extracts taken from J. Fletcher, The Furious Butcher Humbled (London, n.d.), 2-5.

209 On tensions between parishioners and Fletcher, see Chapter 4.
manner and substance of his preaching was not static. There were those like Mary Matthews of Madeley Wood who ‘felt herself much prejudiced against him’ initially, yet came to favour him over time. Her family continued to attend church, and she experienced a conversion less than two years after Fletcher’s arrival; it was in her house that Fletcher first began a ‘society’ meeting outside of the church building.210 Similarly, another early sceptic, Mary Barnard, was led to conversion by the influence of the Liturgy of the church. Her husband had, ‘read the Collect for the last Sunday before Lent [c. 1761]’, which included a prayer for mercy to follow after Christ in both his suffering and resurrection.211 ‘These words struck [her] greatly’, and after nine weeks of crying to God, Mary experienced a conversion: ‘My soul was filled with love to every creature,—I felt all that evil gone,—He made me quite new.’ Many of the testimonies of Fletcher’s effectiveness as a preacher (with some exceptions) relate to his preaching in the parish church. Many of those who were converted in the church, began thereafter to attend his society meetings which are addressed in the next chapter.

**Baptisms, Weddings and Burials**

In a rapidly growing parish like Madeley, the Baptisms, Weddings, and Burials consumed a significant portion of the vicar’s time. Fletcher was invited on several occasions to visit Bristol to preach on a weekday which would allow him to keep up his Sunday duty. However, not having a curate at the time, and typically hesitant to leave his parish lest he neglect his responsibilities, he replied that even if he wanted to leave, ‘Burials [and] Xnings – compel me to remain in place here on weekdays as well as [S]unday.’212 Fletcher saw all events as opportune and providentially provided occasions to declare the gospel. Indeed, he understood the services of the Church as spiritual starting gates, mileposts, and finish lines. Thus, at the wedding of one couple, he took the opportunity to encourage their faith, noting the rites in their order and significance:

> Well William, you have had your name entered into our register once before this [at his baptism] ... now your name will be entered a second time [i.e., marriage] ... Recollect, however, that a third entry of

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210 *WMM* (1800), 219-22.
211 The Epistle for the day was Philippians 2:5-11 and the Gospel was Matthew 27:1-54. *BCP*.
212 *JF ➔ CW*, 22 Aug. 1764.
your name,—the register of your burial will sooner or later take place. Think, then, about death; and make preparation for that also.\textsuperscript{213}

\textit{Baptisms}

It is difficult to evaluate Fletcher’s practice of baptism in Madeley, for there was little documentation of this Sacrament other than the baptism registers. Under all but extraordinary circumstances, baptisms were to be conducted (publicly) in the parish church.\textsuperscript{214} Fletcher makes no mention of the common problem of requests by the gentry for private baptisms.\textsuperscript{215} The Canons did make an exception for private baptisms in cases of emergency. Indeed, the clergy were required to hasten to the home of a dying infant when notified, and refusal to do so was punishable by suspension.\textsuperscript{216} More than one-third of the burials during Fletcher’s incumbency were infants,\textsuperscript{217} and numbers of those burials had occurred on the same day as or within a month of the baptism on weekdays, suggesting that emergency baptisms, while exceptional, were probably not uncommon.\textsuperscript{218}

The seriousness with which Fletcher carried out baptisms in Madeley may be inferred from the emphasis he placed on the teachings of the church regarding it, and the frequency with which he reminded his parishioners that the real significance of the rite. In his writing against solifidianism and antinomianism he drew heavily upon the Baptismal Office as well as the Collects and the Catechism to demonstrate the necessity of the new birth, declaring: ‘How dreadful the error of those who imagine that all whose faces have been typically washed with the material water in baptism are now effectually “born again of” living “water and the Holy ‘Spirit’”?

Thus he often enjoined the necessity to ‘stand to our baptismal vow:—to renounce all sin, to believe all the articles of the Christian faith, and to keep God’s commandments to the end of our life.’\textsuperscript{219}

\textsuperscript{213} \textit{WMM} (1823), 257.
\textsuperscript{214} \textit{BCP}.
\textsuperscript{215} Cf. Jacob, \textit{Clerical Profession}, 194-95.
\textsuperscript{216} \textit{Canons}, 359.
\textsuperscript{217} i.e. Children up to seven years old.
\textsuperscript{218} Mad. Bap. Reg.; Mad. Bur. Reg.; The norm set by the 68th Canon was for baptisms to take place on Sundays or holy days, but in cases of emergency, this was overridden by necessity. \textit{Canons}, 359.
\textsuperscript{219} JF\rightarrow Madeley Parishioners, 13 Jan. 1777, paraphrasing the Catechism, \textit{BCP}. 114
Weddings

Population increase in Madeley between 1760 and 1785 was not mirrored by a correlative increase in marriages. Even so, weddings averaged 18.6 annually, and during his incumbency Fletcher officiated at 279 ceremonies.\textsuperscript{220} Weddings, were held on various days of the week, but the largest proportion—one fourth of them— took place on Mondays, with another fifth occurring on Sundays. This coincided with the cultural schedule of the parish. These events were accompanied by large celebrations, another example of the centrality of the parish church to the local community.\textsuperscript{221} Such celebrations, as Malmgreen has astutely observed, provided opportunities for a priest to become better acquainted with this flock.\textsuperscript{222}

Fletcher held a different standard for himself regarding marriage than he did for his parishioners. His conservatism towards clerical marriage stemmed from a concern that only a wife who shared his evangelical dedication would allow him to fulfil his calling as a parish priest.\textsuperscript{223} Despite the fact that Fletcher was hesitant to enter into matrimony himself, he did not discourage marriage amongst his parishioners. As he wrote to Charles Wesley: ‘I take care not to speak of [marriage] with disrespect ... I recommend it in the fear of God: I have gone further, I have myself single-handed made a marriage between two people of our Society;\textsuperscript{224} and nonetheless with regard to myself it seems to me from day to day that I am called to live as St. Paul.’\textsuperscript{225} The seriousness with which Fletcher viewed marriage as a religious rite was well-known by his parishioners, and one such was even anxious of appearing before him for the ceremony, ‘lest the drapery she wore should call forth some admonition’ from him.\textsuperscript{226} In general Fletcher appears to have conducted marriages in conformity to parish expectations, though in 1763 he brought himself into conflict when he conducted a marriage in the afternoon under ‘particular circumstances’.\textsuperscript{227} As a measure to prevent clandestine weddings, the Canons required that they be conducted in the hours of Morning Prayer when the parish was

\textsuperscript{220} Mad. Mar. Reg. Weddings occurred with significantly less frequency on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays.
\textsuperscript{221} IRS (3rd), 201-202.
\textsuperscript{222} Malmgreen, Silk Town, 31.
\textsuperscript{225} JF\textright CW, 31 Jan. 1765.
\textsuperscript{226} WMM (1863), 162-69.
\textsuperscript{227} JF\textright CW, 9 Sept. 1763.
gathered and the event would thus be public. At the time that Fletcher made an exception (for which the Canons allowed), there were some of his parishioners who were already concerned with his religious society meetings (see Chapter 4), which might also explain the upset caused by this apparently singular occurrence.\footnote{Canons, 215, 353.}

Nothing, however, came of the incident.

Fletcher had considered marriage—to Mary Bosanquet—around the time of his acceptance of the call to Madeley, and rehearsed his reasons for and against the possibility of his getting married in a letter three years later to Charles Wesley.\footnote{JF\rightarrow CW, 9 Sept. 1763.} Mary’s feelings toward Fletcher were mutual, however, neither of them knew of the other’s intent.\footnote{LMF, 1:170-72; SAJF, 133.} One of the reasons Fletcher believed he could not make a proposal to Mary Bosanquet in the 1760s was that his wealth was unequal to hers.\footnote{JF\rightarrow C. Bosanquet, 22 Sept. 1781.} When in 1781, he returned from the continent in tolerable health and was reacquainted with Miss Bosanquet, both of their financial situations had changed. She had an annuity, yet because she had contracted considerable debts she was not wealthy; he, on the other hand, had inherited part of his family’s estate in Switzerland. Thus their situations were then comparable, freeing Fletcher to propose. They were married on 12 November 1781. Their marriage was as much a commitment to ministry in the church as it was to each other. In the Covenant Service that followed the wedding, Mr Fletcher asked Mrs Fletcher: ‘Will you join with me in joining ourselves in a perpetual covenant to the Lord? Will you with me serve Him in his members? Will you help me to bring souls to the blessed Redeemer? ... She answered ... “May my God help me so to do!”’\footnote{SAJF, 139.} Fletcher assured his flock that his marriage was not only for his own but for their benefit as well\footnote{MJMF, MARC: MAM Fl. 40/4/2.} and wrote gratefully to a friend: ‘God has found me a partner, a sister, a wife, ... who is not afraid to face with me the colliers and bargemen of my parish until death part us. Buried together in our country village, we shall help one another to trim our lamps’.\footnote{JF\rightarrow The Hon. Mrs C——, 26 Dec. 1781.}
Burials

Perhaps no one in Madeley was as familiar with the brevity of life in the parish as Fletcher, who was responsible for burying the dead. In addition to natural deaths, accidents were remarkably common. Barges sank drowning their crews, explosions sometimes killed both miners and furnacemen, and there is no scarcity of accounts of men, women and children dying by either falling into the mouth of an open pit or a chasm caused by mining subsidence. Epidemics were particularly hard on infants and the elderly. In all, there were over 1,200 burials during Fletcher’s incumbency, an average of fifty per year, and Fletcher was keen to make the most of every opportunity to remind his parishioners of the uncertainty of life. ‘Use more prayer before you go to church’, he reminded them, ‘Consider that your next appearance there may be in a coffin’.\textsuperscript{235} Upon hearing of an accident which had taken several lives while Fletcher was away in 1776, he graphically recalled the incident, urging repentance: ‘May the awful accident … May the sound of their bodies, dashed to pieces at the bottom of a pit, rouse us to a speedy conversion … Let the long suffering of God towards us, who survive the hundreds I have buried, lead us all to repentance.’\textsuperscript{236} In this way, burials were a constant reminder of the centrality of the church to parish life.

Care for the Church

As Taylor and Walsh have noted, it has been a ‘frequent criticism of the … Church … that it failed to take adequate care of its places of worship.’ And they are right to conclude that neglect was not always the issue. Rather, the problem was often created by the difficulty of keeping ‘medieval fabrics in decent repair.’\textsuperscript{237} This was certainly the case with the Norman building in Madeley, which had the concomitant problems of structural deficiency caused by mining subsidence. The churchwarden accounts reveal that the windows were frequently glazed, and the ropes, bells, clock, church doors, locks, gallery, ironwork, steps, poor box, steeple, chancel mats, floor tiles, and Fletcher’s clerical garments were all kept in good repair.\textsuperscript{238} Fletcher himself was often among the first subscribers for impending needs

\textsuperscript{235} JF→Madeley Parishioners, 23 Sept. 1766.
\textsuperscript{236} Ibid. 28 Dec. 1776.
\textsuperscript{238} MCWA.
such as in 1762 when the church was re-roofed largely at his own expense. Even so, the best efforts of clergy and vestry could not keep pace with the disintegration of their aging church. Thus, during Fletcher’s incumbency new buttresses were built to support the walls and tower. Nevertheless, the building was in such a state of disrepair that, only a few years after Fletcher’s death, the old building was torn down and a new one built in its place.

**Conclusion**

Fletcher’s diligence in performing his stated duties related to worship was both in response to his own sense of calling as well as to the expectations of at least some of his parishioners. The popularity of preaching in Madeley followed the pattern of the eighteenth century more generally—where there was a sermon, people were more likely to attend a service. Fletcher took advantage of this, seeing the sermon as the chief means of evangelism by which sinners were converted, and his preaching was not without effect. The rites of the church remained central to the lives of parishioners, especially baptisms, weddings and funerals. Fletcher’s own testimony regarding his parishioners’ expectations of frequent communion and his practice of a monthly Sacrament demonstrates a degree of high churchmanship which was common of the region as a whole. In all, worship in Madeley could be characterized as consistent in provision, evangelical in content, and lively in form. Fletcher built upon this pattern to extend his ministry beyond Sabbath services in order to both evangelize and accommodate the whole of his parish. These initiatives are examined in the following chapter.

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239 JF CW, 4 Sept. 1762.
Chapter 3
Church Extension: ‘Chapel’ Ministry and the Societies in Madeley

Introduction

In March 1761, Fletcher wrote to Charles Wesley ‘Last Sunday all the aisles of my church were full as were the pews\(^1\) and a month later that there were ‘several people under the windows in the Churchyard who were not able to get into Church.’\(^2\) When John Wesley preached in Fletcher’s pulpit in 1764, he noted: ‘The church would nothing near contain the congregation. But a window near the pulpit being taken down, those who could not come in stood in the churchyard, and I believe all could hear.’\(^3\) The level of attendance had not always been so high,\(^4\) but the success of Fletcher’s tireless efforts in drawing people to church made accommodating his congregation a veritable problem. There were no Anglican chapels\(^5\) in the parish in 1760, and the old church, which seated roughly 600,\(^6\) could hold just over half of his parishioners in two services. During the following twenty-five years, the population rose to more than 3000. This chapter examines Fletcher’s strategies for extending the reach of his ministry so that the whole parish could participate in the worship of the church.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1760</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>John Fletcher’s estimate on his arrival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1782</td>
<td>2690</td>
<td>560 families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1785</td>
<td>3029(^a)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1801</td>
<td>4758</td>
<td>942 families</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) Est. pop. of Madeley calculated at a steady rate of 4% between 1782 and 1801

Madeley Population 1760-1800. Sources: P. Clark and J. Hosking, Population Estimates of English Small Towns 1550-1851, (Leicester, 1993); Whiteman, Compton Census; Plymley, GVAS; G. Perry, A Description of Coalbrookdale (c.1758); SRO: 2280/2/10-11. VCH, Shropshire, 11; Abstract of the Answers and Returns to the Population Act, 41 Geo. III. 1800 (1801 Census); IRS; Sogner, ‘17 Parishes’, 126-46.

In this sense, this chapter is a case study in eighteenth-century Anglican ‘church extension’. It also focuses on the nature and function of Methodism in the parish as Fletcher’s chief strategy to achieve the aims of extension. This included not

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1 JF\(\rightarrow\)CW, 10 Mar. 1761.
2 Ibid. 27 Apr. 1761.
4 Ibid.; MF\(\rightarrow\)Unidentified Recipient, [c.1806] (B1.9).
5 i.e. no parochial chapels or chapels of ease, on which see below in this Chapter.
6 HoD\(\rightarrow\)M, 167.
only enlarging the seating capacity of the church but also creating new venues for the spiritual needs of the laity, namely religious societies, as add-ons to worship services. As Walsh has so clearly stated it, religious societies offered what contemporary Anglicanism [otherwise] did not ... a close-knit ‘Fellowship of Christian Brotherhood’. Whatever clergymen assumed, the familiar forms of public liturgical worship, coupled with closet devotions, were not enough for some sin-sick souls in search of spiritual growth and collective moral support.7

Similarly, Brunner observed that the rise of the early religious societies was indicative of the devotional needs of the laity that went beyond the ‘formal, prescriptive ordinances of the Church ... the Liturgy and Sacraments’.8 Yet it appears that in Madeley, it was the worship services of the church that ‘stoked the fires of piety’ created a longing amongst the faithful for fellowship gatherings in addition to Sunday services—and Fletcher was keen to ‘provide a public outlet for the consequent devotion’.9 He often pressed his congregation to attend both church and society. ‘Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together’, was his constant entreaty, ‘in little companies, as well as in public.’10 Indeed for Fletcher, gathering in societies for what he called ‘social prayer’ was not an adjunct to the means of grace but was a means of grace itself flowing from the worship of the church, while simultaneously preparing the people for it.11 As he wrote in his Last Check: ‘Social prayer is closely connected with faith, in the capital promise of the sanctifying Spirit; and therefore I earnestly recommend that mean of grace, where it can be had, as being eminently conducive to the attaining of Christian Perfection.’12

Although historians have tended to exaggerate Fletcher’s connexion to John Wesley as his ‘designated successor’13 and the extent to which Methodism in Madeley was that of the Wesleyan kind, the fact remains that Fletcher identified

8 Brunner, Halle Pietists, 203.
11 FL, 351.
12 WJF (B), 4:460.
13 See Chapter 4. This suggestion is most strongly made by Tyerman in WDS. However, there are serious issues of historical fact regarding Tyerman’s interpretation. On these issues, see P.S. Forsaith, ‘Wesley’s Designated Successor’, PWHS 42:3 (1979), 69-74.
himself with the evangelical emphases of Methodism and capitalized on the associationalism of the age\textsuperscript{14} to set up religious societies in his parish that were clearly influenced by Wesley’s model. Indeed like Wesley, he used the term ‘society’ with ‘evident deliberation’.\textsuperscript{15} Yet similar to some of the other evangelical clergy, Fletcher maintained superintendence of the societies rather than turning them over to Wesley or his itinerants.\textsuperscript{16} He preached in the societies himself, effectively creating a preaching rota amongst Madeley’s villages. Thereafter, he gradually extended his preaching journeys beyond his own parish into the surrounding parishes of the East Shropshire coalfield. His primary concern was to proclaim the gospel to lost sinners, and he put expediency in this cause over church polity or even his own reputation.\textsuperscript{17} For these aspects of his ministry—probably more than for his relationship with Wesley—he was denominated by his parishioners, as well as by other clergy, ‘a Methodist, a downright Methodist!’\textsuperscript{18} Such early criticism, however, abated over time, though it took nearly a decade.\textsuperscript{19}

The juxtaposition of these two emphases—church extension and Methodism—may seem paradoxical, for the former is an emphasis on ‘Established’ or ‘church’ religion while the latter is an emphasis on what has often been construed as an ever-separating movement of ‘chapel’ religion, supposedly in competition rather than cooperation with the Church of England. Gilbert, for example, has asserted that there was a ‘bitter confrontation’ based on an inverse relationship between church and chapel, characterized by the decreasing relevance of the Establishment and the increasing ‘capacity of Evangelical Nonconformity to satisfy widespread individual and communal needs.’\textsuperscript{20} Another way of explaining this relationship has been to contrast Established ‘church’ religion with popular ‘chapel’ religion, which in the conventional view has been categorized as ‘the non-institutional religious beliefs and practises, including unorthodox conceptions of Christian doctrine and ritual

\textsuperscript{17} Cox, \textit{Life of Fletcher}, 1st edn., viii-ix, 176.
\textsuperscript{18} JF→CH, 6 Jan. 1761. In 1768, Fletcher was implicated in the St Edmund Hall controversy over the expulsion of six students, one of which, a James Matthews, was reputed a Methodist for his association with Fletcher. R. Hill, \textit{Pietas Oxoniensis} (London, 1768), 8-9. But compare Baker’s opinion that it was his connexion with Wesley that implicated his Methodism. ‘John Fletcher’, 291-98.
\textsuperscript{19} See Chapter 4.
\textsuperscript{20} Gilbert, \textit{Religion and Society}, 8, 69.
prevalent in the lower ranks of rural society'.\textsuperscript{21} This construal has tended to reify conceptions of religious practice into static categories, suggesting that Anglican churches did not reach the masses, nor, by definition, could they, for popularization existed only outside of institution.\textsuperscript{22}

However, a number of studies conducted in the last two decades have revealed that religious participation was in fact much more fluid. According to Jacob, ‘There is evidence that the relationship was often relaxed and that the boundary between Church and dissent was porous to the extent that many dissenters attended their parish churches from time to time and that some Anglicans attended dissenting meeting houses’.\textsuperscript{23} As Gregory noted, in 1786 one rector reported: ‘Many persons in this town go to the Cathedral in the morning, to the Presbyterian meeting in the afternoon and to a Methodist meeting at night.’\textsuperscript{24} Patterns of religious practice in Madeley appear not only to confirm a permeability of the wall between church and chapel but more importantly, they indicate that the Establishment was capable of assimilating Methodist or chapel strategies for developing Anglican piety.\textsuperscript{25}

Eventually Fletcher expanded his ministry beyond Madeley into the larger coalfield and other regions. When he was away on preaching journeys, a curate preached in Madeley in his stead, or he and the minister of the church where he was preaching exchanged pulpits. This too was a part of Fletcher’s extension strategy, for he saw the advantage of his congregation hearing different preachers, if for no other reason, than to draw them to a gospel sermon by the novelty of a new voice in the pulpit.\textsuperscript{26}

As a practical necessity, Fletcher eventually resorted to preaching in the open air, in response to crowds too large to be contained in one of his meeting places.\textsuperscript{27}

All of these activities were aimed at bringing the church to the people in their respective villages, workplaces, and families using strategies that have typically been associated with evangelical dissent. That is to say, Fletcher sought to establish church religion as the religion of the people. Indeed, in the eighteenth-century, industrializing parish of Madeley any clear distinction between Established religion

\textsuperscript{23} Jacob, \textit{Lay People}, 6.
\textsuperscript{24} \textit{RRR}, 273.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid. 226.
\textsuperscript{26} JF→CW, 20 Sept. 1762; JF→Madeley Parishioners, 23 Sept. 1766; 30 Apr. 1766.
\textsuperscript{27} JF→W. Ley, 9 May [1765]; JF→CW, 12 Apr. 1765; 29 Apr. 1765; 10 May 1765.
and popular religion—church and chapel—is elusive. Thus, it is the argument of this chapter, that chapel religion in Madeley was actually best represented by Fletcher’s own variation of localized Methodism, which operated largely as an auxiliary to the church and in this way, as a form of ‘unofficial’ Anglican church extension.

**Official and Unofficial Means of Extension**

The parochial ideal of a system of territorial parishes as units ‘of ecclesiastical administration and pastoral care’, bounded areas ‘large enough in population and resources to support a church and its priest, and yet small enough for its parishioners to gather at its focal church’, remained central to church administration in the eighteenth century.28 This ideal has informed studies of church extension which have typically focused upon official means, represented by the church-building activity of the Establishment, by parochial subdivision, or by both. Sole use of official means as the form of measurement has been a key factor in shaping portrayals of the eighteenth-century church as unsuccessful in achieving its aims as a national church.29 Emphasis on official means is not altogether unwarranted. For cumbersome though the process of church-building was,30 it was the standard method for enlarging the church’s reach. The term ‘church extension’ seems not to have appeared until the first decade of the nineteenth-century, when it was used to describe an ‘initiative’ to make up for the neglect of the eighteenth-century church to improve its position by competing with other religious options in a voluntary religious marketplace. Here the obvious association of the term might be with Thomas Chalmers, a clergyman of the Scottish Kirk who chaired the Committee for Church Extension and published numerous treatises on the subject, epitomizing the nineteenth-century critique of the Hanoverian church’s failure to reform itself in response to the expanding population and changing demographic needs of industrial society. In 1821, he reflected critically that in order to bring the number of non-churchgoing population back into attendance upon the services of the church, ‘what


29 On the continuance of this ideal by the Anglican clergy into the eighteenth century, see *RRR*, 207; but compare B. Young’s study which suggests that despite a clerical ideal of a national church (if there was one) in the eighteenth century, the variations within Protestantism made any homogenous national identity based on religion tentative at best. ‘A History of Variations: The Identity of the Eighteenth-Century Church of England’, in T. Claydon and I. McBride (eds.) *Protestantism and National Identity* (Cambridge, 1999), 105-30.

a rapid process of church-building this would imply. More would need to be done in this way ... than there has been done altogether since the first erection of them.³¹

Some recent historians have followed suit. Virgin has asserted that it was ‘just as well’ that the masses did not ‘show any great enthusiasm for the services of the Church of England’, for, ‘had they all decided to attend, there would have been nowhere to put them.’³² Best asserted that not only church-building, but parochial subdivision was the necessary yet neglected response,³³ and Virgin refers to this as one of the ‘central problems’ left ‘largely untouched’ until such legislative efforts as the Church Building Act of 1818.³⁴ Similarly, Gilbert’s conclusions that the church lost ground to the chapel religion of New Dissent and Methodism rely heavily on a critique of the church’s failure to provide adequate accommodation:

This was the crux of the Anglican failure in early industrial society. Little was done ... to enlarge the Church of England as a religious service organization ... The facilities ... in terms of personnel or in terms of accommodation for religious worship, increased only marginally, if at all.³⁵

Underlying these arguments is the assumption that the official forms of extension—building new churches or chapels or creating new parishes out of larger less-manageable ones—were the only means by which the church’s aims could be realized. For example, Sykes’s observation of the difficulties presented such as the ‘cumbersome method of procedure’ involved in parochial subdivision and church-building, or the equally foreboding idea of ‘thoroughgoing reform’ of church administration, led him to claim that ‘[a]part from the independent chapels built by the Anglican evangelicals such as Grimshaw and Venn, and the sporadic erection of proprietary chapels by enterprising individuals, the national church made little

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³² Virgin, Age of Negligence, 5.
³⁴ Virgin, Age of Negligence, 3, 143.
³⁵ Gilbert, Religion and Society, 27-28; also see H.O. Wakeman, An Introduction to the History of the Church of England (London, 1908), 432.
endeavour to meet the needs of the rapidly changing social organisation.' He could have added to his examples the church built for David Simpson at Macclesfield (1775) and St James, Manchester (1786-88), built for Cornelius Bayley. Sykes's portrayal suggests that the extension which did occur represented evangelical anomalies. Yet, there was in fact much more church-building happening in the century, and not only by evangelicals. In Manchester, for example, there were thirteen new churches or chapels consecrated in the eighteenth century, not to mention those which were partially or fully rebuilt. In Shropshire, a gallery was added to Madeley church early in the century, and a new church was built to replace the dilapidated Norman building in the 1790s. A new church at Wombridge was built in 1757, and the church at Wrockwardine was beautified and repaired and a gallery added in the 1780s.

Furthermore, as Burns has illustrated in his analysis of diocesan reform in the nineteenth century, critiques by historians regarding the lack of systematic initiatives taken before the Tractarians, have eschewed the fact that throughout the eighteenth century reform was taking place from the diocese down to the parish itself. Likewise, Smith has concluded that Oldham and Saddleworth’s ‘failure to subdivide ... may have helped to create a culture of church extension’ as a foundation on which the nineteenth century church could build. Smith’s study, however, while deviating from the conventional interpretations of the eighteenth century as an age of clerical torpor in response to the needs of industrializing society, still relied partly upon evidence of official means of church extension, namely, the building of either parochial chapels or chapels of ease. Parochial chapels were unbenefficed places of Anglican worship which also had the rights of baptizing and burying, whereas chapel ‘merely of ease’ did not have rights of baptism or burial, nor was it benefited. Both were intended to make attendance at worship in the church more convenient for

36 Sykes, Church and State, 406.
37 Malmgreen, Silk Town, 148-149.
41 A. Burns, The Diocesan Revival in the Church of England, c.1800-1870 (Oxford, 1999), 16-17, 41-43, 76-78.
42 Smith, Religion, 41-42.
those who lived remote from the parish church. Smith has shown how, despite the fact that the large parishes of the north were not subdivided, the church was extended by building Anglican chapels and multiplying church services. His analysis in this regard is largely quantitative, comparing the increase in church seating with increase in population to measure density. His conclusions are signally optimistic regarding the ability of the church to rise ‘to the challenge of its new circumstances with surprising vigour and imagination.’

Smith’s study provides a contrast to Sykes’s claim that a ‘lack of missionary and evangelistic enterprise’ was ‘characteristic of the churchmanship of the century’. This gets more to the subject of pastoral care as church extension. Indeed, in Madeley it was not a scarcity but the abundance of such enterprise which can be seen in Fletcher’s efforts. To observe this, however, we need to look beyond official channels for his initiatives to accommodate all of his parishioners. Several strategies revolving around pastoral dutifulness, like multiplying services and conducting religious meetings in houses in various parts of the parish, were a partial solution that did not require an act of parliament or other cumbrous procedure but should still be considered as part of the response of the church. For such initiatives were in some cases carried out by the church’s emissaries—the parochial clergy—who even gathered on occasion to encourage one another towards such aims. Some of these practices led to what both Fletcher and his contemporaries considered ‘clerical irregularities’, and as Carter has suggested, these efforts, though expedient, often ‘involved conflict with the legal structures’. However, not all of Fletcher’s extension work was irregular. Indeed, his earliest attempts were well within canonical allowances and clerical expectations.

**Expansion of Church Services**

Church extension in Madeley was accretive, building upon the Establishment’s prescribed duties as opportunity presented, or as Fletcher saw it, as

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44 Smith, *Religion*, 34.
45 Sykes, *Church and State*, 406.
providence opened the door.\textsuperscript{48} Overton and Relton suggested that ‘The numerous week-day services [in the eighteenth century] ... became a vanishing quantity.’\textsuperscript{49} In striking contrast to claims that the bare minimum of perfunctory duties became the standard practice of the clergy\textsuperscript{50} and that the later eighteenth century evidenced a steady decline in church services,\textsuperscript{51} moving beyond the minimum was Fletcher’s first phase of church extension. His weekday preaching increased early on and remained steady thereafter. As Gilpin testified: ‘Not content with discharging the stated duties of the [S]abbath, he counted that day as lost, in which he was not actually employed in the service of the church[.] As often as a small congregation could be collected, which was usually every evening, he joyfully proclaimed to them the acceptable year of the Lord’.\textsuperscript{52} The energy with which Fletcher performed his duty was indicative of his concern to provide the opportunity for every parishioner to attend divine worship and hear a sermon more than once a week. Indeed, Fletcher admonished ministers who made excuses ‘that they neglect to proclaim that Gospel during six days in the week’.

In November 1760, Fletcher began weekly Friday evening lectures which attracted more parishioners than he had anticipated and elicited a favourable response. He noted: ‘The number of hearers at that time is generally larger than that which my predecessor had on a Sunday.’\textsuperscript{54} There is little doubt that Fletcher said morning and evening daily prayers\textsuperscript{55} and that this was carried on by his curates as well. When he was in Bath preaching in October 1765 he wrote to his parishioners to remind them that like hungry people ‘find time for their meals’, they should find time as well for ‘spiritual meals’, praying ‘all the way [to the church]’ and afterwards, carrying to their homes ‘the unsearchable riches of Jesus’s dying and rising love’.\textsuperscript{56}

There is some evidence that indicates that Wednesdays\textsuperscript{57} (and possibly Fridays) were

\textsuperscript{48} Cf. JF\textsuperscript{CH}, 27 Apr. 1761; JF\textsuperscript{CW}, 27 Apr. 1761.
\textsuperscript{49} Overton and Relton, \textit{English Church}, 63.
\textsuperscript{50} Russell, \textit{Clerical Profession}, 64-65.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid. 54.
\textsuperscript{52} Gilpin, ‘Notes’, 1:84.
\textsuperscript{53} Portrait, 1:361; also see JF\textsuperscript{CW}, 4 Sept. 1759.
\textsuperscript{54} JF\textsuperscript{CH}, 6 Jan. 1761.
\textsuperscript{55} On this duty, see ‘Concerning the Service of the Church’, \textit{BCP}.
\textsuperscript{56} JF\textsuperscript{CH}, 6 Jan. 1761.
\textsuperscript{57} See JF\textsuperscript{CW}, 5 Jan. 1763. See \textit{UL}, 173, n. 147. Fletcher, even prior to his ‘conversion’, kept Thursdays as his weekly fast day. \textit{HLF}, 9.
kept as fast days, as was customary, particularly during Lent, in some parishes.\textsuperscript{58} By April of 1761, Friday evening services were part of his regular pattern, but this was not the full extent of his preaching ministry even then. Similar to patterns exemplified by Berridge, whose pastoral work he emulated,\textsuperscript{59} Fletcher preached in his vicarage. And like Grimshaw\textsuperscript{60} he preached wherever he could gather people in the parish.\textsuperscript{61} In these admittedly ‘irregular’ moves, he trusted the hand of providence to lead. He described his own routine to Lady Huntingdon: ‘I am insensibly led into exhorting sometimes, in my house and else where. I preach [S]unday mornings and Friday evenings; and Sunday evening ... I read one of the Homilies, or a sermon’.\textsuperscript{62} Even though neither Wesley nor his preachers had spent any time in Madeley yet, it did not take long for his parishioners to associate Fletcher’s zeal and evangelical doctrines with Methodism.\textsuperscript{63} Already in 1760, he wrote to Lady Huntingdon that the parishioners had begun to call his ‘meeting’ a ‘Methodist one, I mean the Church.’\textsuperscript{64}

Fletcher believed that ‘all pastors, should give evening instructions to those who have been engaged, through the course of the day, in their different callings.’\textsuperscript{65} Weeknights, he conceived, lent themselves particularly well to spiritual reflection, and services conducted during the week offered a competing model of communal solidarity to that of the alehouse.\textsuperscript{66} He hoped these services might ‘prevent many young persons from mixing with that kind of company, and frequenting those places, which would tend to alienate their minds from religion and virtue.’\textsuperscript{67} Fletcher recognized the voluntary nature of participation in religious life, and his attempts at extension were designed to compete in the associational marketplace. For example, by 1764 Madeley’s church schedule also included Monday night services.\textsuperscript{68} His choice of Mondays was intentional. The colliers and iron workers who were paid fortnightly often recreated on what were known as ‘Reckoning Mondays’, usually by

\textsuperscript{59} JF→CH, 6 Jan. 1761. On Berridge, see BI.
\textsuperscript{60} Cf. JF→W. Wase, 13 Jan. 1777.
\textsuperscript{61} See Laycock, \textit{Methodist Heroes}, 55-57.
\textsuperscript{62} JF→CH, 27 Apr. 1761.
\textsuperscript{63} JF→CW, 12 Oct. 1761.
\textsuperscript{64} JF→CH, 19 Nov. 1760.
\textsuperscript{65} \textit{Portrait}, 1:369.
\textsuperscript{66} JF→CH, 10 Sept. 1763.
\textsuperscript{67} \textit{Portrait}, 1:369.
\textsuperscript{68} \textit{WJW}, 21:481.
gathering for drinking fests.\textsuperscript{69} Monday-night preaching coincided better with industrial workers’ schedules than other nights. Fletcher was keenly aware of the need to overcome obstacles presented by industrialization which, as Mather has shown, could in some areas only be ‘solved by substituting informal evening gatherings—cottage lectures, schoolroom services and class meetings—for the regular worship of the parish church.’\textsuperscript{70} There were still those who refused to attend these weeknight gatherings, so Fletcher went to them: ‘I preach every morning to the colliers of Madeley Wood, a place that can vie with Kingswood for wilderness’.\textsuperscript{71} Thus, although Hindmarsh has suggested it was roving ‘Methodist evangelists’ rather than ‘agents of a religious monopoly addressing a parish congregation of the Established Church’, that ‘openly competed for the willing attention of individuals in public spaces’, Fletcher demonstrated that such tactics could in fact be used parochially—that competition in the marketplace was not limited to extra-Establishment ministry.\textsuperscript{72} The expansion of weekday services was not merely his ideal, it was his practice, and he used this as an apologetic for his preaching holiness, calling upon the testimony of his parishioners to confirm his diligence:

\begin{quote}
I appeal to every impartial hearer ... whether I ever ... hinted that we ought not to endeavour so to despatch our worldly business, as to hear (if possible) the word preached or expounded both on Sundays and working days: whether I have intimated that we can live in the neglect of God’s ordinances, and break his Sabbaths, without bringing upon ourselves ‘swift destruction’.\textsuperscript{73}
\end{quote}

Thus the first phase of church extension flowed from his reputedly Methodist zeal for declaring the Gospel at every opportunity and in every place,\textsuperscript{74} that all would come to saving faith and worship God in ‘spirit and in truth’. This however begs the question, if every person was to attend divine worship, but the church would only contain half the parish in two services, how were the people to be accommodated? The next phase of church extension then required some innovation

\textsuperscript{69} IRS, 346; cf. Thompson, ‘Time, Work-Discipline’, 72-75.
\textsuperscript{70} Mather, ‘Georgian Churchmanship’, 278-79.
\textsuperscript{71} JF\(\rightarrow\)CH, 10 Sept. 1763.
\textsuperscript{72} Hindmarsh, \textit{Conversion}, 77.
\textsuperscript{73} \textit{WJF (A)}, 4:75.
\textsuperscript{74} JF, Sermon, Acts 5:42 (B1.9).
in Madeley, though in line with a long English tradition of gathering believers together into religious societies.75

**Madeley Religious Societies**

*Origins and Development*

New venues for preaching and fellowship in the absence of parochial chapels was an obvious obstacle, but it did not keep Fletcher from trying to reach out to the villages of his parish. His answer to the need for accommodation was to look for the opportunity to take the church to the people, rather than trying just to get people to the church.76 This was a strategy of extension that Gilbert claimed was exclusive to nonconformity, giving it an advantage over the Establishment.77 The first opportunity came in 1761. ‘I have often had a desire’, Fletcher wrote, ‘to exhort at Madeley Wood & the Dale ... but I did not dare to run before I saw the door open: it is now opening, a little society of about 20 or 30 people has come together of its own accord in the 1st of those places, and another of some 20 in the second’.78 The church now had bases of contact in the two most populous parts of the parish.

By ‘[m]oving beyond the ... church [building]’, and working ‘in households and neighbourhoods, particularly among the labouring classes’, Fletcher attempted to break down divisions of class or status between priest and people.79 He attended to his parishioners in their daily habitats, conducted meetings in the local villages, and eventually constructed a school and preaching house in the centre of the parish at his own expense. A central claim of Valenze’s thesis is that such ‘cottage religion’—ministry amongst the labouring classes in ‘households and neighbourhoods’—was responsible for the development of ‘autonomous popular religion’ apart from the work of the Established Church and in conflict with church authority. Yet Smith has shown how the construction of Anglican chapels in outlying parts of Oldham and Saddleworth served similar ends by symbolically affirming each village’s communal identity centred around chapel life.80 Similarly, Fletcher’s ministry demonstrates that strategies, such as taking religion into the local villages, were as available to the

75 Fletcher, *Rules*, 7-10; On the pattern of ‘religious sociability’ as a characteristic of Anglicanism, see Spurr, ‘The Church’, 127-42.
76 MF → Unidentified Recipient, [c.1806].
78 JF → CW, 27 Apr. 1761.
79 Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters*, 54-55.
parish clergy as they were to dissenters; the clergy who chose to make use of them could do so effectively. The fact that Fletcher’s societies were sustained over his long tenure is evidence of this. It is true that his societies in Madeley seem to have shown signs of decline during the period he was away from his parish recovering from his illness, during which his curate was less attentive to the management of societies than he. However, this actually buttresses the point that it was the strength of the church which fostered the practice of religion in the village communities of Madeley, for the laity were apparently unable to adequately manage the societies apart from direct clerical support. This is noteworthy considering that during this time Wesley’s preachers in Madeley were apparently no substitute for Fletcher either. This clerical aspect is one of several clues to which models for religious societies Fletcher used in Madeley.

Pike’s observation that Wesley’s Methodist societies were strongly influenced by the early Anglican religious societies could apply to those at Madeley as well. It has generally been assumed that Fletcher’s primary model was Wesley’s London societies, one of which Fletcher had been a member in the 1750s. But actually, Fletcher’s first involvement with a society arose from his own perceived need for fellowship with other Christians seeking holiness before he had even met Wesley or heard of the Methodists. ‘When I was sixteen [c.1745]’, he recalled,

I began ... to strive in earnest to grow in holiness ... I was also convinc’d of the necessity of having a Christian friend and ... I at last ... met with 3 Students who formd with me a religio us society: we met as often as we could to confess one an other our sins to exhort

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81 Valenze, Prophetic Sons and Daughters, 51-55. My point here is not to argue against Valenze’s interpretation that such a sphere created new avenues for the participation of women in ministry (for surely this was the case) where it was correspondingly unavailable in the Established Church but rather to suggest that such strategies were not uniquely available to either Wesleyans or dissenters, be they male or female.
82 On Greaves and the societies, see below; also, BI.
83 JF CW, 8 Oct. 1765; Hall’s Circuits.
86 LJF, 23, 37.
read & pray, and we would ... perhaps have been what the Methodists
were at Oxford.88

The societies in Madeley did reflect Wesley’s Methodism in some ways, but
there was an explicit clerical and Anglican emphasis in Fletcher’s assemblies more
reminiscent of those of Horneck and Woodward.89 Fletcher drew up rules for them,
which like Wesley’s specified the requirement for membership as ‘A sincere desire to
flee from the Wrath to come’.90 However, Fletcher qualified this statement with the
condition, ‘and to seek Salvation from the Servitude of Sin, according to the Gospel
and the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England; especially the Ninth, Tenth,
Eleventh, Twelfth and Thirteenth; which are earnestly recommended to the Perusal
of every person who would be a member’. Fletcher’s societies, also like Wesley’s,
were to be spiritual associations whose members were admitted upon their
confession of their desire for salvation, ‘according to the Articles of the Church of
England ... be they high or low, old or young, learned or unlearned.’91 Fletcher
summarized what constituted a religious society according to the means which the
Church recommends, in the first Exhortation of the Communion
Service ... Such a Society then, is only a Company of People who ...
require, as says our Church, farther Counsel and Comfort for the
quieting of their awakened Consciences, and meet to consult, read
and pray with their Ministers.92

Given Fletcher’s earlier relationship with the Wesleys and the London Methodists
and his awareness of Wesley’s Rules of the United Societies, it is significant that in
his own Rules for the Madeley societies he made no mention of Wesley, his
Connexion, nor any of his publications, even though some dependence is apparent.
Instead, Fletcher (not unlike Wesley’s own habit) borrowed where he saw fit, and he
emended as necessary to establish the Anglican character of the societies,
independent of Wesleyan control and contextualized to his own parochial situation.

88 JF CW, 10 May 1757. Interestingly, it has been suggested that the term ‘Methodism’ was referred to
in relation to the ‘professors of Geneva’, Turretin and Ostervald, as early as 1717, two theologians by
whom JF was influenced. RS passim; see T.E. Brigden, ‘Notes and Queries, 163’, PWHS 3 (1902), 112.
89 Cf. JF [Lord Gower], n.d. In this letter, Fletcher specifically mentioned his reliance upon
Woodward’s model. Also see Rack, ‘Religious Societies’, 582-95.
90 Cf. WJW, 9:69-75.
91 Fletcher, Rules, 15.
92 Ibid. 10.
Overton and Relton thought ‘The [Anglican] religious societies, which were to a large extent responsible’ for the extension of church services into parish communities in the seventeenth century, had by the middle of the eighteenth century, ‘ceased to thrive’. Such ‘chapel’ meetings, Gilbert asserted, were now the stronghold of dissenting congregations or Methodism, which he characterized as ‘Extra-Establishment’ religion. Extra-Establishment religion, he claims, was part of a ‘new, expansionist, chapel-based movement’ within ‘Evangelical Nonconformity’. The Establishment on the other hand, was allegedly (due to the constraints of an outmoded parochial system and clerical lethargy) incapable of assimilating the currents of evangelicalism and consequently unable to compete in the market-situation presented by chapel religion.

In Madeley, however, the growth of evangelical chapel communities was a feature of Anglican initiative rather than competition from a rival sect, for it was the parish incumbent who established and managed both church and chapel. Indeed, the growth of ‘extra-Establishment’ communities may be seen as the fruits of Fletcher’s conscientious attempt to fulfil the church’s ideal of pastoral work through a ministry of church extension by which he became familiarized with his parishioners, fostered their spiritual growth in their local village communities, and built an informal parish infrastructure to support this expansion. In this context then, ‘extra-Establishment’ might be better described as extra Establishment, where the ministry of the church took on forms auxiliary to its liturgical services and gradually extended from its centre in Madeley (Town) to the outlying villages. Functionally, this served to provide church services in the local communities, despite the lack of consecrated chapels. But what evidence is there that Fletcher’s meetings were auxiliary to the church other than his Rules? Were they as Anglican in practice as in their charter?

Fortunately there is enough evidence to provide a sketch of what the religious societies were doing, and the Anglican content that is revealed is the clearest indication that Fletcher viewed his societies as extra (or more) Establishment. Indeed, the content and form of his meetings holds the key to interpreting his Methodism as an extension of the church rather than as nonconformist worship gatherings in competition with the Establishment or Wesleyan groups tending toward

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93 Overton and Relton, *English Church*, 63.
separation. This can be observed dialectically in the records of the conflicts Fletcher was brought into by his so-called ‘Methodistic’ ministry. For instance, the first society at Madeley Wood met in ‘a tall cottage on the edge of the Severn Gorge’, the home of one of Fletcher’s earliest converts, Mary Matthews. It soon became known as ‘the Rock Church’ for the precipice on which it stood. Some of the conflicts which followed the earliest meetings in the Rock Church provide the best view into the meetings, and the way in which Fletcher responded helps to paint a picture of his model of church extension. Two incidents involving the Rock Church are of special interest.

The first offers insight into the format and content of the meetings. About a year after the society had first come together, Thomas Slaughter Jr., a Catholic, interrupted Fletcher’s meeting with a mob led by a drum. However, Slaughter’s intrusion was judged to be so indecorous that he was left standing alone, and Fletcher took it upon himself to present him at the Church Court. The incident will be examined in more detail in Chapter Six, but we are concerned here with what the situation reveals of the Anglican nature of Fletcher’s meetings. In his charge against Slaughter, Fletcher enumerated the offences he had committed, amongst which two are noteworthy: (1) Fletcher charged him ‘With prophane behaviour, and open contempt of the Lord’s prayer & the Liturgy of our Church’; and (2) ‘With remarkably interrupting the Vicar while he was praying for the Royal Family, in so much that he found himself obliged to get up from his knees, and make the said Mr Slaughter walk out of the room, before he could quietly conclude the Collect for the Queen’. The implications are clear that at least part of the content of the meetings included the Anglican liturgy.

This is confirmed by another source. In ASW there is a Fletcher commonplace book/sermon case which contains several sermons along with the bidding prayer (a part of the Anglican liturgy), written in the covers. Baker, upon

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95 IRS, 269.
97 See Chapter 4.
98 Tyerman mistakenly identifies him as ‘Thomas Haughton’, but the manuscript records are clear that Fletcher was writing of Slaughter. WDS, 70-75. For more on Slaughter, see Chapter 6 and B1.
100 Slaughter Charge (B1.9).
101 JF, Preaching Case/Commonplace Book (B1.1).
examining these supposed that the abbreviated form of the liturgy and the brevity of several of his outlines indicated Fletcher’s low churchmanship. Romanticizing this view even more, Baker wrote, ‘One can readily imagine him slipping the little sermon-cover and its contents into his pocket as he set off on one of his many preaching journeys.’¹⁰² Lawton aptly corrected the interpretation, pointing out that Fletcher’s ‘abbreviated’ liturgical prayers were nearly verbatim the prayer contained in the 55th Canon.¹⁰³ As such, they were not representative of an attempt to dilute the liturgy for a Methodist audience, as Baker suggests, but rather they demonstrated Fletcher’s faithfulness to use the prescribed forms of the Church in all worship settings in the parish church or elsewhere. In addition, Fletcher’s inclusion of the ‘King’s Titles’¹⁰⁴ in his Pulpit Prayer was in strict adherence to the law which William Watson noted in 1747, was generally neglected ‘in every Diocese.’¹⁰⁵ Fletcher’s use of the bidding prayer in his church and his chapels in Madeley indicates the extent to which he was attempting to carry out the ideals of Anglican belief and practice in all spheres of his parish ministry. Also, Fletcher was aware of fears that his house meetings might be incubators of Jacobitism, and thus his charge defended the meeting against any such accusation by declaring that in his meetings they duly prayed for king and country, while simultaneously implying that Catholics, such as Slaughter, might themselves be Jacobites.¹⁰⁶

The second incident occurred at around the same time, when the Rock Church meeting was accused of being a conventicle, and Matthews, along with those who met at her house, were presented to the magistrate on that account, for which she was fined £20 by some of the parish gentlemen. Threats were made against Fletcher shortly thereafter, and some of the accusers actually sent a presentment to the bishop.¹⁰⁷ Fletcher attempted to pre-empt any judgment by sending a letter to the bishop himself. He described his defence in a letter to David Simpson, the evangelical incumbent of Christ Church, Macclesfield, who had asked Fletcher about the irregularity and legitimacy of such house meetings:

¹⁰³ See Anglican Canons, 343.
¹⁰⁴ i.e. ‘our sovereign [George], King of England ...’ See Canons, 342-45.
¹⁰⁷ See Chapter 4.
'If the Bishop were to take me to task about this piece of irregularity, I would observe,—

1. That the canons of men cannot overthrow the canons of God.
‘Preach the word. Be instant in season and out of season.’ ...

2. Before the Bishop shackled me with canons, he charged me to ‘look for Christ's lost sheep that are dispersed abroad, and for his children who are in the midst of this wicked world;’ and these sheep, &c., I will try to gather whenever I meet them ...

Some of my parishioners went and complained to the bishop about my conventicles. I wrote to the registrar that I hoped his lordship, who had given me the above-mentioned charge at my ordination, would not be against my following it ... As I was speaking on the head of preaching in licensed places, or dissenting meeting-houses, with the late Mr. Whitefield, he told me, that when a minister of the church of England did read the common-prayer, there was no law against him[.]

Again it is apparent that Fletcher perceived his religious meetings to be fully within the scope of his calling as a parish priest, that the content and form of the meetings only served to build upon and encourage piety and churchmanship, and that the meetings were an integral part of his strategy to extend the reach of the church. Thus, similar to Samuel Walker at Truro, Fletcher’s societies ‘were parochial in character and were animated throughout by Prayer-book teaching’. Fletcher was never called to account by the bishop, which he attributed to the strength of his case. ‘[H]is Lordship very prudently sends me no answer’, he wrote to Wesley. ‘I think he knows [sic] not how to disapprove; & ... dares not to approve this Methodist way of proceeding.’ The societies then, despite a lack of accommodation in the parish church for every inhabitant, helped to provide worship in the local communities. But faced by threats of prosecution, Fletcher did not yet have the support to erect an official chapel. However, in addition to Mrs Matthews house, Fletcher leased a building, which he referred to as his ‘Tabernacle at Madeley


110 JF→JW, 22 Nov. 1762.
Wood’, at his own expense of five guineas a year. When in 1777 the opportunity to buy land presented itself, Fletcher used his own resources (£296 17s. 5d.) ‘to build a house in Madeley-Wood, about the centre of the parish, where’, he wrote, ‘the children might be taught to read and write in the day, and the grown up people might hear the word of God … and where the serious people might assemble for social worship’. When Fletcher was building the Madeley Wood chapel, his health was deteriorating quickly, and he was away from the parish during most of the construction.

The society in Coalbrookdale also met in the house of parishioners, namely the Cranages. The ‘Dale’ as the village was called, was the centre of Quaker activity in the parish, and confrontations with one of their preachers reveal that the meetings at the Cranages’ were similarly built upon the ministry of the church—that is, the content of the meetings was, along with personal times of sharing spiritual experiences, structured around the Liturgy. Due to the growth of the Coalbrookdale meeting, in 1784 the Fletchers began the construction of a chapel there. Mr Fletcher himself not only prayed before the laying of the first stone but helped the workers quarry stones for the new building. The land was provided by the Quaker, William Reynolds. Thus, between 1760 and 1785, Fletcher’s ever expanding ministry came to encompass all three parts of the parish. The attendees at society meetings were mostly Madeley parishioners (though some from neighbouring parishes attended as well). George and Sarah Longmore of Coalbrookdale were archetypal. As regular churchgoers they were converted from mere moralism to true religion by the ‘unwearied zeal and fervent prayers of Fletcher’. After their conversions they joined and became ‘steady and consistent members of the Methodist Society’, attending both the church and Fletcher’s chapel meetings in the parish.

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111 This may have been where he preached daily to the colliers of Madeley Wood.
112 JF T. York and D. Edmunds, Nov. 1777; cf. MARC: MAM Fl. 19/2/6; 38/1/17.
113 Much of the information regarding the content of the religious society at Coalbrookdale is to be found in MJAD; see Chapter 6 below.
114 J. Crowther, A True and Complete Portraiture of Methodism (New York, 1813), 101-102; SRO: 4035/5; 1681, box 144, deed; 2280/16/185; VCH, Shropshire, 11:69. A print of the meeting house at Coalbrookdale is printed in Skinner, Nonconformity, Plate XI.
Leadership in and Management of the Societies

Fletcher called the first assemblies in his parish ‘societies’, noting that they had come together ‘of their own accord’ in Madeley Wood and Coalbrookdale by 1761. In context this might suggest that they formed voluntarily because of Fletcher’s encouragement to assemble frequently both in and out of church. In summer 1762, Fletcher wrote that he was attempting to form another society in the parish, and by autumn he had succeeded. In addition, a society had formed at Broseley, which Fletcher began to lead as well.\footnote{116} He imposed his leadership on the societies in the earliest stages, yet was constrained by the realities that he could be in but one place at a time, and in his absence, the society meetings went on without him. Fletcher did not uphold the view of some of his contemporaries that clerical control was to be constantly maintained.\footnote{117} Instead he delegated responsibilities to mature lay leaders, seeing them as his assistants in ministry.\footnote{118} Indeed, when writing on the value of religious societies in one of his theological treatises, he made the comparison that the societies and their leaders were to a parish minister what Aaron and Hur were to Moses, holding up his tired hands and multiplying his work by doing so. Fletcher expounded on his meaning writing that the member of a religious society ‘bears the burdens of his brethren ⁄ watches over them ⁄ compassionately sympathises with the tempted, impartially reproves sin, meekly restores the fallen, and cheerfully animates the dejected.’\footnote{119}

While Fletcher was on the Continent, he entrusted his parish work to his curate, who was likewise assisted by parish lay leaders. One of these, William Wase, was one of Fletcher’s chief correspondents regarding the societies. Wase’s wife, Jane, was the sister of George Cranage, in whose home the first Coalbrookdale society met, suggesting that Wase was possibly a leader in that meeting. Fletcher charged Wase while he was away from the parish on a preaching journey: ‘I hope ... you try to keep the people together, & stir them up in every way of righteousness: Do my dear friend, let me recommend them to your care, diligence, attendance, visits, & good example.’\footnote{120} At one point, Wase became discouraged by a low attendance at one of the meetings where he apparently exhorted on occasion. Fletcher wrote to

\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{116}{JF\to CW, 19 July and 20 Sept. 1762; JF\to JW, 22 Nov. 1762.}
\item \footnote{117}{Cf. Walsh, ‘Religious Societies’, 299.}
\item \footnote{118}{JF\to Madeley Parishioners, 26 Nov. 1777.}
\item \footnote{119}{WJF (B) 2:69; cf. Exod. 17:12.}
\item \footnote{120}{JF\to W. Wase, 15 Oct. [1766].}
\end{itemize}
hearten him: ‘The great Mr. Grimshaw was not above walking some miles, to preach to seven or eight people; and what are we compared to him?’ There is also some indication that there was a preference for clerical over lay leadership, leading Fletcher to encourage Wase that ‘Our neighbourhood will want you more when Mr. Greaves and I are gone.’ Indeed by 1781 Wase had written to Fletcher that one society had experienced a revival and for want of room, they were building an addition to one of the houses where they met. Fletcher himself was the chief monitor of the religious meetings, admonishing and disciplining when necessary. He once wrote to Charles Wesley that he had ‘banished from [his] Society two false witnesses who claimed to be without sin being far from sharing in their delusion.’ At times however, he left them, as Lawton has speculated, to ‘exercise their own discipline by agreement.’

After the Fletchers’ marriage, it is clear that the societies and various prayer meetings were conducted by both Mr and Mrs Fletcher as partners in ministry. As was typical of her previous ministry endeavours before her marriage, Mary Fletcher committed to her new calling with remarkable energy. Indeed, it appears at times that she took on the majority of the responsibilities for managing the societies while her husband focussed on his other pastoral duties. The majority of the accounts of religious work in the parish between 1782 and 1785 were written by Mrs Fletcher. ‘[God] hath not left us without encouragement’, she wrote to her friend, the Wesleyan preacher John Valton, ‘Several fresh ones are coming in; and we have scarcely had a week ... in which one or more have not been set at liberty’.

Valton himself mentioned the advantage of this partnership in a letter to Mrs Fletcher in 1784. He commented that he was convinced of the role of providence in leading her to Madeley and that he perceived a great benefit would come of her presence in the parish, primarily due to her organizational abilities. When Mr Fletcher had managed the parish by himself, Valton claimed to have been told, the parish was ‘without Classes or Bands, and I never knew any success attend our

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121 Ibid. 13 Jan. 1777.
122 JF→W. Wase, 14 Feb. 1781.
123 JF→CW, 20 Sept. 1762.
124 Lawton, Shropshire Saint, 27.
125 LMF, 1:173-95.
126 JF&MF→J. Valton, July 1783, WMM (1798), 597-98; also see MF→Unidentified Recipient, [c.1806] (B1.9).
ministry where these were omitted.\textsuperscript{127} It does in fact appear that Fletcher’s structure of the meetings in Madeley, at least early on, did not have the stratum of Wesley’s. Fletcher never mentioned ‘class’, ‘band’, or ‘select society’ meetings in his letters. Furthermore, records of those who wrote in biographies or letters that they had once been in Mr Fletcher’s class (deducing a rough timeline by their accounts and their age at the time of writing) indicate that it was in the later period of his ministry. For example, Joseph Dorrel, who with his wife had attended both church and society since 1778, became a class leader in this later period.\textsuperscript{128} The same is true of John Bartlam and George Perks, the former of whom was first influenced towards true piety in one of Mrs Fletcher’s prayer meetings in the vicarage, but afterwards joined Mr Fletcher’s class; the latter of whom was first convicted under a sermon by John in the church, and converted shortly after under a sermon by one of Wesley’s preachers. He joined a class meeting led by Mr and Mrs Fletcher.\textsuperscript{129} In March 1782, Wesley visited the parish and assisted the Fletchers in setting up a new society. The Fletchers had only returned to Madeley in January and found that there were many who they could not get to join a society. Wesley preached a sermon ‘enforcing the necessity of Christian fellowship’, and after the service about ninety-two men and women came forward to join in society with the Fletchers.\textsuperscript{130}

The situation was improved by autumn when, having been only nine months in the parish, Mrs Fletcher wrote in her journal, ‘I have a variety of people and different calls of God to attend unto ... My spiritual sphere of action is different. I have in many respects a wider call for action than before’.\textsuperscript{131} She, like her husband, extended the ministry by setting up new meetings in the parish; a class meeting on Sunday mornings in about 1781 and a society at Rough Park (near the northern centre of the parish) about 1783.\textsuperscript{132} It is notable that the societies did not balk at having Mrs Fletcher as a new leader among them. She wrote in October 1782: ‘I am a good deal encouraged for the people. I have much liberty in meeting them.’\textsuperscript{133} The following year, she gave another encouraging report: ‘God is good unto us ...

\textsuperscript{127} J. Valton\textsuperscript{MF, 30 Mar. 1784.}
\textsuperscript{128} S. Waler, ‘Account of Mary Dorrel’, \textit{WMM} (1805), 463-68.
\textsuperscript{129} \textit{WMM} (1828), 212-14; MT, ‘Account of George Perks (B1.9)’; idem, ‘Memoir of George Perks’, \textit{WMM} (1835), 895-900; also see \textit{CMFV} (1855), 382, which mentions a Madeley man (the father of Mrs Sarah Leighton) who met in Mr Fletcher’s class meeting.
\textsuperscript{130} \textit{WJW}, 23:232-33.
\textsuperscript{131} \textit{LMF}, 176.
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., 1:195; \textit{VCH}, Shropshire, 11:69.
\textsuperscript{133} \textit{LMF}, 1:177.
He hath not left us without encouragement. Several fresh [society members] are coming in; and we have scarcely a week, for some time, in which one or more have not been set at liberty.\textsuperscript{134} Thus, the development of societies within Madeley was a lifelong venture for John Fletcher, which came to include the energetic leadership of his wife, whose own talents were spent in the service of the parish.

**Expanded Ministry to the Coalfield**

*Coalfield Itinerancy*

Proclamation of the gospel began in Fletcher’s parish, but it did not end there. Once patterns of worship had been established in Madeley, he began to travel beyond its boundaries into surrounding parishes to preach evangelistically but also to meet religious societies, intended to augment attendance upon the worship of the church. An apologetic employed by some Methodist historians explaining Fletcher’s reticence towards a Wesleyan itinerancy, has been to point to his ill health.\textsuperscript{135} Certainly his health was one of the reasons Fletcher gave Wesley for not becoming a Wesleyan itinerant (at one point under physician’s orders),\textsuperscript{136} but this was never the primary reason. Fletcher saw the advantages parochial ministry offered, and he found himself encouraging those like Benson, who as itinerants found it difficult to measure their success due to their limited duration in one place. He explained:

Methodist ministers, who itinerate from place to place ... have fewer opportunities of seeing the results of their labours, than those who are located and have a defined sphere of operation ... who minister uniformly to the same congregations, [and] can form a tolerably accurate estimate of the full extent of their influence.\textsuperscript{137}

Even noting these provisos, Fletcher did not refrain from itinerancy altogether. ‘[H]e did not confine his Labors to this Parish’, wrote his widow. ‘[F]or many Years he regularly preached at Places, eight, ten, or sixteen Miles off, returning home the same Night, though he seldom reached it before one or two in the Morning.’\textsuperscript{138}

\textsuperscript{134} JF&MF→J. Valton, July 1783; also see MF→A. Tindall, [April 1784?] (B1.2).
\textsuperscript{136} WJW, 23:27; *SAJF*, 66-67.
\textsuperscript{138} *HLF*, 15.
These journeys were prompted by Fletcher’s awareness of need and by the leading of providence.

As early as 1761, parishioners were travelling from neighbouring parishes to hear Fletcher. The practice of ‘sermon gadding’ tells part of the story. For instance, in 1761 Fletcher wrote of 80 workmen from a neighbouring parish who had invited him to preach in their church, but the incumbent refused him his pulpit. So the workmen threatened to attend Fletcher’s church, but the churchwardens opposed them, to Fletcher’s consternation. Practicality was another reason neighbouring parishioners were drawn to Madeley. Some came from parishes where their own church was nearly as far from their homes as was Madeley. This was the case with some Dawley and Wellington parishioners. In 1763, several women from Coalpit Bank, Wellington, began to travel to Madeley church on Sundays, including Mary Wales (who was converted under Fletcher’s preaching) and Mary Barnard. Coalpit Bank was about the same distance from the Wellington parish church and from Madeley church. Going to churches other than their own was not uncommon in other parts of Shropshire. One parishioner of High Ercall explained: ‘as this village lay more than 2 miles from the parish church a many of the people went to Waters Upton not much above a mile at which place I attended’.

Others were drawn specifically by Fletcher’s evangelical reputation, like Francis Child from Shifnal who went to hear him, having been pressed by his future mother-in-law to do so. Child’s eulogist later wrote: ‘while Mr. Fletcher was preaching, the Lord applied his word with such power to Mr. Child’s conscience, that he literally roared out for the disquietude of his heart ... he continued to be in deep distress about 15 months ... But he cried to God for mercy ... and at length ... God ... spoke peace to his soul’. Child had been a churchgoer already, and continued his attendance in Shifnal, but like an emissary to his own village, he ‘became very zealous’, began a class meeting in his house, and welcomed Wesley’s

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139 JF→CW, 10 Mar. 1761.
140 Probably Broseley parish; cf. JF→CW, 26 Dec. 1758.
141 Ibid. 19 Aug. 1761.
142 A. Suter, ‘Account of Mary Wales’, AM (1793), 528-32; MF, ‘Account of Mary Barnard’, WMM (1800), 221. On these women, see BI.
143 Unidentified Autobiography (B1.9). The subject of the biography, born in 1757, eventually moved to Madeley where he attended Fletcher’s church and meetings.
144 WMM (1807), 281. On Child, see BI.
145 Ibid.
preachers to stay with him on their journeys through the parish. Cases of extra-parochial clerical provision of services were also evident during this period. For example, despite the non-residence of the incumbent of Wombridge and the lack of a curate at the chapel of ease at Priorslee, vicars of the neighbouring parish of Wrockwardine conducted worship services in both for most of the eighteenth century.¹⁴⁶

For his first three years, Fletcher’s preaching and management of societies was predominantly, if not exclusively, within Madeley. Yet as he perceived the desire of parishioners in surrounding parishes to have their own local societies, he began to consider setting up meetings thereabout, as he had in Madeley. Already by 1762 fourteen people had gathered themselves into a society in Broseley and requested Fletcher’s leadership. He heeded their invitation, and ‘the house was soon well filled’.¹⁴⁷ In December 1763 he asked Charles Wesley: ‘Would you counsel me to set myself at liberty from time to time to make visits to serious-minded people in the neighbouring parishes’?¹⁴⁸ He was probably considering preaching at Coalpit Bank since that was a place where he saw an increased need. Those who lived there could travel to Madeley church for the Sunday morning service but, due to distance, had to return before evening. Wesley’s answer has not survived. In any case, Fletcher began to conduct a coalfield itinerancy shortly thereafter. His initial preaching visits to other parts of the coalfield he considered as evangelistic or missionary visits. He was going to those who ‘did not see the Danger of Sin, & were not willing to leave their wicked courses’, those who ‘would not come to church’. Mary Fletcher explained that their refusal to go to church was his motivation to preach

at any hour or in any place where he cod gather them, at the Bank 5 miles off he used to go 2 or 3 times a week at 5 in the morning because that hour suited them, & much Blessing was given on his Endeavours as is proved by a pious minister who now occupies a Church near that spot instead of an empty Building he has now a

¹⁴⁶ VCH, Shropshire, 11:299-300.
¹⁴⁷ JF→CW, 20 Sept. 1762.
¹⁴⁸ Ibid. 26 Dec. 1763.
numerous congregation & the Change that is to be seen in Madeley is very great indeed.\footnote{MF\textgreater{}Unidentified Recipient, n.d. (B1.9).}

Fletcher attempted to communicate with the ministers of the coalfield parishes where he preached in order to foster a spirit of cooperation, and he was not altogether unsuccessful. ‘Two received me civilly’, he wrote, ‘the 3rd was not at his Lodging’.\footnote{JF\textgreater{}CW, 3 June 1764.} In the earliest years, the parishes where he preached regularly outside Madeley were Wellington (at Coalpit Bank), Dawley, and Wombridge (at Trench). It is uncertain which of the parish ministers were civil with him, but he did face opposition initially from Richard Smith, vicar of Wellington, who perceived Fletcher’s Methodism as nonconformity.\footnote{VCH, Shropshire, 11:244; JF\textgreater{}CW, 29 Apr. 1765.} In winter of 1764 (or earlier) Fletcher had begun preaching on Sunday evenings to the collier community at Coalpit Bank with the help of his friend Thomas Hatton, rector of Waters Upton, who travelled down from his parish for the same purpose.\footnote{JF\textgreater{}CW, 12 Apr. 1765; 29 Apr. 1765.} During the winter months, Smith provided only one service, but Fletcher and Hatton’s preaching drew a considerable crowd ‘despite the bad roads and the darkness’.\footnote{Ibid. 29 Apr. 1765.} When in 1765 Fletcher requested permission to preach Sunday evenings in Wellington church to avoid having to preach in the open air to his crowd of hearers, Smith refused,\footnote{Ibid.} and it may have been this vicar who informed him that Wombridge was a donative and peculiar, saying ‘I can ... kill you for preaching there, and no-one will bring me to judgment for so doing.’\footnote{Ibid. 3 June 1764.}

Regardless of Smith’s resistance, Fletcher added preaching at religious assemblies at Wellington (Town) to his itinerary.\footnote{JF\textgreater{}W. Wase, Nov. 1777.} By the mid-1760s, his coalfield itinerancy included preaching in Dawley at Lawley Bank, in Wellington (both in the Town and at Coalpit Bank), in Wombridge at Trench, and in Broseley.\footnote{JF\textgreater{}[Lord Gower], n.d.; JF\textgreater{}T. York, 15 Sept. 1778; VCH, Shropshire, 11:131, 311; IRS, 158; SRO: 3916/1/1. See Map 4.} Additionally, it appears that he made occasional visits to places like Little Wenlock, Sheriff Hales, Lilleshall, and Shifnal.\footnote{JF\textgreater{}CW, 12 Apr. 1765.} Even though Fletcher left his parish during
the week at times to preach in surrounding parishes, he continued to perform his full
duty and weekday services at Madeley. Thus, he reported to Charles Wesley: ‘after
having served my Church I went to the Coal-Pit-Bank about 5 miles distant from
Madeley.’\footnote{JF\textsuperscript{159}\textsuperscript{CW}, 12 Apr. 1765.} Ten years later, and at the peak of his controversial writing (which
some historians have hinted was a leisurely distraction from parochial duty),\footnote{WDS.}
Fletcher reported that he had returned home one Sunday ‘at 11 at night tolerably
well after reading prayers and preaching twice and giving the sacrament in my own
church and preaching and meeting a few people in society in the next market
town’.
\footnote{JF\textsuperscript{160}\textsuperscript{CW}, 4 Dec. 1775.} Not only did his involvement in controversy not diminish his ministry at
Madeley, but as he was able, he continued his broader coalfield ministry as well.

\underbar{Open Air Preaching}

Until 1765 Fletcher’s sermons—whether in church or chapel meetings—were
preached indoors. He had not yet imitated Harris, Whitefield, or Wesley by
preaching in the open air.\footnote{Cf. RE, 208-209, 223-24.} When he finally took this step it was a matter of
expediency. Interestingly, it was not in his own parish that necessity first forced the
issue but in Wellington at Coalpit Bank, where he had been preaching in
cooperation with Hatton since 1764. This became another facet of extension as his
field preaching at Coalpit Bank set a precedent which he and others later followed in
Madeley. The place where Fletcher regularly preached at Coalpit Bank was a house
or cottage. After several months, the house became too crowded to be practical. On
Easter Sunday, ‘the house was full and the number of Hearers was greater outside
than in’, and in order to make himself heard by all Fletcher ‘preached \textit{sub dio}, for
the first time.’\footnote{JF\textsuperscript{161}\textsuperscript{CW}, 12 Apr. 1765.} The need, he perceived, was severe as demonstrated by the fact
that even in the winter months, ‘despite the bad roads and the darkness’ and despite
the fact that he and Hatton had redoubled their efforts—each preaching at the same
time in different houses—there was yet scarcely room for everyone. When in spring,
Hatton resumed evening services in his own parish, his hearers at the Bank joined
Fletcher’s congregation there, and the crowd was such that ‘it was almost impossible
to breathe in the house’. Nor was the move to preach in the open air unwanted by

\footnote{159 JF\textsuperscript{CW}, 12 Apr. 1765.} \footnote{160 WDS.} \footnote{161 JF\textsuperscript{CW}, 4 Dec. 1775.} \footnote{162 Cf. RE, 208-209, 223-24.} \footnote{163 JF\textsuperscript{CW}, 12 Apr. 1765.
the people. ‘[T]hey beseeched me’, he wrote, ‘to exhort in front of the house, which is what I did and what I have continued to do since that day.’\textsuperscript{164} Some of his timid parishioners feared he would be prosecuted. He believed, come what may, that the step he had taken was necessary\textsuperscript{165} and wrote to Charles Wesley: ‘I am calm and I await the event without anxiety.’\textsuperscript{166}

Fletcher’s Continental background may have influenced his view on field preaching as well, for he noted that ‘the [F]rench expression among our protestant brothers in the Languedoc is preaching in the wilderness’,\textsuperscript{167} and he was particularly impressed by the field preaching of some Protestant itinerants on one of his visits to the Continent.\textsuperscript{168} In any case, illustrating the maxim that ‘no press is bad press’, Fletcher wrote: ‘the commotion that is made about the matter brings me from time to time some new hearers.’\textsuperscript{169} Novelty had its advantages.\textsuperscript{170} As had happened when Wesley and Whitefield preached in the open air for the first time, the success they experienced offered experimental evidence that providence had prompted the irregularity.\textsuperscript{171} His success in the venture proved to him that the expediency of the gospel was more important than polity in the matter. ‘If I had to do it again’, he wrote, ‘I would do it tomorrow.’\textsuperscript{172} Indeed, he continued to preach in the open air at Coalpit Bank on his Sunday visits.\textsuperscript{173}

This precedent paved the way for field preaching by visiting preachers. When Maxfield was in Madeley the following August, he preached not only in the church and chapel meetings but also, with Fletcher’s approbation, to ‘a great number of hearers ... among the Coal mines.’\textsuperscript{174} Likewise, when Wesley visited the parish in 1773, he ‘preached under a spreading oak in Madeley Wood.’\textsuperscript{175} When Wesley visited the following year, he wrote that again he preached in Madeley Wood, this

\begin{footnotes}
\item[164] Ibid. 29 Apr. 1765.
\item[165] JF\rightarrow W. Ley, 9 May [1765].
\item[166] JF\rightarrow CW, 12 Apr. 1765.
\item[167] Ibid. 10 May 1765.
\item[168] JF\rightarrow JI, 25 Sept. 1778.
\item[169] JF\rightarrow CW, 10 May 1765; cf. Hindmarsh’s comments regarding the use of commercial strategies in Conversion, 77.
\item[170] Cf. Hindmarsh, Conversion, 136.
\item[172] JF\rightarrow CW, 10 May 1765.
\item[173] Ibid. 29 Apr. 1765.
\item[174] Ibid. 8 Aug. 1765.
\item[175] WJW, 22:381.
\end{footnotes}
time ‘under a sycamore tree ... to a large congregation, good part of the[...] colliers, who drank in every word.’ Fletcher did not simply leave field preaching in his own parish to visiting preachers. Although his first open-air sermon was in Wellington, he eventually carried the practice to Madeley. Again, it was both extraordinary circumstance and expediency working together that prompted him to do so.

In May 1773, a landslip at the western edge of Madeley bordering Buildwas left gaping chasms, swallowed the turnpike, hoisted entire fields and groves of trees many yards, destroyed the bridge over the Severn between the two parishes, and redirected the course of the river. Remarkably, nobody was killed or injured, yet the upheaval was of such a magnitude that it drew spectators from surrounding areas. Fletcher anticipated that the effect would be like that of the Lisbon earthquake of 1755, striking fear into the hearts of the people with visions of apocalypse. Such he hoped would lead the unconverted and the backslidden to repentance for their wicked ways, which had brought forth the judgement of God in so clear a providence. Wasting no time, he hastened to the place and preached a sermon from Numbers 16 on the spot where a large congregation gathered. Yet he feared: ‘This awful accident has not had the effect ... I fear the people in these parts are gospel hardened.’

Fletcher published an extensive and celebrated description of the landslip together with the sermon he had preached. In the preface he explained the circumstances which led him to preach once again in the open air. He explained that some of his parishioners, like him, had hurried to see the desolation. Fletcher explained to these spectators that the landslip was but a confirmation of an argument he had laid out in a recent treatise, published to convince and convert the gentlemen of his parish. Having several copies with him, which he had purposely brought to distribute, he read aloud from it, exhorting his hearers on the reality of original sin based on the evidence of the judgement of God in such catastrophes as seen in the ruins on which they were then standing. Fletcher followed his exhortation with extempore prayer and invited his auditors to return the following evening when he would preach a sermon.

176 Ibid. 22:422-23.
177 JF→JW/CW, 30 May 1773.
178 Weekly Miscellany 9 (1773), 193-97; Monthly Review 49 (1774), 415.
179 Fletcher, Phenomenon, 27-33.
Fletcher justified his irregularity on this occasion by the extraordinariness of the circumstances but also by the apostolic command to ‘preach the word ... in season and out of season, which is abundantly confirmed by these words of our communion-service, *It is ... our bounden duty, that we should at All times, and in All Places give thanks to almighty God*. He expected that some would return to hear him for the novelty of it and that the event would draw the attention of both trifling and serious-minded parishioners. Furthermore, he hoped there would be some who might attend his sermon at the Birches who would rarely, if ever, attend church. His suspicion that this expansion of his ‘bounden duty’ might lead to the extension of God’s grace through the ministry of the church was confirmed (though he had his doubts of what response his invitation would provoke), for he wrote: ‘when I came at the time appointed, to my vast surprise I found a great concourse of people, and among them several of my parishioners, who had never been at church in all their lives’.\(^{180}\) Although some of the crowd made light of the moment with drinking, others were attentive. Several months later when a landslip of a smaller magnitude struck fear into the villagers of Hennington in Shifnal parish, Fletcher again preached on the spot, this time at the request of the people.\(^{181}\)

**Preaching Beyond the Coalfield and Visiting Preachers in Madeley**

From April 1764 Fletcher engaged in a wider sphere of cooperative Anglican ministry than had hitherto been practicable. Fletcher’s invitations to other preachers represented another means of increasing the influence of his evangelistic mission. This consisted of three interrelated strands. He believed that: first, the unity and cooperation of the evangelical clergy could only help the spread of the gospel; second, his congregation would benefit from occasionally hearing preachers other than himself; and third, having his pulpit supplied by another enabled him to extend his own preaching ministry beyond the coalfield. A by-product of this extra-parochial activity was a broader connexion with evangelical work in other parts of the country,

\(^{180}\) Ibid. 32.

which Fletcher then related to his parishioners. This section examines Fletcher’s attempts to implement these strategies.

Similar to the way a gardener might sow her seeds in order that one plant would grow under the shade of another, so Fletcher believed that the gospel would grow best when planted under the shade of a broader evangelical unity, particularly amongst gospel ministers. This was an aim for which Fletcher strove for the duration of his incumbency, yet never achieved to the satisfaction of his own high standards. Nevertheless, his efforts in this regard were not without merit. His earliest such associations were of course with the Wesleys. However, after his appointment to Madeley, Fletcher sought to build relationships with the evangelical clergy of the West Midlands. Eventually this took shape when a clerical society formed as the fruit of several years of interaction between its would-be members. Wesley had, since the late 1750s, been trying to encourage the evangelical clergy to form such associations, with him as the chief liaison or overseer. Wesley’s motivation was twofold. He thought this would bolster the good work of the clergy, but he also hoped to secure the reception of his lay preachers in their parishes. Initially he met with little success, yet continued to lobby for such a union until the end of the following decade. In 1764, he wrote a letter to various clergymen throughout England promoting union on the basis of three ‘grand scriptural doctrines’. These were: (1) Original Sin; (2) Justification by Faith; (3) Holiness of Heart and Life. Fletcher was included among the recipients along with nearly fifty others. Wesley reprinted his letter as a circular in winter 1766. In August 1769, Wesley gave up hope that such a society of ministers under his or any central authority could be formed, reading to Conference his famous statement: ‘So I give this up. I can do no more. They are a rope of sand: and such they will continue.’

Wesley’s account would seem to indicate a general stubbornness and disunion between those clergy to whom he appealed; he lamented that only three ministers had replied to his proposal. There was however another side of the story, for a number of the clergy—even those to whom Wesley had written—recognized the benefit of association and formed regional clerical societies as a means of mutual

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184 *LJW*, 4:146.
185 Ibid. 4:235-39.
186 Ibid. 5:143-45; This is chronicled by Baker in *John Wesley*, 180-96.
edification and support, even if they did not reply to him directly.\footnote{See F.W.B. Bullock, \textit{Voluntary Religious Societies: 1520-1799} (Sussex, 1963), 238-40.} At least a part of the reluctance of some to join Wesley’s plan was due not to petty fractiousness but to disagreements with Wesley’s irregularities, particularly his invasion of their parishes to preach and to set up Methodist societies and an awareness that association with Wesley could also cause tension in their parishes.\footnote{Baker, \textit{John Wesley}, 186-88.} In 1764, when Fletcher went to invite Stillingfleet to join a clerical association after Wesley’s plan, Stillingfleet was ‘greatly soured’ at Wesley for having bought a meeting house in West Bromwich. Fletcher observed at that time: ‘I do not believe that many among the clergy agree to a union, unless [Wesley] keeps his word and promises not to send his preachers into their Parish, or among their labours.’\footnote{JF\textarrowright CW, 22 Aug. 1764.} And, as was learned from Wesley’s encounters with Walker and Venn, this was a point on which he refused to negotiate.\footnote{Baker, \textit{John Wesley}, 180-92.} Fletcher was not amongst those Wesley listed as having responded to his circular letter which proposed union.\footnote{LJW, 4:235-39.} This was not, however, an indication of obstinacy on Fletcher’s or the other ministers’ part. Indeed, Fletcher was actually working to set up a regional society of ministers. This was managed by Fletcher’s persistence in April the following year when seven ministers gathered at Evesham to establish a clerical association. Two other ministers had intended to be there but had other engagements.\footnote{JF\textarrowright CW, 29 Apr. 1765.} Apparently Fletcher was able to persuade Stillingfleet of the value of the association, even if it had been recommended by Wesley.\footnote{A handwritten copy of Wesley’s circular letter, edited to include more ministers’ names and including an additional clause to encourage unity whether the proposal was endorsed or not, is among Fletcher’s papers at ASW. It is dated 19 April 1764. See: Proposal for a Union of Gospel Ministers, 19 April 1764 (B1.1).} A decade later Fletcher summarized Wesley’s proposal in one of his theological publications, urging it as a model after that of the SPCK the SPG, or any of the other useful societies which brought likeminded Christians together.\footnote{WJF, (B) 3:559-65.}

Fletcher’s clerical society, the rules for which are extant,\footnote{A Society of Ministers of the Gospel (B1.1).} met quarterly at Worcester\footnote{‘in the private house of some reputable person’.} ‘in the private house of some reputable person’.\footnote{There is a
correlation between the Worcester rules and those of Samuel Walker’s ‘Parson’s Club’, such as the rotation of directorship from one member to the next. More significant, though, are the headings of the rules, which were: (1) Public Preaching; (2) Religious Societies; (3) Catechizing of Children and Instructing of Youth; (4) Personal Inspection and Pastoral Visiting of the Flock; (5) Visiting of the Sick; (6) Ruling Their Own Household; (7) Particular Experiences of Themselves.

It would be wrong to infer too much from the order of the rules, but it cannot be coincidental that preaching appears first on the list. Each of the headings is followed by an explanation of enquiries which might arise according to the subject at hand, and the tenor of the whole document is a mutual concern to pool knowledge and to share experiences including obstacles to ministerial duty and strategies for overcoming them. There is not enough evidence to assess whether all of the ministers attended regularly or for how many years, but Fletcher mentions a meeting with some of the members in May of 1768.

Another result of the connexions made at their meetings was the development of pulpit exchanges. Fletcher was reticent at first to leave his parish for even part of a Sunday until 1764, when he exchanged pulpits:

I went away for the first time on a Sunday ... Mr. Davenport Curate of Tipton in Staffordshire made an exchange with me – I preached in his church in the morning, and in the afternoon I preached at West Bromwich ... I returned the same night to Madeley after having done 55 miles; and I found myself as fresh as when I left in the morning.

Exchanges became more regular after the meetings of the Worcester society commenced. ‘I shall go ... to our little Clergy conference at Worcester on the 4th of next month’, Fletcher wrote to Charles Wesley, ‘and I count on bringing back with me to Madeley our brother Davies of Evesham to support me a little.’ It did not take him long to realize that such exchanges benefited his own aims of promoting

107 A Society of Ministers of the Gospel (B1.1).
110 Cf. RRR, 237-45.
111 JF→GW, 28 May 1768; also see JF→W. Ley, 9 May [1765].
112 JF→CW, 22 Aug. 1764.
113 Ibid. 10 May 1765.
piety in the parish while satisfying the wants of his parishioners.\textsuperscript{204} Furthermore, it provided Fletcher the opportunity to preach sermons to a fresh congregation, and to connect with a broader range of experienced Christians.\textsuperscript{205}

Fletcher’s invitations to other preachers to his parish were primarily rooted in his concern for his parishioners, following Wesley’s model for keeping sermons fresh. One of the reasons Wesley gave for including itinerancy in his list of non-negotiable facets of Methodism\textsuperscript{206} was that he had observed how having the same preacher week after week tended to lead to apathy in congregations. ‘[W]ere I to preach one whole year in one place’, he wrote, ‘I should preach both myself and most of my congregation asleep; Nor can I believe it was ever the will of our Lord that any congregation should have one teacher only.’\textsuperscript{207} Given the importance people placed on preaching and the fact that itinerant preachers like Wesley, Whitefield, Captain Thomas Scott, and Fletcher himself seldom had trouble garnering at least a small crowd, there was clearly some truth to Wesley’s claim that the novelty of a new preacher introduced to an area could enliven the spiritual interests of the congregation or could at least arouse the curiosity of potential congregants who showed up to hear travelling evangelists.\textsuperscript{208}

Even though Fletcher eventually welcomed lay preachers into his parish, it is with regard to these that his distinction between his church services and his chapel meetings can most clearly be seen. The first visiting preachers in Madeley were ordained clergymen.\textsuperscript{209} Thus in 1762, Fletcher invited a young minister, a Rev. Lear,\textsuperscript{210} from Somerset whom he met at the assizes to preach in his pulpit at Madeley. Lear preached three times over four days in the parish, which as Fletcher noted, ‘gained him the reputation of M[ethodis]t.’\textsuperscript{211} A year later Jacob Mould and John Riland visited Fletcher and preached in his church, the latter of whom Fletcher found to be an ‘excellent young man’, though ‘lacking a little Methodist zeal’.\textsuperscript{212}

\textsuperscript{204} Cf. JF\(\rightarrow\)Madeley Parishioners, 30 Apr. 1765; 28 Dec. 1776.
\textsuperscript{205} Ibid. 23 Sept. 1766.
\textsuperscript{206} \textit{WJW}, 20:111; 24:128; 26:595.
\textsuperscript{209} See Chapter 4.
\textsuperscript{210} On Leir [alt. Lear], see BI.
\textsuperscript{211} JF\(\rightarrow\)CW, 22 Aug. 1762.
\textsuperscript{212} Ibid. 21 June 1763; on Mould and Riland, see BI.
The situation with lay preachers, however, was different, for their role was restricted to Fletcher’s societies. Clearly he was not against lay preachers, and indeed gave the practice tacit approval by allowing them to exhort in his societies. Thus, William Ley, who in 1762 came to Madeley to be Fletcher’s pupil, presumably with the intention of preparing to take Anglican orders, had begun ‘exhorting in a neighbouring parish’ by Autumn 1763, making him one of the earliest lay preachers in the coalfield. Likewise, Fletcher permitted Wesley’s lay itinerants to preach in his meetings but not in his church. Fletcher’s curate, Greaves, allowed the lay preachers to continue in their leadership during Fletcher’s absence. Indeed, it appears that Fletcher saw Greaves and the preachers as working in tandem ‘to stir up the people’ in his parish. A typical example of Fletcher’s reception of visiting preachers was described by Cradock Glascott who was an ordained clergyman, but of the Calvinist persuasion. Even so, in 1781 (notably after the Calvinist-Arminian Controversy had subsided) both Fletcher and Greaves welcomed him into the Madeley pulpit, thus:

Mr. Fletcher ... received me with great cordiality. He rode about his parish, and in about an hour after my arrival the church was nearly full ... G[reaves], his curate, very civilly accompanied me the next day on my way to Wolverhampton.

A similar welcome was offered to Charles Simeon when he visited in 1784. Fletcher received him at the vicarage, prayed with him, then ‘took up a bell, and went through the whole village ringing it, and telling every person he met, that they must come to church, for there was a clergyman from Cambridge come to preach to them.’ The visits of preachers were seen by Fletcher as providential opportunities for spiritual encouragement. When the Wesleyan, Jeremiah Brettell, and a friend visited Fletcher at his Madeley Wood meeting in 1773, Fletcher invited them: ‘If either of you will give us a word of exhortation, or go to prayer, we shall be very thankful.’ The Wesleyans were limited to preaching in the religious meetings in Madeley. Similarly, when the evangelical and charismatic lay preacher Captain Scott

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213 JF→CW, 26 Dec. 1763.
214 JF→J. Owen, 14 Feb. 1781.
217 WMM (1830), 651.
came to Madeley, he preached from Fletcher’s horse-block in the vicarage yard, and Samuel Bradburn preached in a room in the vicarage. As one of Bradburn’s biographers stated: ‘If [Fletcher] could not ask [Bradburn] to officiate in the church, seeing that he had taken no holy orders, the good vicar had no difficulty or scruple in regard to his guest’s preaching the gospel in the house.’

Even with these limitations, the number of guest speakers in Madeley is impressive. There are records of more than thirty visiting preachers in Madeley over Fletcher’s long incumbency, twenty-one of whom were ordained clergy, nine of whom were Wesleyan itinerants, and several others such as Captain Scott and George Burder. John Wesley made five visits to Madeley; Charles, to Fletcher’s deep disappointment, made none. Thomas Maxfield visited the parish on several occasions, staying for weeks at a time. Maxfield had been involved in the perfectionist controversy in London in the early 1760s, and Wesley had warned Fletcher (and others) to beware of his influence. Fletcher invited Maxfield to Madeley anyway, ‘because I love peace as a Catholic, and I hope to maintain it with all’. After hearing him preach, Fletcher was pleased:

He does not preach perfection, as I supposed, does not hint at it, but labours simply to awaken and bring souls to the life of faith his preaching appears to me very profitable, abundance of people attend him & love his plainness ... I trust he will do good among us.

Having his pulpit supplied by another also allowed Fletcher the opportunity to take more extensive preaching journeys, and for all of his comments which suggest he was a lover of seclusion (‘I am best hid, I think, in my hole’), he travelled rather extensively between 1765 and 1770. On numerous occasions he took weekday trips to other parishes (mostly in Staffordshire) in order to be in Madeley on the Sabbath, but there were times he was away for several days or even weeks at a time, preaching for the Wesleys or Lady Huntingdon at Bristol, Bath, or London. When this was the case, his parish was supplied with those he considered dutiful.

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219 See Appendix 5.
220 See UL, 28-29; JF→W. Ley, 9 May [1765].
221 JF→CW, 22 Aug. 1764.
222 JF→W. Ley, 3 July [1765].
223 JF→GW, 3 July 1767; cf. JF→JI, 13 Sept. 1784.
224 JF→CW, 8 Aug. 1765.
curates, evangelical, and devoted to carrying on his ministry in his absence.\footnote{225} When away, he wrote to his parishioners. He exhorted them to take advantage of the spiritual resources they had in visiting preachers—whether his curate or the Wesleyan itinerants—reminding them that it was a blessing and a privilege to have a variety of preachers. ‘I hope ... you improve much under the ministry of ... Mr. Brown’, he wrote in 1765. ‘Make haste to gather the honey of knowledge as it drops from his lips’.\footnote{226}

Fletcher’s most extended extra-parochial journeys were those made to Lady Huntingdon’s College for training ministers at Trevecca, where he served as its first president between 1768 and 1771.\footnote{227} Located at Talgarth in South Wales, the school was approximately seventy miles from Madeley, short enough to visit during the week and still attend upon his duties at Madeley.\footnote{228} In the early period of planning for the institution in 1765 when asked to fill the post of master or under-master by Howell Harris, Fletcher politely declined: ‘I said to him that as I was sure that providence had placed me here [Madeley], I would not dare quit my Post without particular and well-marked order from my divine Master’.\footnote{229} However, compelled by a spirit of evangelical cooperation\footnote{230} and reassured by the fact that a master would be secured, allowing him to remain in Madeley while making only occasional visits to the institution, he reluctantly accepted the position: ‘With regard to the superintendency of the college, ... as far as my present calling [to Madeley] and poor abilities will allow, I am willing to throw my mite into the treasury’.\footnote{231} Several evangelical clergymen filled his cure when he was at the college but most often it was Glascott, sent on the errand by Lady Huntingdon. After their marriage, both of the Fletchers were invited by Thomas Coke to take a preaching journey to Ireland. At first they were both reluctant, but when Cornelius Bayley and Nathaniel Gilbert

\footnote{225} JF\rightarrow Miss Hatton, 27 May 1766; JF\rightarrow JH, 27 Apr. 1767.\footnote{226} JF\rightarrow Madeley Parishioners, 30 Apr. 1766.\footnote{227} Trevecca was opened on 24 Aug. 1768; JF resigned his post as the first president on 7 March 1771 in a letter to CH (B1.3).\footnote{228} Cf. LJF, 151.\footnote{229} JF\rightarrow CW, 31 Jan. 1765.\footnote{230} Lady Huntingdon had proposed a plan for a union of evangelical ministers in 1764. See JF\rightarrow CW, 22 Aug. 1764; JF\rightarrow GW, 28 May 1768.\footnote{231} JF\rightarrow CH, 24 Nov. 1767; cf. A. Harding, The Countess of Huntingdon’s Connexion (Oxford, 2003), 184.
presented as willing and available curates, the Fletchers set out for Dublin, supported by the ‘prayers and blessings’ of their devoted parishioners.$^{232}$

Fletcher’s itinerancy beyond the coalfield and his invitation of preachers to proclaim the gospel in Madeley could be interpreted in several ways. It could have been that the trials he experienced with his society meetings and the opportunity to join with his colleagues away from the parish prompted his travels. However, because he so consistently refused invitations to leave his parish, especially on Sundays, and because these statements spanned the duration of his incumbency, this seems untenable. It also may have been that there was little strategy involved, other than his tendency to constantly look for the doors which providence opened to him. Thus, when his parish schedule was agreeable to his being away, and there was a substitute in his pulpit, he was willing to take leave of Madeley for various times. This is perhaps more likely, since it answers both the question of why he was willing to leave Madeley, and is consistent with his views on providence. There is another option however, that would appear to fit with his larger model of ministry. It is possible that, as with his other irregular activities, which served as a means of extending the reach of the church, so his preaching journeys and invitation to preachers operated as a means of assimilating typically Methodist or dissenting strategies into his Anglican ministry at Madeley. There is much to suggest this view, but it is difficult to be certain; Fletcher never overtly explained it. Of course, at different times, he may have been motivated by different reasons, and all of these possibilities may have at one time or another been true. Carrying out a Church-Methodist strategy was not without its difficulties, for tensions arose at times both from within his parish and from without. The next chapter examines these issues.

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$^{232}$ LMF, 1:182.
Chapter 4
Tensions in Church and Chapel

If in Fletcher’s mind his chapel societies and preaching meetings formed a seamless web with his Anglican church ministry, this was not always understood by either his Anglican clerical colleagues, his parishioners, nor ostensibly, even John Wesley. Misunderstanding and disagreement gave rise to a number of interrelated tensions. Many of his parishioners eventually warmed to the idea of religious society meetings and the full orb of Fletcher’s evangelical paradigm. But the process by which this Methodistic way of proceeding came to be accepted took time, and occasionally it was met with considerable resistance. Clerical colleagues from other coalfield parishes challenged what they perceived as ‘enthusiasm’ in Fletcher’s preaching, sometimes stirring up his parishioners against him. Furthermore, the early societies in the parish, particularly the Rock Church meeting at Madeley Wood, were seen by some as conventicles and provoked accusations that they might be Jacobite assemblies.¹ Such claims served a rhetorical purpose in stirring reaction against the meetings which were perceived to be disrupting the peace in the local community. Resistance was initiated by the gentry who encouraged mobbing from below and took legal action from above.

These tensions were not constant, and as Fletcher proved himself an earnest and diligent pastor over his long tenure, pressures eased. Even so, tensions ironically arose from a different quarter as Fletcher attempted to maintain his model of Church Methodism over and against John Wesley’s competing model. While Fletcher saw Methodism as centred in the parish, Wesley saw it as centred in the Connexion, operating as an external adjunct to the ministry of the parish incumbent but managed by himself or his superintendents. Despite Fletcher’s friendship with the Wesley brothers, he was hesitant to assimilate his parish ministry into the ‘highly articulated and nation-wide organisation’ of Methodists.² Fletcher’s Methodism was expansionist, yet had the local parish church as the base of evangelical mission. This did not prevent Wesley from persistently attempting to draw Fletcher away from Madeley to work full-time with the Methodists, urging him to leave his Madeley societies to Wesley’s itinerants. In this, Wesley appears as either unaware or

unwilling to accept that a model of Methodist ministry, which functioned independent of his authority and formulation, could sustain evangelical success despite Fletcher's best attempts to demonstrate exactly that. This chapter presents these tensions thematically, but with a loose chronological structure, beginning with an examination of opposition from neighbouring clergy and Madeley parishioners successively, and concluding with a discussion of tensions between Fletcher and Wesley and their differing models of Methodism.

**Ecclesiastical Tensions**

*The Rev. Mr Prothero*

The parish clergy generally lived peaceably with each other. At times however, their responses to one another's work could be reactionary, according to their individual opinions and prejudices. At a parochial level, these were limited in both frequency and extent by the practical reality that the clergy had their own parishes to care for, and interference with that of another was frowned upon. Periodically, the clergy gathered for mutual edification and exhortation in pastoral dutifulness at episcopal and archidiaconal visitations. These occasions provided an opportunity for the clergy to have discourse with one another, to encourage pastoral endeavours, and to report on their ministries, and at each visitation one or more of the clergy would preach. Typically visitation sermons were focussed upon encouraging pastoral duties. Occasionally however, those who preached took advantage of the opportunity to chastise their clerical brethren. It was also customary that some of the laity would attend; some because their children were to be confirmed, and some out of more general social and religious interest. In addition, churchwardens were required to attend in order to report on their respective parishes and make

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3 The exceptions were, of course, the unbeneficed or non-resident clergy who resided in the parishes of other incumbents. See below in this section regarding Rev. Hinton.
4 See, *Canons*, 3, 351. Episcopal visitations in Hereford (as well as other dioceses) were carried out at a central location (for Hereford diocese visitations were held at Ludlow, Shropshire) where clergy would gather, rather than the bishop making personal visits to each parish—a custom originating in the thirteenth century. See P.M. Smith, 'Points of Law and Practice Concerning Ecclesiastical Visitations', *Ecclesiastical Law Journal*, 2 (1992), 189-212.
5 Smith, 'Points of Law', 201.
7 Cf. Warne, *Church and Society*, 118.
8 Smith, 'Points of Law', 200-201.
presentments as needed. One particular visitation created problems for Fletcher. At the archdeacon’s visitation (at Wenlock, Shropshire) in 1761, Rev. Prothero, a clergyman from a nearby parish, preached a sermon in which he criticized ‘enthusiastic’ clergy for emphasizing experience in religion. Fletcher took the address as a personal affront. He wrote to Charles Wesley that the: ‘sermon ... was almost all against the points which are called Methodist doctrines[,] [T]he Clergyman who preached it is only separated by one parish from mine, and he surely it seems had me in view’. Several of Fletcher’s parishioners were in attendance and understood the implications of Prothero’s remarks. They called upon Fletcher to either acquiesce to Prothero’s points against evangelical preaching or to defend his doctrines and methods. This is suggestive of the way in which the laity could be incited to protest against enthusiasm, Methodist or otherwise. Prothero’s sermon was not printed, but Fletcher outlined its main points in a ‘long letter’ defending the role of experience in religion. It was in this letter which Fletcher most clearly exposited his view of what he called ‘experimental religion’. He designed the letter for circulation around his parish, and he notified Prothero of this intent. The points of Prothero’s sermon which provoked Fletcher’s response on behalf of ‘the souls of [his] parishioners’ and the ‘success of [his] ministry among them’ are worth noting.

The sermon was divided into two parts, neither completely contrary to Fletcher’s own ministerial concerns. In the first part Prothero affirmed ‘revealed religion’ praised by Fletcher as a bold and ingenious attack upon ‘Deists & Infidels’. In the second part, he guarded ‘Truth from the other extreme, Superstition and Enthusiasm, [which] deserves no less to be commended’. Fletcher commented that ‘The rocks on which both split are equally dangerous’, and he clarified his own position on enthusiasts: ‘Boasting of communion with God & peculiar favours from

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9 There is little evidence relating to any clergy by the name of Prothero (var. Prytherch, Prother, Prosser). The variant spelling and the context seems to suggest the Rev. Stephen Prytherch (1720-86) who was the incumbent (1752-86) of Much Wenlock where the visitation was held. He had various connections in Madeley both with Fletcher’s predecessor by marriage, and with Abraham Darby, III, and Daniel Hemus, vicar of Broseley who also was at odds with Fletcher occasionally. On Prytherch, see BI. On the coalfield clergy, see Map 1.
10 JF→CW, 19 Aug. 1761.
11 Ibid.
13 Prothero’s text was 2 Cor. 3:5.
14 See Chapter 2.
15 The original manuscript (JF→Rev. Prothero), 25 July 1761) is at GCAH. It was first published in WMM (1821), 17-28, 95-105. All quotations which follow in this section are taken from the original manuscript.
heaven is no less hurtful [than Deism] to the cause of X' when ... actuated by a spirit of delusion. These are the counterfeits & bane of inward Religion'. However, Fletcher declared his frustration with the injudiciousness of Prothero’s tack: ‘[W]hile you ... were pulling out the Tares did not you root up, unawares, some of the wheat also?’ It was this aspect of the sermon which Fletcher perceived to be levelled at his ministry at Madeley. Frequently referencing the Homilies, Collects, and Articles of the church, Fletcher took aim at the extreme, which he saw as negating inward religion altogether in favour of ‘Morality as the way to Salvation’. He was trying to make the point that evangelicalism was actually the true doctrine of the Church of England. To find doctrines of repentance, justification by faith, and a renewed and regenerated heart required looking no further than to the Articles and the scriptures upon which they were based. If Fletcher saw his opponents as doctrinally ignorant or naïve in their assumption that preaching morality was the same as preaching the gospel, Prothero saw a converse myopia in Fletcher. For it was not his doctrines alone (or possibly at all) to which Prothero objected, but the ‘stirring up the hearers in proportion to the clearness, constancy, [and] power with which they are preached’, namely the provocation of an experiential response by ministers like Fletcher who thereby created ‘disturbances, strife & confusion’. Prothero appears to have been concerned that Fletcher’s doctrines ‘cut at the very roots of common morality’, but Fletcher interpreted the complaint as being against the prophetic message of the gospel, similar to the way the Pharisees had been confused and their authority undermined by Jesus’ message. Thus Fletcher argued that giving offence or raising disturbances by preaching true doctrine was no indication that such preaching should be stopped, for so ridiculed were the prophets of Israel, St. Paul, and especially Jesus himself.

Fletcher’s discourse continued for forty-eight pages, largely in defence of his preaching which emphasized ‘experimental religion’, ‘inward religion’, or ‘heart religion’. It seems clear that Fletcher and Prothero were speaking past each other, both parties hearing but neither understanding what the other was saying. Without an extant copy of Prothero’s sermon it is difficult to ascertain with any certainty just how divergent his preaching actually was from Fletcher’s own. Fletcher also

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18 On this theme, see Mack, Heart Religion, passim.
perceived the danger of enthusiasm but was convinced that he needed to moderate tendencies toward devaluing all sense of feeling in preference to reason alone. In his explanation, Fletcher attempted to find common ground with Prothero, writing:

To set up impulses as the standard of our faith, or rule of our conduct; To take the ... flights of a heated imagination for the workings of God’s Spirit; To pretend to miraculous gifts & those fruits of the Spirit; which are not offered ... to believers in all ages ... is downright Enthusiasm; I detest it as well as you.

For Fletcher however, Prothero’s solution of preaching pure reason and morality apart from the doctrines of true faith was only applicable in matters of speculative religion, but by no means practicable in the real needs of parishioners for relief from the heavy burden of sin and for understanding the hardships of life. Fletcher’s response was one of moderation in attempt to give reason its proper place in religious discourse, while simultaneously defending the place of feelings in response to the supernatural change effected by the Holy Spirit in a believer’s conversion. Notoriously adept at forming analogies, he cleverly elucidated his point that true religious feelings, ‘are the natural effect of grace, which the soul cannot contain; and they are to grace, and the fire of Divine love, what smoke is to culinary fire: it proceeds from it, but adds nothing to it; yea, if a man lay any stress thereon, it will darken, and perhaps put out the flame.’

The entire discourse reflected the negotiations of eighteenth-century Anglicans in attempt to assimilate the growing emphasis on reason with the religion of the heart, so effective in the preaching of the Methodists and according to evangelical Anglicans, central to the formularies of the church. Indeed, Fletcher, who in the rest of the letter was notably reticent to make accusations (deferring instead to the assumption that he had somehow misunderstood the preacher’s intent), in one instance, called Prothero’s churchmanship into question: ‘[I]s it consistent with the Doctrine of our Ch[urch] to condemn and set aside all feelings in religion, and rank them with unaccountable Impulses? [I] tell you, that either you or

19 Cf. JF>JW, 22 Nov. 1762.
20 For an outline of Fletcher’s theodicy, see JF, Sermon, Heb. 12:6-8, (B1.9).
22 JF>[Rev. Prothero], 25 July 1761.
the compilers of our liturgy, articles, and homilies, must be mistaken, if I did not
mistake you.’ Fletcher concluded with an appeal to Prothero’s consentient authorities
for true religion. ‘I have endeavoured to prove’, he apologized, ‘from the doctrine of
our Church, from reason and Scripture ... not only that feeling and rational
Christianity are not incompatible ... but also that such feelings, so far from deserving
to be called madness and enthusiasm, are nothing short of the actings of spiritual life,
or, to speak Scripturally, “the power of God to every one that believeth”.’24

Up to this point, Fletcher’s strategy in promoting his evangelical cause and
defending his methods had relied upon accepted, yet ancient, authorities rather than
present testimony from likeminded clergy. At this time he perceived that in Madeley
he was isolated from the main currents of revival amongst his clerical
contemporaries, and he reflected: ‘I have neither good nor bad preacher who cares
to have anything to do with me’.25 There was perhaps a degree of self-fulfilling
prophecy at work, for he had written to Charles Wesley only days after being
appointed to Madeley the year before: ‘I am inwardly in suspense, my heart recoils
at the idea of being here alone opposed by my superiors hated by my neighbours
and scorned by everyone ... without resolve how can I resist the attacks & surmount
the difficulties that I foresee if I fulfil my duty at Madeley?’26 Psychology aside,
Prothero’s sermon and the clergy who after hearing it, ‘came up [to Fletcher] with a
triumphant air and demanded ... what [he] had to say in reply’, served to confirm his
earlier suspicions that he would be met with resistance, which he saw as providence
working to mould him spiritually. Contemplating his difficulties, Fletcher wrote in a
letter to Lady Huntingdon: ‘Why the Lord permits these offences to arise has not a
little staggered [sic] me’. And somewhat uncharacteristically, yet still cautiously
optimistic, he expressed his resolve: ‘Had not this trial staggered me, I should have
great hopes that a few living stones may be gathered here for the temple of the
Lord’.27

Even though Fletcher’s evangelical ministry was centred in the parish church,
there was a degree to which, in the minds of his neighbours, he might as well have
been a Methodist itinerant. Although Wesley’s preachers had not yet made their way

24 Rom. 1:16.
26 Ibid. 29 Sept. 1760.
27 1 Pet. 2:5.
to Madeley, Fletcher, even as the parish incumbent, brought with him some of the same characteristics that raised tensions in other parts of England when itinerants ‘invaded’ the local parish culture. As Walsh has adroitly observed, the typical Methodist ‘societies were tended by itinerant agents, whose origins were unknown, whose persons were obscure, and who appeared to have no formal authorisation whatever.’

To some degree, Fletcher was viewed with a similar scepticism. His foreign accent, his effusive manner of preaching the new birth, and the fact that he arrived in Madeley and entered into his ministry with considerable vigour compared to his predecessor, all conspired against any easy acceptance by his parishioners and un-evangelically-minded neighbouring colleagues, that the ministry he was building was—as he believed it to be—a more faithful version of Anglicanism, ergo, primitive Christianity.

His letter against Prothero arguing this position probably seemed a weak defence to some, and Fletcher himself knew that his strategy needed to be undergirded. In this light, it seems unlikely that his visit to Edward Stillingfleet in West Bromwich the following month to invite him to preach in Madeley, was a coincidence. Stillingfleet was part of a new evangelical cohort in South Staffordshire and amongst his congregation was the evangelical William Legge, Earl of Dartmouth. West Bromwich was one of the parishes violently disrupted by the Wednesbury riots in the 1740s, but now had some stability due to Stillingfleet and Lord Dartmouth. It is possible that Fletcher was hoping Stillingfleet’s voice in the Madeley pulpit would buttress his own teaching and give some credibility to the evangelical message. Unfortunately for Fletcher, Stillingfleet turned down the invitation, and Fletcher wrote to Charles Wesley that it was because he was ‘so afraid of acting the part of a Methodist although he preaches their doctrines’. By February 1762, Prothero had not replied to Fletcher’s letter, and it is curious that Fletcher did not let it lie, for he wrote to him: ‘Having waited some months for an answer I ... trouble you again sir to beg ... the favour of a line from you on the important subject.’

If Prothero ever responded, the answer has not been preserved.

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30 On Lord Dartmouth, see BI.
32 JF ➔ CW, 19 Aug. 1761.
33 JF ➔ Rev. Prothero, 3 Feb. 1762.
The Rev. William Hinton and Madeley Parishioners

The most troublesome of Fletcher’s clerical adversaries was William Hinton, apparently unbeficed and living ‘in Madeley wood where he has much influence’. Fletcher’s statement itself portrays one of the hurdles to maintaining a stable ministry in the three villages of Madeley, each of which could be influenced by a local person if they had particular standing in the community. Hinton attended Oxford and was ordained deacon in 1760. By law, he would have needed a title to be ordained, but it seems he was unbeficed when Fletcher arrived in Madeley. Hinton was not ordained a priest until 1765 and lived with his father, William Sr, a grocer who also opposed Fletcher. Hinton remained there until an appointment by Lord Gower lead him to Kinnerley, Shropshire. The Hintons took aim at Fletcher’s ministry starting in 1761, particularly targeting his religious societies. Fletcher exclaimed to Charles Wesley: ‘Do not write to me any more care of Mr. Hinton, he is become my fiercest enemy as well as his son who is in Orders.’ He interrupted the religious societies, and taunted Fletcher publicly (he called Fletcher a ‘Jesuit &c’). The following year he brought charges against Fletcher in Wenlock and incited the churchwardens to (threaten to) testify against him ‘before the Spiritual court’. Fletcher explained to Charles Wesley:

[Hinton] has openly declared war on me by affixing to the door of the Church a paper in which he accuses me of Rebellion of Schism and of being a disturber of the public peace. He puts himself at the head of the gentlemen of the parish (as they call themselves) and supported by the Squire, and the Recorder of Wenlock ... he wants to enforce the Conventicle act.

The main source of conflict was Fletcher’s Madeley Wood meeting at Mary Matthews’ house. The issue had come to a head when Fletcher was absent from one of the meetings and a lay person ‘read and prayed’ in Fletcher’s place. Mrs Matthews, along with the ‘20 or 30 people’ who were meeting at her house were prosecuted before the magistrates, and she was fined £20. Fletcher accompanied

34 JF→CW, 8 June 1762.
36 JF→CW, 19 Aug. 1761; 16 May 1762. On Hinton, see Bl.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid. 8 June 1762.
them to the court: ‘I pleaded my cause as well as I could ... I assured [the magistrate] that we were prepared to bear the severity of the law if it applied to us.’

Anxious that further threats of prosecution would become reality and uncertain whether his meetings were within the law, Fletcher sought advice from several friends. He wrote to James Ireland, Martin Madan, and an attorney from Wem with evangelical sympathies, Jonathan Henshaw. Both Madan and another counsellor affirmed that Fletcher ‘fell foul of the Conventicle act’. Henshaw saw more ambiguity in the law and suggested there might be room for varying interpretations. He suggested the possibility that Fletcher was within the law precisely because the content of his chapel meetings was according to the Liturgy of the Church of England. Indeed, he pointed out the absurdity of enforcing the Conventicle Act in such a case:

If therefore this statute sho[d be construed to Extend to the Ministers of the Established Church, and as an Abridgement of their Power of Instructing their congregation, the Dissenters by virtue of the Toleratcion Act would have a more extensive Liberty to Instruct their Hearers, than the Ministers of the Established Church.

Fletcher was prepared to appear before the court but he was never called by the bishop or magistrates to do so. Even so, Fletcher bolstered his case, not in a legal treatise, but in a sermon preached on Acts 5:42, which reads: ‘And daily in the temple and every house they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ’. The entire sermon is an apologetic for his irregular ministerial activity and demonstrates both his familiarity with the Canons and his priority of God’s law over the law of the church wherever the two were in conflict. The sermon had three ‘heads’, the second of which was aimed directly at those in his congregation who took umbrage at his parish meetings. He recited the verse, emphasizing that preaching was allowed by scripture (1) in the temple and (2) in every house. To prove his point he cited

40 Ibid. There are obvious parallels to the situation at Rolvenden in March 1760. It is quite possible that Fletcher was familiar with that case since he was at that time working with the Wesleys in London. See Lond. Mag. (1761), 413-14, 529-30; L&TJW, 2:359.
41 JF→CW, 22 Aug. 1762; Jonathan was surely a relative of Samuel, on whom, see WJW, 22:265, n.59.
42 J. Henshaw→JF, 24 Sept. 1762.
44 J. Henshaw→JF, 24 Sept. 1762.
45 JF, Sermon, Acts 5:42 (B1.9).
biblical examples of preaching both indoors and out of doors, in the temple, in the ‘upper room’ on the day of Pentecost, and ‘house to house’. The following extract reveals how Fletcher addressed anticipated objections:

... 4 Obj. this is not allowed in the Church.

1. Our Church is not against the Bible

2. Canon 71. No preaching nor administering Sacraments but in case of necessity in private house. But there is a Necessity seeing the ignorance of Churchmen – and Busy endeavours of Dissenters.

3. 73 Canon forbids to hold conventicles or secret meetings. – to empeach & deprave the Doctrine of the Church of England.

4. Canon 49 Allows a Minister examined by the Bishop and duly licensed to expound in his own cure or elsewhere any scripture or matter of Doctrine.\(^{46}\)

This was not the only place Fletcher made such arguments,\(^{47}\) but it is significant that his aim was to demonstrate that his chapel meetings in the parish were not conventicles, if by that term it was meant that they contradicted or sought to undermine the true doctrine of the Established Church. Indeed, it was his chief point that his meetings (he went on to defend daily meetings and sermons in the parish) were thoroughly Anglican. Much later in his life, Fletcher included in his Portrait an anecdote which has striking similarities to his conflict with the Hintons. He wrote:

A worldly minister ... entering into an [religious] assembly ... heard the prayer of these humble believers; and, as much surprised to see the ardour with which they offered their petitions, as to observe the time and place in which they were presented, withdrew from their society with as much indignation as a good pastor would retire from a company of jugglers. But having understood that one of his own parishioners was of the religious party, he took the earliest opportunity of testifying the utmost disapprobation of his conduct.

\(^{46}\) Ibid.

\(^{47}\) Appeal (2nd edn.), 128-29.
‘What was it,’ said he, ‘that you was doing with those people the other day in such a place? Conventicles of that kind are contrary to order, and unworthy of toleration. The church is the only proper place for the performance of divine worship ...’ But the [society member] ... asserted, that the prayer against which the zealous pastor had so angrily exclaimed, was used in exact conformity to those very petitions which he himself was inconsistently heard to offer at the feast of pentecost, and on other solemn seasons.48

In addition to Hinton’s charges against the religious societies, he on one occasion ‘assembled the Parishioners to instigate them to chase [Fletcher’s] valet from the Parish—after much argument he was obliged to desist.’49 We know little of Hinton’s churchmanship, but wherever his loyalties found their place, it seems in that part of the parish a squire-parson alliance was established, not between Fletcher and a local gentleman, but between Rev. Hinton and the Madeley Wood gentry. Fletcher’s pastoral ideals and methods interfered with Hinton’s status as local unbeneficed clergyman but gentrified leader. Other than Fletcher’s letters to Charles Wesley expressing his frustration with Hinton, it is difficult to say just how Fletcher dealt with him personally. Fletcher was often discouraged by the opposition brought by clergy who he thought should rather be his allies.50

Anti-religious agitation was not reserved for Methodist itinerants, or enthusiastic dissenters, and it was not only some of his fellow clergy who complicated Fletcher’s task; there was a body of the laity who proved similarly umbrageous concerning his pastoral fervour. He approached his parish ministry, similar to Wesley and his itinerants,51 ‘with the language of a missionary going to the most ignorant heathens’.52 The month he was inducted, he wrote to Wesley that his call to Madeley was ‘to preach Christ among the Gentiles ... to try to save ... the souls that are committed to Me ... crying to them to turn in the name of the Lord.’53

48 Portrait, 2:104-105.
49 JF→CW, 8 June 1762.
50 Many of Fletcher’s letters to both Charles Wesley and Lady Huntingdon, especially in the early period of his ministry, were replete with statements of feelings of inadequacy to the task before him. For example, see JF→CH, 19 Nov. 1760; 6 Jan. 1761; JF→CW, 12 Oct. 1761.
51 See Minutes, 10-19.
Eight years later he wrote to James Ireland that there were ‘no farmers at Madeley who feared God and loved Jesus.’\textsuperscript{54} To his congregation he preached:

\begin{quote}
Let us observe here the dangerous mistake of some who judge, that they are regenerate because they are reformed ... You pity those who never go to church, and never worship in God’s house: But when you are there, are you sensible of the presence of the God on whom you wait? ... You cry out against those who never say their prayers ... But when you pray, is the intercourse opened between God and your soul ...\textsuperscript{55}
\end{quote}

It is no surprise that when he began to preach the new birth at Madeley, proclaiming that many of his congregation, despite their attendance at church and communion, were yet unfamiliar with true religion, they began to call him a Methodist. ‘Some of the poorer sort’, however, affirmed his gospel message saying ‘he is speaking the truth.’\textsuperscript{56} His Methodism, albeit flowing from the church pulpit, was beginning to disrupt the status quo. Furthermore, because the bulk of his parish was made up of the semi-literate or illiterate, his preaching often catered to the capacities of the lower classes.\textsuperscript{57} In this, Fletcher demonstrated less of the ‘conventional social conservatism’ of Walker of Truro,\textsuperscript{58} though both parsons emphasized that the gospel was equally available to all regardless of social standing. In any case, in Madeley the gospel was, Fletcher alleged, received more readily by the poor colliers of his parish.\textsuperscript{59} The same gospel message, however, perturbed some of the gentry who saw Fletcher as an encourager of fanaticism amongst the lower classes and a disturber of the public order. His preaching quickly elicited the rebuke of ‘Some of the best farmers and most respectable tradesmen’, of whom he wrote, ‘talk often among themselves ... about turning me out of my living’.\textsuperscript{60} The aggravation he caused was indicative of rising tensions in general over his evangelicalism, foreshadowing his later ‘trials’ as he called them. His frequent sermonizing on the lost and damnable state of man provoked ‘repeat clamours of

\textsuperscript{54} JF \rightarrow JI, 14 Oct. 1768.
\textsuperscript{55} WJF, (B), 7:231-41.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{57} LJF, 65-66.
\textsuperscript{58} Walsh, ‘Religious Societies’, 300-301.
\textsuperscript{59} LJF, 65-66.
\textsuperscript{60} JF \rightarrow CH, 6 Jan. 1761.
those who complain that they hear of nothing but harsh unsound and unscriptural doctrine in this church’. On one occasion, Fletcher commented on a ‘poor inconsiderate man ... indecently betraying before the congregation the thoughts of his heart on that subject’, to which Fletcher responded in a sermon on the Sunday following the interruption.61 The sermon was an apologetic for preaching the new birth, and he noted in his concluding remarks:

I ... beg you to take notice of the unjustice of those who cry out against my doctrine as if it were strange & never heard of in our church before: can I help peoples calling themselves church[men] without knowing the Articles of our Church & exclaim against me as a dissenter for dissenting from their loose principles, and defending the 9th Article of the Church they pretend to be of[?]62

Just as taunts were brought publicly against him, so he replied publicly from the pulpit, calling churchmen to true churchmanship. This provoked at least a portion of his congregation to anger and as in other areas, ‘incitement came from clergymen, gentry or some “blustering, influential farmer”’.63 If Hinton was the former type of adversary, William Purton, a parishioner who had land in both Madeley and a neighbouring parish, was the latter. Purton had already been adversarial towards Fletcher, but when Fletcher preached in the open air near Purton’s barn,64 he was stopped short because ‘a man “set about ringing the pan at him and another man threw eggs at him, and a man of the name of Rogers drove four horses through the Congregation.”’65 Purton was known to insult Fletcher as he came out of church, and on one such occasion, Fletcher told his congregation that ‘the Lord would display a signal mark of his displeasure against the enemies of his cause and truth.’66 On his way home from a ‘midnight revel’ the following Saturday, Purton fell from his horse and died.67

Tensions were not constant, but it is clear that Fletcher’s irregularities occasionally provoked new reactions. When Fletcher preached against the

61 JF, Sermon, John 3:18 (B1.9)
62 Ibid.
63 Walsh, ‘Methodism and the Mob’, 216.
64 JF>CW, 4 July 1774. On Purton, see BI.
65 Unpub. Address quoted by Skinner, Nonconformity, 72.
66 A.G. Meacham, A Compendious History ... of the Methodist Church (New York, 1825), 231-33.
67 Crowther, Portraiture, 101; Tyerman has mistaken ‘Preston’ for ‘Purton’ in WDS, 82.
immorality of popular recreations, for example, new conflicts arose. Still, Fletcher was able to find advocates in the parish as well. Indeed, two of his primary collaborators in the parish, helping him with his societies, namely Thomas York and William Wase, were both gentlemen; not all of the gentry opposed him. Over time, Fletcher garnered support from his parishioners more generally by demonstrating his commitment to their care. In Chapter Two it was observed that Fletcher’s preaching of the gospel was more effective than a first glance at his own testimony might suggest. The same is true of his efforts at reforming the parish more generally. When towards the end of Fletcher’s life one of his erstwhile students, Noel Hill (now First Baron of Berwick), with another nobleman met Fletcher on the road, Hill commented to his companion: ‘That man has nearly civilised all this very populous country: when he came here, there were many little better than savages, who are now respectable members of society. He has been the greatest blessing in all these parts.’

Tensions Between Fletcher and John Wesley

Traditionally, historians have looked at Madeley through Wesley’s eyes, assuming that the ministerial success Fletcher found there was due to Wesley’s model of Methodism. There has, in recent years, been some debate over claims that in the eighteenth century, ‘Methodism ... grew fastest in areas of Anglican parochial weakness, where the supervision of squires and parsons was at its most rudimentary, and appealed also to occupational groups in closely knit communities’, yet it is this perspective which has typically been applied to Madeley. Baker claimed that the parish was a characteristic background for a Methodist circuit even before Fletcher organized Societies and built chapels there ... typical of those areas most affected by the Industrial Revolution of the eighteenth century—areas where Methodism achieved its greatest success because the maximum spiritual need was too often coupled with minimum ministration by the Established Church.

68 T. Brocas, God No Respecter of Persons (Shrewsbury, 1808), 31.
It is true that Fletcher saw Madeley as a good setting for a Methodist ministry, but it was not the Methodism of Wesley’s itinerants operating under his authority. Rather, Fletcher envisioned a Methodism centred in the local parish under his authority as the vicar. This caused two problems for Wesley: first, it meant that Wesley would have to (if reluctantly) defer to Fletcher’s own sense of calling to a single parish; and second, it meant that, despite his close relationship with Fletcher, he would still have to negotiate about sending his preachers into the parish as he had with other evangelical clergymen.

_Fletcher’s Narrow Sphere_

Wesley predicated that submission to his authority and his Methodist principles was voluntary and that those who wished to depart from them (and thus from his Connexion) were free to do so without hindrance. Referring to his early preachers, he wrote, ‘These severally desired to serve me as Sons, and to labour when and where I should direct. Observe. These … desired me, not I them … each had power to go away when he pleased’. Such a claim he could hardly have defended regarding his relationship with Fletcher (and indeed, with several others). For when Fletcher’s appointment to a parochial ministry called him away from his work with the Wesleys among the Methodists in London, John Wesley persistently asserted his presumptive prerogative to draft Fletcher back into Methodist service. Fletcher’s consistent response was to assert that it was God’s providence which had called him to Madeley, and until it was clear that providence had released him from that call, it was there he would stay. Fletcher believed he could carry out a Methodist ministry as a parish incumbent.

Despite all the time Fletcher had spent working with Wesley in the London societies, he did not perceive that work to be his ultimate calling. Instead, he took for his model a parish priest; he hoped to become a ‘little Berridge’. John Berridge was one of the so-called irregular clergy who set up preaching meetings in his parish, as well as itinerating beyond its bounds. His ministry met with remarkable success, and his model made an impression on Fletcher. In the spring of 1759 and again in 1760, Fletcher visited Berridge’s parish of Everton where he witnessed the crowds

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71 Minutes, 19-20.
72 Ibid. 18.
73 JF CH, 6 Jan. 1761.
74 Ibid.
that flocked to hear the gospel and the conversions that were effected.\textsuperscript{75} Whereas Wesley’s paradigm presupposed that extra-parochial leadership was intrinsic to gospel success, Berridge’s model suggested that a Methodist ministry could be performed from within the parish system, albeit with some irregularities. When he visited Berridge, Fletcher already had Madeley in mind as the place to which he might be presented, and he envisioned it as the ideal context for implementing Berridge’s model. ‘Should the Lord vouchsafe to plant the Gospel in this country’, he wrote to Lady Huntingdon, ‘[Madeley] seems to be the best spot for the centre of a work, as it lies just among the most populous, prophane, and ignorant parishes.\textsuperscript{76}

Fletcher’s induction to Madeley simultaneously limited Wesley’s Methodist work in the parish and took Fletcher away from the agenda Wesley had for him in London and elsewhere. This was understandably frustrating to Wesley who believed that Fletcher was somehow obliged to continue in his service, but he could not say of Fletcher what he said of some of the preachers: ‘they do me no favour in being directed by me’.\textsuperscript{77} Indeed, from the day of Fletcher’s ordination as priest, Wesley thought he had found a coadjutor. He recorded the day in his \textit{Journal}:

\begin{quote}
[F]inding myself weak at Snowsfields, I prayed (if he saw good) that God would send me help at the chapel ... And as soon as I had done preaching, Mr. Fletcher came, who had just then been ordained priest, and hastened to the chapel on purpose to assist, as he supposed me to be alone.\textsuperscript{78}
\end{quote}

He hoped this was an indication of Fletcher’s future, serving by his side, helping him to oversee the societies. Fletcher was not opposed to such a ministry, but he was not convinced that he should give up on hopes of being presented to Madeley. Fletcher had been useful in helping Wesley with organizing the singing in his London communion services,\textsuperscript{79} and both John and Charles invited him to accept a salary as a Methodist preacher in 1759 and 1760.\textsuperscript{80} His curacy had been terminated by Chambre, and his employment with the Hills was coming to a natural

\textsuperscript{75} A.H. New, \textit{Memoir of Selina, Countess of Huntingdon} (New York, 1858), 179-82; \textit{L&TCH}, 1:236; \textit{JF\rightarrow CW}, 1 Mar. 1760.
\textsuperscript{76} \textit{JF\rightarrow CH}, 19 Nov. 1760.
\textsuperscript{77} \textit{Minutes}, 18.
\textsuperscript{78} \textit{WJW}, 21:88.
\textsuperscript{79} \textit{JF\rightarrow JW}, 13 Dec. 1756, \textit{WMM} (1798), 92-93.
\textsuperscript{80} \textit{JF\rightarrow CW}, 4 Sept. 1759; 10 Nov. 1759; \textit{JF\rightarrow JW}, 27 Oct. 1760. In the latter year, Wesley had offered him £40.
end. Fletcher had been waiting to see what was to become of the Hills’ offer of Madeley. Thus, there was reason for the Wesleys to think Fletcher might join the Methodists permanently rather than taking a parish. Given this expectation, it would be natural for Wesley to be disappointed. However, it was not mere disappointment but severe censure that he expressed when he heard that Fletcher had accepted a living. If others were free to leave Wesley’s Connexion at will, as he asserted they were,81 he made no such allowance for John Fletcher. This introduced a protracted ambivalence82 into Fletcher and Wesley’s relationship, despite Wesley’s claim that they ‘were of one heart and soul.’83 This ambivalence both caused and was perpetuated by the tensions between Fletcher’s and Wesley’s differing versions of Methodism. Immediately upon hearing Fletcher had accepted an appointment to Madeley, Wesley wrote to Fletcher to persuade him he had made the wrong decision. The letter was indicative of the pressure he would put on Fletcher periodically for the remainder of Fletcher’s life, to leave his parish for a permanent role with the Methodists.

Although Wesley’s letter to Fletcher (written after hearing of his acceptance of Madeley) has not survived, Fletcher quoted from portions of it in his reply. Wesley’s first response was a stern rebuke. Fletcher’s defence of his acceptance began with a statement of his call to preach the gospel, despite the sacrifice it required in tearing himself away from ‘Father, Brother, &c’ as the disciples ‘tore themselves away from their beloved master’.84 But Wesley went further than simply accusing Fletcher of abandoning his spiritual father (an appellation Fletcher himself granted): He called Fletcher’s new charge ‘the Snare of the Devil’. Fletcher rebutted: ‘I can not see it in that light, what appears to you a snare seems to me to be a door providentially open’d ... here you say “I cannot do well in a living, it is not my calling”’.85 Finally, it appears that Wesley insinuated that he had accepted the living for the sake of money, ‘preferring things temporal to things eternal’. Fletcher, clearly shocked by such an accusation, listed the proofs that financial gain was the last possible reason for his acceptance of a Shropshire living, where he predicted he

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81 Minutes, 19-20.
82 I borrow the description of the relationship as ‘ambivalent’ from Forsaith, ‘Designated Successor’, 69-74.
83 SAJF, iii.
84 JW, 27 Oct. 1760.
85 Ibid.; elisions in the original have been maintained here to demonstrate Fletcher’s emphasis.
would struggle to ‘make both ends meet in living at Madeley upon 70 [pounds] – To say nothing of my having declined the offer of other livings, 3 or four times better’. To make himself clear to Wesley that he was not going to amend his decision, he concluded: ‘In short – I cannot retreat now I have been inducted some days, & could I do it, I do not think it expedient’.86

But why was Wesley, who claimed to hope for a more diligent and evangelically minded clergy, so eager to pull Fletcher away from helping to fulfill precisely that ideal? The timing may have had much to do with it, for the perfectionist controversy between Wesley and the perfectionist leaders, George Bell and Thomas Maxfield, was intensifying in the London societies.87 Fletcher’s mediating voice would have been a useful resource for Wesley who was trying to hold together his Connexion which was threatened by the controversy. Even so, once Fletcher had so clearly indicated that he was obeying his conscience (a mark Wesley commonly claimed for his own following of providence),88 why was Wesley not then more supportive of this minister par excellence? Part of the answer is to be found in the conversations Wesley had with his preachers during the previous five or six years. In 1755 Wesley prepared a document entitled Ought We to Separate from the Church of England to be read at the Conference. In one part of the address, he implied that those of his preachers who had received Anglican orders did not ‘give themselves to the work [of Methodism] so entirely as they did before’.89 Presumably this was because ordination required appointment to a curacy or incumbency and thus took them away from the London societies where the Wesley’s served Communion. Wesley did not mention who he had in mind, but he was reticent to encourage further ordinations amongst the ranks of lay preachers, seeing it as a liability to his movement in general. Now, five years later, Fletcher was unwittingly proving him correct by leaving London for his new parish.

For Fletcher, his trajectory was set. Once he was inducted, no alternatives could convince him that it was not his call. Wesley, on the other hand, would not accept Fletcher’s decision, yet he could not simply force him to leave Madeley. As Forsaith has suggested: ‘Wesley could not have behaved to Fletcher as he behaved

86 Ibid.
87 On the perfectionist controversy, see RE, 96-98.
88 e.g. LJW, 4:118.
89 WJW, 9:572.
to some others, expelling them from his circle. Fletcher was too well known and respected. Moreover he risked alienating Charles, neither politically nor fraternally conceivable. So Wesley contrived a series of strategies to persuade Fletcher to relinquish his beloved parish, none of which proved successful.

Hearing of Fletcher’s appointment, Wesley did not hesitate to design a plan to draw Fletcher back to London. Only two months after Fletcher’s induction, Wesley conspired to have him take on Samuel Furly as his curate. Fletcher had no need of a curate, nor had he requested that Wesley procure one for him. It may have been that Wesley was attempting to use Madeley as a nominal appointment in order to get Furly into orders. However, it seems more likely, as Forsaith has suggested, that Wesley hoped providing Fletcher with a curate would release him from parochial duty and free Fletcher to work with him in London, or as an itinerant. About the same time, Lady Huntingdon attempted to procure a curate for him as well, but he wrote to her: ‘There is little probability of my ever wanting [a curate]. My oath obliges me to residence, and when I am here I can easily manage all the business’. It is uncertain why the Countess had attempted to find a curate for him. It is possible that she too saw the benefit Fletcher could provide in London, where she had seen his effectiveness among the Huguenots. In any case, if she was trying to draw Fletcher away from Madeley, after he explained to her that he was tied to Shropshire, she desisted. Not so with John Wesley.

Only a year later, Wesley wrote to Fletcher asking him to resign his living: ‘You are not fit to be alone, and you will do and receive much better among us, come and if you do not want to be my equal I will be below you’. Fletcher copied part of his reply in a letter to Charles:

In my last I mentioned to him that I was prepared to quit my benefice without repugnance should providence give me the signal, far from feeling myself attached here by particular views: but I make a distinction between his obliging invitation and the ordering of

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90 Forsaith, ‘Correspondence’, 243-44.
91 This was certainly one of Wesley’s aims: ‘If he [Fletcher] takes you to be his curate, probably you may be ordained priest.’ L/JW, 4:118.
92 JF→CH, 6 Jan. 1761.
93 JF→CW, 19 Aug. 1761.
providence: I don't care to leave my post before I have been relieved by the sentry: I came passively, I will go in the same way."\textsuperscript{94}

It is noteworthy that when Fletcher wrote this, he had very recently been accused of enthusiasm and his churchwardens had risen up against him for allowing neighbouring parishioners to attend church at Madeley. Such circumstances make claims that Fletcher stayed in Madeley for the leisure it provided difficult to support, especially when at such a time Fletcher could have eased his troubles by accepting a better living from Wesley. Ironically, Fletcher’s attempt to trust in providence was not a sufficient explanation for Wesley, who thought he knew Fletcher’s call better than Fletcher himself. A contradictory Wesley appears here, for when in 1773 Thomas Webb tried to convince Joseph Benson that he was needed for the mission in America, Wesley wrote to Benson: ‘Certainly you cannot stir unless you are clearly satisfied of your call from God. An impression on the mind of another man is no rule of action to you.’\textsuperscript{95} Yet even after Fletcher had repeatedly asserted that he was satisfied with his call from God, Wesley continued to badger him to leave.

In 1762 Fletcher wrote to Charles: ‘Your brother has written to me ... and incessantly recommends me to form a society in order that his preachers can take it into their circuit if I leave Madeley.’\textsuperscript{96} Fletcher had no intention of leaving his parish, but even so, rumour had made it to Charles Wesley that he might be considering the possibility. Fletcher wrote to reassure Charles that he would not do so without first conferring with him. Fletcher’s advice to others was consistent with his own practice of following providence. Thus, when John Valton wrote to him asking advice on whether to leave his position at Purfleet, Fletcher replied: ‘Providence has placed you where you are; and you must not remove rashly. Nay you must not do it without the fullest persuasion that you are in the way of God.’\textsuperscript{97}

A central aspect of early Methodism for Wesley was a doctrine of ministry, which increasingly prioritized exceptional methods (or irregularities) over the normative practises of the church. He found in the New Testament examples of ways in which the early church made exceptions to rules of polity based on necessity. While there were ordinary means by which God worked to spread the gospel, at

\textsuperscript{94} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{95} LJW, 6:20.
\textsuperscript{96} JF\textsuperscript{→}CW, Aug. 1762.
\textsuperscript{97} JF\textsuperscript{→}J. Valton, 30 Mar. 1775.
certain times God used *extraordinary* means. He wrote that ‘the whole work of God termed Methodism is an extraordinary dispensation of His providence.’ For Wesley, however, such extraordinary means appear to have had an ontological character, for not only was he unwilling to relinquish the four most important of his irregularities, but he believed the work of God could not well be accomplished without them.

These irregularities included itinerancy, preaching extemporaneously, forming religious societies, and lay preaching. Sometimes Wesley included praying extemporaneously and field preaching as well. The Methodists, he wrote, would be bound ‘to separate from the Church than to give up any one of these points.’ By the late 1750s, however, these irregularities, for all of their extraordinariness, were perceived increasingly as essential and normative methods for spreading the gospel. The parish system could not succeed apart from them. Gregory is certainly correct in suggesting that Wesley viewed his irregularities as ‘add-ons’ to the ministry of the Establishment but also that his ‘commitment was increasingly to the add-ons rather than to the original structure.’ Furthermore, it appears that an essential component of implementing these add-ons was Wesley’s own authority over them. Even if the local incumbent was already preaching extemporaneously, forming religious societies, and even itinerating in local parishes himself, Wesley was not willing to let them be; his Methodism needed a presence in all areas of evangelical ministry for his broader scheme of a Connexion to function. In this light, it is easier to conceive of how, as Lloyd has asked, ‘the Wesley brothers could accommodate their radical ministry with their Anglican orders and continued membership of the Church.’ To this could be added the question, how could John Wesley repeatedly claim to be reforming the church when he was simultaneously trying to extract the best ministers from the parishes?

Wesley justified his attempts to persuade Fletcher to leave Madeley by purporting that he would be eminently more useful to God if he exercised his talents in a broader arena. The impression that is given by Wesley’s letters to Fletcher is that he viewed Fletcher’s parish ministry as a waste of talent; it was simply too

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98 *LJW*, 5:257.
99 *WJW*, 26:595.
100 Gregory, ‘In the Church’, 164.
101 Lloyd, *Charles Wesley*, 64.
limited a field of action. Fletcher was not the first evangelical clergyman Wesley attempted to draw from his parish. Indeed, in 1757 he had tried to lure Walter Sellon from Smisby, Staffordshire. His letter to Sellon is indicative of his evolving ecclesiology. Sellon, like Fletcher, experienced some early turmoil as the result of his gospel preaching. As he would with Fletcher, Wesley urged Sellon to leave his parish in order ‘to be near those who have more experience in the ways of God [i.e. the Methodists].’\(^{103}\) In contrast, Wesley offered no explanation of why it would be beneficial to remove the one person whom he considered to have experience in the ways of God from the people of Smisby.

During the decade following 1763, Wesley visited Madeley four times. He was impressed both with the beauty of the parish as well as the number of attenders, but in his journals he made no comment regarding his conversations with Fletcher, other than that ‘It was a great comfort to me to converse once more with a Methodist of the old stamp, denying himself, taking up his cross, and resolved to be “altogether Christian”.’\(^{104}\) The culmination of Wesley’s efforts to enlist Fletcher came when in 1773 he wrote to Fletcher officially asking him be his successor, taking on the leadership of the Methodists. He began his discourse with a brief statement of the success of Methodism, followed by a statement of the concern of the preachers, ‘When Mr. Wesley drops, then all this is at an end!’\(^{105}\) He then described the qualities required, such as ‘a single eye to the advancement of the kingdom of God’, and ‘a clear understanding’. ‘But has God provided one so qualified?’ he asked. ‘Who is he? Thou art the man!’

Not only did Fletcher meet the basic requisites for such a role, but he had also recently grown in ‘favour both with the preachers and the whole people.’ In large measure this was due to Fletcher’s *Checks* which had been published and widely distributed over the preceding two years, not to mention his *Appeal* which had met with immediate success among the Methodists (even though it was originally intended for his own parish). By 1772 the possibility of Fletcher’s succession as the leader of Wesleyan Methodism was public knowledge—that is, it had been discussed by a wider constituency than Fletcher and the Wesley brothers. In the autumn of that year, John Wesley had invited Mark Davis to join the

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\(^{103}\) *LJW*, 3:243.

\(^{104}\) *WJW*, 21:481.

\(^{105}\) *LJW*, 6:10-12.
Methodists in London. Davis vacillated in his decision, and had expressed to Charles Wesley that one of his conditions for joining would be if he could be ‘sure Mr Fletcher would succeed my brother.’ Charles replied, ‘There is all reason to hope J.F. will succeed J.W. ... I have no more to say upon the subject.’ In any case, Fletcher replied negatively.\footnote{CW\textbullet M. Davis, 10 Dec. 1772 (B1.9).}

In July of that year, Wesley visited Madeley to offer the invitation in person, which Fletcher again refused. Wesley persisted, writing to him a few days later, ‘You say, indeed, “Whenever it pleases God to call me away, you will do all you can to help [the Methodists].” But will it not then be too late?’\footnote{Fletcher’s reply has not survived, but Wesley made a note that he received a letter from Fletcher declining the nomination on 6 Feb. 1773. See \textit{UL}, 303.} He again offered a curate for Madeley and suggested that Fletcher at least make a trial of spending time among the Methodists again. Fletcher was not persuaded; his call was still to Madeley. Indeed, it was in May of that year that Fletcher preached to the multitudes at the Birches where he was reminded that his call to evangelize the area was not yet accomplished.\footnote{JF\textbullet CW, 30 May 1773.} Wesley made one last attempt in 1775 after Fletcher had contributed a plan for the examination of the preachers at Conference (see below). This time, he offered no long arguments but wrote somewhat condescendingly: ‘When you do not write, you must travel ... Sit still till I die, and you may sit still forever.’\footnote{LJW, 6:174-75; cf. 7:272.} Even with these persistent tensions between Wesley and Fletcher, it must be noted that Fletcher was not antagonistic towards Wesley, even if he was sometimes frustrated with him. Quite the opposite, in fact, Fletcher often extolled Wesley’s usefulness as a minister of the gospel in his writings, with such comments as: ‘let a Baxter, and a Wesley, astonish the world by their ministerial labours: let them write, speak, and live in such a manner, as to stem the torrent of iniquity, and turn thousands to righteousness’.\footnote{WF, 4:75-108.} Furthermore, while Forsaith is correct to assert that Fletcher’s relationship with Charles was closer than with John, a friendship remained nonetheless, and John Wesley’s claim that Fletcher once wrote to him ‘With thee I would gladly both live and die’, though taken out of its context, was still
representative of Fletcher’s love for his spiritual Father.112 Fletcher himself even reflected: ‘I cannot but acknowledge the goodness of God in so wonderfully keeping ... [Wesley] for so many years – and preserving him to undergo such labours’.113

Even so, by 1785, Fletcher’s resistance to Wesley’s goading had made its impression, and though Wesley maintained a fatherly love for Fletcher, he never quite understood his sense of calling. On 3 April 1785, only four months before Fletcher’s death, Wesley invited him to the Conference in London and asked him rhetorically, ‘Do you not stay at home too much?’114 And writing to Charles on 2 June he complained: I grudge [Fletcher’s] sitting still; but who can help it? I love ease as well as he does; but I dare not take it while I believe there is another world.115 To the very end, Wesley was never reconciled to Fletcher’s choice, and even Fletcher’s death did not put a stop to Wesley’s remarks of disapprobation, for in March 1786 he wrote to one of his preachers: ‘If Mr. Fletcher had travelled like you or me, I believe he would have lived these twenty years.’116

In what appears as an almost prophetic apologetic against Wesley’s ‘eulogistic’ comment that Fletcher’s ministry was confined to but a narrow sphere,117 Fletcher wrote:

St. Paul was for three years the resident pastor of a single church. The city of Ephesus was his parish: and while he resided there, he gave an example, which every minister, by the most solemn engagements, is bound to follow; whether he be commissioned to labor in a city or a village. During two other years of his life, this Apostle was confined within narrower limits than any pastor of a parish. Shut up at Rome in a house, that served him for a prison, and constantly guarded by a soldier, he was unable to extend the sphere of his labors. Yet, even in

113 JF CW, 2 July 1775.
114 LJW, 7:265.
115 Ibid. 7:272.
116 Ibid. 7:321; ‘The suggestion that Fletcher was ‘out of the order of God by not being more with Mr Wesley’ circulated amongst some of the Methodists after Fletcher’s death and eventually made its way to Mrs Fletcher. She was quick to correct any such assumption and wrote a letter to the author of the rumours. MARC: MAM Fl. 13/1/24.
117 Wesley, Sermon on the Death of Fletcher, 13.
these circumstances, he continued in the diligent exercise of the holy ministry ... Surely nothing can appear more perfectly reasonable, than that every pastor should discover as much zeal in his particular parish, as St. Paul was accustomed to manifest in the Roman Empire, when he was at liberty, and in his own apartment, when loaded with chains.\footnote{Portrait, 1:320-21.}

However, Wesley’s perpetual hope that Fletcher would leave his parish was not the only way in which their two models of Methodism were brought into competition, for despite Fletcher’s accomplishments in setting up societies, Wesley insisted that they should be integrated with his Connexion.

\emph{Wesley’s Preachers in Madeley}

As discussed in Chapter Three, Fletcher was not against having others preach in his pulpit, though he initially limited invitations to preach in Madeley to ordained clergymen of the Church of England—that is to say, they were not Wesleyan itinerants.\footnote{See Appendix 5.} Fletcher had difficulties enough without having to defend lay preachers in the parish as well. Instead, he hoped to get matters settled regarding his parish societies, and those in surrounding parishes before Wesley’s preachers created a new stir. This fact has been obscured by those who have hailed Fletcher’s relationship with Wesley and his preachers as the ideal cooperative Methodist-Anglican ministry, focussing only on the eventual outcome rather than the early tensions. Thus, it has been supposed that Fletcher happily left the Madeley religious societies to Wesley and his itinerants, apparently without either hesitation or conflict. Baker claimed that Fletcher was the ‘one clergyman [who] proved fully co-operative.’\footnote{‘Methodism and Its Relations to the Church and Nation’, \textit{WMM} (1829), 378-82; W. Tranter, ‘Methodism in Madeley’, \textit{WMM} (1837), 900-903; Baker, \textit{John Wesley}, 193.} This view has been propagated almost entirely by reference to an extract from a letter by Fletcher to his friend, Miss Hatton.\footnote{On Miss Hatton, see BI.} The commonly quoted extract reads:

\begin{quote}
The coming of Mr. Wesley's preacher's into my parish gives me \textit{no uneasiness}: As I am sensible that every body does better, and, of course, is more acceptable than myself, I should be sorry to deprive
\end{quote}
any one of a blessing; and I rejoice that the work of God goes on, by any instrument, or in any place.122

Fletcher did eventually ‘welcome’ Wesley’s preachers into his parish as fellow helpers in the gospel and a degree of cooperation ensued, but that does not represent the whole story. Wesley’s preachers, when they first came into the coalfield, made Fletcher uneasy and his work harder. For he had already been trying to demonstrate that his practice of setting up societies and preaching evangelically was not irregular or illegal but rather was consistent with ideals of the Church of England. But Wesley was oblivious to the problems in which Fletcher was already enbroiled.123 Despite Fletcher’s reticence, Wesley was not one to defer to the will of local incumbents.

In the 1750s, Wesley’s conflict with Samuel Walker had heightened with Walker’s insistence that the Methodist societies be run by the parochial clergyman if he ‘both preaches and lives the gospel’,124 and that Wesley should discontinue his use of lay preachers. Then, in 1761 with the induction of the evangelical Henry Venn to Huddersfield, conflict arose again because Venn wanted Wesley to leave the Methodist societies—which had been recently established by Wesley—to Venn’s care. Wesley refused, asserting that his preachers had preceded Venn in carrying out an evangelical ministry and therefore, the societies should continue under their care. Wesley explained that he did not desire to send preachers ‘[w]here there is a gospel ministry already’.125 Wesley’s appointment of preachers to Truro and Haworth despite the presence of evangelical incumbents, and his attempts to draw some of the dutiful clergy away from their cures, make his claim appear somewhat disingenuous. Venn and Wesley came to a compromise, that the preachers would visit Huddersfield only once a month. As might be expected, the arrangement was context specific and no such compromise was standardized. Indeed, only a year later he was posturing to appoint preachers to Madeley, a parish where even Wesley could not criticize the evangelical doctrine, character, or practice of the incumbent.

122 JF→Miss Hatton, 27 May 1766.
123 JF→CW, Aug. 1762; see above in this Chapter.
124 Quoted in Baker, John Wesley, 186.
125 This brief outline of Wesley’s conflicts with Walker, Grimshaw, and Venn follows ibid. 185-193; cf. LJW, 4:159-61.
It is curious that Wesley did not visit Madeley until Fletcher’s fourth year there. It was only partly for want of opportunity. The first occasion that offered was apparently blocked by Fletcher. In March 1761, Wesley travelled from Wednesbury to Shrewsbury, passing, but not stopping at Madeley on the way.\(^{126}\) At that time some of Fletcher’s trials were receding, the pews of his church were filled, and he was disinclined to invite Wesley to the parish. Fletcher wrote to Charles: ‘Someone has written me from Shrewsbury that your brother is awaited there if he is passing here I think that I will not request him to preach in my church.’\(^{127}\)

Wesley was again in the area in March the following year, but his schedule was too full to fit in a visit to Madeley.\(^{128}\) Skinner has suggested that Fletcher and Wesley were to meet at Shrewsbury in 1763, but this dating is based upon an incorrectly-dated letter printed in the *Arminian Magazine*, and there is no evidence to suggest that Fletcher or Wesley planned to see each other that year.\(^{129}\) During this same period, the debates were escalating in the London Society over the issue of Christian perfection. To Wesley’s consternation, Fletcher was unwilling to take his (or any) side in the conflict. Instead, Fletcher offered to mediate between Wesley and the perfectionists and to admonish the minority, whom he felt were falling into fanaticism,\(^{130}\) but Wesley’s reply, if there was one, has not been preserved. In these first years of Fletcher’s ministry, he and John Wesley corresponded only infrequently, with at least three of Wesley’s letters between 1760 and 1764 criticizing Fletcher’s decision to remain in Madeley.\(^{131}\) This was the context for Wesley’s first visit to Madeley in July 1764.

Wesley’s first glimpse of the East Shropshire coalfield made an impression which suggested a field ripe for the harvest, and he would send his labourers with or without invitation. For, as Fletcher was extending his ministry into the coalfield at large, focussing specifically on the industrial development on the Wellington and Wombridge border at Coalpit Bank, Wesley was preparing to add Madeley to the

\(^{126}\) The editors of Wesley’s *Journal* (BE) have suggested that this was at Fletcher’s invitation to Shropshire, but I have not been able to find any evidence supporting this and given the difficulties in Madeley and Fletcher’s letters to Charles Wesley indicating tensions with his brother, it seems unlikely that Fletcher was bidding Wesley at the time. *WJW*, 21:311, n.84.

\(^{127}\) *WJW*, 21:311.

\(^{128}\) Skinner, James Fletcher, p. 57.

\(^{129}\) JF→CW, 19 Aug. 1761.

\(^{130}\) JF→CW, 22 Aug. 1762.

\(^{131}\) These are not extant but are referenced in: JF→JW, 27 Oct. 1760; JF→CH, 28 Oct. 1760; JF→CW, 19 Aug. 1761; JF→CW, Aug. 1762; JF→CW, 22 Aug. 1762.
Chester Circuit. The preacher appointed was Alexander Mather, and his first stop was to be Coalpit Bank. Fletcher had hoped to ‘prevent this happening’, that is, appointment of Wesleyan preachers to his parish or to his Wellington mission at ‘the Bank’, because he knew it would complicate his present conflicts there. Fletcher had enough problems without the added questions raised by Wesley’s lay itinerancy. Furthermore as Streiff has noted, Mather, ironically, was involved with the perfectionist controversy in London, and at Wednesbury had, with his wife—who had ‘not honoured her profession’—made a stir about it. Mather visited Fletcher at Madeley to inform him that ‘he had been invited’ to preach at the Bank and possibly even to preach at Madeley. Fletcher ‘refused him on the pretext that Mr. Hatton and myself are both better placed to take care of that place given that it is between our two parishes and that we have very recently met there.’

Fletcher was confused and frustrated, for John Wesley had been in Madeley only a month earlier, yet ‘said nothing [to Fletcher] on the matter of introducing preachers into the neighbourhood’. If his previous policy had been to refrain from sending itinerants into parishes where there was already an evangelical ministry in place, it was clearly changing.

Another of Wesley’s preachers, Joseph Guilford, arrived in Madeley the following January, again, a preacher of Christian perfection but of another variety. Fletcher found his theology lacking but not his earnestness in faith. This time Fletcher made no complaint about the visit but lamented the growing division between Wesley and the ‘perfects’ in London. In August 1765, the Methodist Conference created a new ‘Salop’ circuit to which were appointed Alexander Mather and William Minethorpe. Streiff has suggested that the ‘fact that we hear little of [intrusion of Methodist preachers] in Fletcher’s letters points to a relatively peaceful acceptance of them.’ This may be true generally, but clearly the preachers caused certain tensions, and Fletcher believed their intrusion might indeed interfere with or dismantle all he had accomplished thus far. If they were injudicious in how they proceeded, not only would they disrupt ministry in the coalfield at large,

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133 Ibid.
134 Ibid., 31 Jan. 1765.
135 RS, 126.
but once they were associated with Fletcher, they could raise concerns with those in his parish with whom he had just begun to garner support for his evangelical ministry.

In October, Fletcher wrote to Charles that Mather was on his way to preach at Wellington and that he had not been invited by Fletcher, but by the people, ‘behind [Fletcher’s] back’. ‘[T]he consequences will come down upon me’, he explained, ‘if they are bad, I will need to carry them as well as I am able’. Fletcher entrusted the problem to providence, resolving ‘to pray that the ill does not outweigh the good, and live in great hope without worry.’

Fletcher had recently extended his ministry to Trench. Mather wrote to Fletcher enquiring why he had set upon preaching there instead of leaving it to Methodist itinerants. Fletcher explained that it was not to pre-empt Mather or Minethorpe but rather to prevent the people there from inviting another travelling teacher whom Fletcher knew to be ‘a lying wretch, who went to them from the Bank’. The friction with Mather over the Trench matter allowed Fletcher to clarify the extent to which he was willing to cooperate with the Wesleyan preachers in Shropshire.

Fletcher was careful to identify for Mather the most expedient places for him to preach and the relative frequency which would least interfere with the work he and Hatton were already doing. As Streiff pointed out, Fletcher was more than willing to welcome the support of the preachers in the parish of Wombridge (which was a Donative and Peculiar without a resident curate) and in Wellington, where Fletcher had already been threatened by neighbouring clergy. ‘I desire you will call there as often as you have opportunity’. In Fletcher’s other societies, however, his invitation was considerably more restrictive. Fletcher limited his welcome with regard to both his own parish and his previously founded societies: ‘An occasional exhortation ... at the Bank, Dale, &c will be esteemed a favour.’ On the other hand, Fletcher left ‘the management of the societies’ up to the preachers, saving for himself the role of visiting evangelist. Wary of the temptation he had observed in the Methodist preachers to expect immediate results from their preaching, he warned Mather to be patient, surely a caution intended to prevent rashness in the way the

138 JF CW, 8 Oct. 1765.
139 JF A. Mather, [1765].
140 JF CW, 3 June 1764; RS, 125.
societies were handled. ‘Let us wait for fruit as the husbandman’, he wrote, ‘and remember, that he who believes does not make haste.’

Whatever misgivings Fletcher had, he still considered Wesley as a spiritual father and an evangelical co-worker. The relationship of Wesley’s Connexion to Madeley had been under negotiation for five years. Now in 1766, despite the potential problems Wesley’s preachers posed for him, Fletcher affirmed his desire to partner with Wesley. After inviting Wesley to Madeley at the time of his usual visits to Shropshire, Fletcher also expressed, if warily, his gratefulness for Mather’s preaching: ‘Mather is so kind as to strengthen my hand ... I trust he will be an instrument of much good.’ Wesley replied that he would be unable to include Madeley in his itinerary for March but that he might fit in a stop in August; he did not. It was the same year that Fletcher wrote to Miss Hatton that Wesley’s preachers gave him no uneasiness. However, he was still concerned about the effects of Wesley’s timing, and he added:

How long it might have been expedient, to have postponed preaching regularly in my parish, till the minister of _____ had been reconciled to the invasion of his; and how far this might have made my way smoother, I do not pretend to determine: time will show it, and, in the mean while I find it good to have faith in Providence.

This often ignored qualification of his opinion about Wesley’s model of cooperation is indicative of a greater tension than has been supposed. Wesley had not coordinated with him, nor apparently asked him whether itinerants would be useful in Madeley but rather sent them regardless of Fletcher’s judgment. There is little evidence to suggest what work the itinerants were doing in Madeley and how frequently they were there; however, it seems that relations were peaceable and that Fletcher increasingly saw them as helpful partners in ministry. Only eight names of Wesleyan itinerants in Madeley appear in Fletcher’s correspondence, and four of these appear during the years Fletcher was on the Continent. During that time,

141 This and the preceding quotations in this paragraph from: JF→A. Mather, n.d. [c. Autumn 1765]; see also JF→JB, c.1771/72.
142 JF→JW, 17 Feb. 1766.
143 Wesley did not make it to Madeley in 1766.
144 Possibly a reference to Wellington, where the vicar Richard Smith had opposed Fletcher’s meetings from the first.
145 JF→Miss Hatton, 27 May 1766.
Fletcher wrote to express his gratitude to the preachers for their assistance, which clearly lightened the load of his curate. Thus, despite earlier tensions, the later accounts of the cooperation between Wesleyans and Fletchers were, in the end, representative.

**A Methodist Church of England?**

The concept of the Methodists as a branch of the Church of England appears quite early in Fletcher’s thought. Twice in 1759 he referred to ‘the Meth[odist] Church’, \(^{146}\) by which he meant that part of the Church of England that was both evangelical and connected to the Wesleys. The same sentiment appears in a statement he made to John Wesley, urging prayer ‘for the [C]hurch of England and that part of it which is called the Methodists’. \(^{147}\) Because such references provide no insight as to how distinct a body Fletcher perceived the Methodists to be, it is difficult to assess at what point he first conceived of a more formal organization of this *ecclesiolae in ecclesia*. His first outline of a plan for a ‘Methodist Church of England’ was drafted in response to a particular crisis in a particular context. The crisis was the seemingly imminent death of John Wesley, who had fallen seriously ill in July 1775 while on a preaching journey in Ireland. Fletcher had heard about it through James Ireland and quickly wrote to Charles Wesley that it was his duty to ‘preside over’ the Methodists if his brother were to die. \(^{148}\) Wesley recovered, but the occurrence had the effect of stirring up concern amongst the Methodists of what would become of the Connexion upon Wesley’s death. The issue was not new, but the possibility that the time was near approaching forced the issue. ‘You have lately been shaken over the grave’, wrote Fletcher, ‘you are spared, it may be to take yet some important step…’ \(^{149}\)

Fletcher was concerned for the Connexion, not only because he feared for the fragmentation of the Methodists, \(^{150}\) but because he saw them as a means of reforming the church from within in order to ‘provoke our superiors to godly jealousy and a complete reformation’. \(^{151}\) As a parish priest, Fletcher had grown

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\(^{146}\) JF→CW, 4 Sept. 1759; 10 Nov. 1759.

\(^{147}\) JF→JW, 9 Jan. 1776.

\(^{148}\) JF→CW, 2 July 1775. A brief but accurate overview of this is provided in *RS*, 220-21, which I have loosely followed here.

\(^{149}\) JF→JW, 1 Aug. 1775.

\(^{150}\) JF→CW, 2 July 1775.

\(^{151}\) JF→JW, 1 Aug. 1775.
uncomfortable with certain elements of the doctrine of the Church of England. Many of his ‘scruples’, as he called them, mirrored those expressed in Wesley’s 1755 address to the Conference.\textsuperscript{152} Amongst these were concerns regarding the Burial Service,\textsuperscript{153} the ‘damnatory clauses’ of the Athanasian Creed, and part of the Baptismal Office.\textsuperscript{154} The Methodists were not the only ones to take issue with the doctrines of the Church of England. There were other doctrinal issues being challenged as well from outside the church.

As Rack has observed, to some degree within evangelicalism at large, but especially within Methodism, there was a ‘rather sudden appearance’ in the 1770s of reports of mystical experiences, which began to appear contemporaneously with the mounting ‘threat of anti-Trinitarian and outright Unitarian ideas’ seemingly offered as ‘experimental’ evidence to contest this heterodoxy.\textsuperscript{155} Similar threats had been known in the years surrounding the Glorious Revolution and the passing of the Toleration Act, but from the 1740s, there was increasing agitation—from within the Anglican fold as well as from dissent—for the relaxation of laws regarding subscription to the Thirty-Nine Articles. Amongst evangelicals there were some, who like Fletcher, disagreed with elements of the Liturgy and Articles, but who, like Grimshaw, were willing to say ‘though I do not approve of everything in our liturgy, yet I see nothing so amiss in it or our Church ... as to justify my separation from her.’\textsuperscript{156}

There was in fact no unanimity as to what form such a relaxation should take, but there was a general sentiment amongst agitators that that subscription was problematic at best for those who had concerns regarding some of the doctrines contained therein, and they therefore advocated reform in order to refrain from subscribing thus against their consciences.\textsuperscript{157} Bills intended to relieve dissenting ministers from subscription to most of the Articles, prompted in part by those who

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{152} JIF, 9:334-49.
  \item \textsuperscript{153} JF\to CW, 22 Aug. 1762.
  \item \textsuperscript{154} Ibid. 20 Sept. 1762.
  \item \textsuperscript{155} H.D. Rack, ‘Early Methodist Visions of the Trinity’, \textit{PWHS} 46 (1987), 65.
  \item \textsuperscript{156} Grimshaw quoted in Lloyd, \textit{Charles Wesley}, 171.
\end{itemize}
were discouraged by the initial rejection of the Feathers Tavern petition, were sent to the House of Lords in 1772, 1773 and finally passed after being sent again in 1779. Furthermore, Joseph Benson had submitted a plan to Wesley for reforming the Methodist Connexion in order to hold the preachers to a stricter accountability. Benson’s plan also included a proposal that John and Charles Wesley, along with Fletcher, lay hands on preachers who had been duly examined, thereby ordaining them out of the order of the Church of England. Fletcher agreed with a stricter examination of the preachers but objected to ordinations, explaining that the Wesleys ‘could not with decency take the step of turning Bishops after their repeated declarations that they would stand by their mother to the last.’

So it was in this particular context—that is, in a theological atmosphere where numbers of English churchmen and dissenters were vying for their own versions of reform regarding requirements of subscription, and Methodists were trying to construct their future—that Fletcher drafted his plan of a Methodist Church of England. Thus he introduced his plan to Wesley: ‘The admirers of the Confessional, and the gentlemen who have petitioned the parliament from the feather’s tavern, cry aloud that our church stands in need of being reform’d.’ Indeed, Fletcher went so far as to affirm the criticisms of the church made by Priestley and Lindsey, that the body of clergy as a whole poorly represented the ideals of the church but added that such an observation should ‘at last rouse us from our lethargy, and stir up seriously to consider the difference there is between primitive and modern Christianity, that we may return to the pure truth’. This return to primitive Christianity formed the ideological framework of Fletcher’s plan. His intent was to help Wesley keep Methodism within the Church of England, yet to take advantage of the church’s breadth to create a recognized evangelical body of believers within her. He noted that even in the Establishment, which he found so pleasing in general, there were in fact ‘palpable defects’.

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159 JF→JB, 12 July 1775.
161 JF→JW, 1 Aug. 1775.
162 JF→J. Priestley (B1.9).
Fletcher’s proposal had thirteen points. These are outlined in some detail by Streiff but several are worth summarizing here. His first point defined the relationship of Methodism to the Establishment: Methodism, he proposed, was to become known as ‘a daughter-church of our holy mother, the Church of England.’ The foundation of such a daughter church was to be a revised publication of the Articles, Liturgy, and Homilies, expunging the ‘Popish dirt’ which yet remained but receding from her in nothing else. In order to establish this new daughter church, a petition was to be drawn up by the Methodists and submitted to the Archbishop of Canterbury with the proposal of the reformed Articles and Liturgy, not as binding on the whole church but on that part of it that was Methodist. Furthermore, it was to be included in the petition that the Methodists would have protection under the law, not as dissenters, but as members of the Church of England who were committed ‘to the purity of the gospel, and the strictness of primitive discipline, and the original design of the Church of England, which was to reform, so far as time and circumstances would allow, what ever needed reformation.’ Fletcher also included a scheme of ordination by which the bishops would ordain the qualified lay preachers by Wesley’s recommendation (an alternative to Benson’s plan). And, following the Wesleys’ deaths, the leadership of the Methodists would be ‘lodged in three or five of the most steady’ ministers of the Connexion.

Now, after having served Madeley for fifteen years, Fletcher saw an opportunity to attempt to ease the tensions between the parish ministers and the Methodist preachers by formally establishing them (by law) as cooperative arms of the same body, a model he had already been implementing in Madeley for a decade. Fletcher had intended that the proposal be read at Wesley’s Conference, which was then taking place. However, Wesley wrote to him after the end of Conference, commenting only that his and Benson’s advice on examining the preachers had been applied; he made no mention of the proposal. Wesley may have thought the plan untenable or even disagreeable to his own agenda.

Fletcher had offered no suggestions on how the cooperation he hoped for amongst preachers and parishes might be fostered. Perhaps he thought that granting
protection under the law would be sufficient, or more likely, he thought that a stricter
discipline, according to purer doctrine, would naturally produce the fruit of
cooperation. In either case, Kent's suggestion that such a hope was perhaps naïve, if
not misguided, is probably correct to the extent that Fletcher could have expected
his proposal to meet with the approval of the Bishops. However, his work in
Madeley was a vivid example of how such a model might be played out in other
parishes, even if it meant living with the tensions which were intrinsic to such a plan.
One of Fletcher's most proven strategies at combating tensions in his parish was his
steady commitment to providing the best quality of pastoral care and utilizing, as
often as was expedient, his society meetings and meeting places to benefit the needs
of the parish. It is his pastoral care that we turn to in the next chapter.

Chapter 5
Pastoralia

Fletcher was never content to merely fulfil the liturgical functions of his calling. Whatever pace the rhythm of parochial life might have been elsewhere, in Madeley, it was anything but slow. Contrary to Virgin’s picture of a body of clergy who completed their pastoral duties with plenty of time to spare, Fletcher’s communications make it clear that he felt his work was never done. His efforts to provide church services alone took up several days each week, not to mention baptisms, marriages, and funerals, which have already been discussed. But in addition to these were the duties of making pastoral visits to the sick, the dying, and the elderly, caring for the poor, and providing for the religious education of children, unlearned adults, and exhorting families to take on education in their homes. In many cases, these concerns overlapped. For example, a visit to a child in the parish might be for the purpose of education but could be doubled with pastoral care for the parents or neighbours. Generally, his pastoral visits and educational initiatives formed two branches of his ministry, which he hoped would draw people to the church, establish them in evangelical faith, and reform the parish. This chapter examines these themes, and the way Fletcher attended to his duties in church and chapel.

Pastoral Care

*Pastoral Visits and Prayer for Parishioners*

There were generally two purposes of pastoral visits: general visits and visiting the sick and the dying in their time of distress. The former type was part of the regular pattern of parish life by which a parson became acquainted with his flock. This consisted, in the best cases, of perambulating amongst the villages and neighbourhoods of the parish to meet families, offer private exhortations, to pray, and in cases of problems, to admonish parishioners. The Canons did not specifically require such visiting, and the Office for the Ordering of Priests only hints at the practice suggesting giving ‘private monitions and exhortations ... within your cures, as need shall require, and occasion ... given’. Furthermore, as has recently been

2 JF→CW, 22 Aug. 1764; JF→JI, 21 Sept. 1773, LJF, 159; JF→CW, 26 May 1771. Cf. Jacob’s statement: ‘It is not that the clergy were idle; there was not much to do.’ *Clerical Profession*, 206.
3 *BCP.*
noted, systematic visitation of parishes was not common amongst the eighteenth-century clergy, especially in smaller parishes where it was easier to become familiarized with parishioners by other means, such as attendance at worship.¹ Yet pastoral visiting was to some degree embedded in the culture of the church. George Herbert recommended it as a means of finding one’s ‘flock most naturally as they are, wallowing in the midst of their affairs’. He suggested the visit should consist of a pronounced blessing upon the family, followed by admonishment towards piety in their business, and if the family was poor, then the parson ‘opens not only his mouth, but his purse to their relief’.² It may have been the size and distribution of population which shaped Fletcher’s view that systematic visiting was essential. In his own clerical handbook, Fletcher outlined requirements similar to Herbert’s:

> By frequent pastoral visits to hamlets, schools, and private houses, the indefatigable minister should continually be moving through the several parts of his parish, discovering the condition of those entrusted to his care, and regularly supplying the necessities of his flock, diffusing all around instruction and reproof, exhortation and comfort ... he should cause the light that is in him to shine out in every possible direction before the ignorant and the learned, the rich and the poor; making the salvation of mankind his principal pursuit, and the glory of God his ultimate aim.³

At least an occasional routine of going from house to house was encouraged by those such as Thomas Wilson, Jeremy Taylor, Gilbert Burnet and John Wesley, and it appears that if uncommon, such visiting was still more frequently carried out than is often suggested.⁴

In any case, Fletcher’s habit in Madeley, as attested by those who observed him, was to daily acquaint ‘himself with the wants and dispositions of his people, anxiously watching over their several households, and diligently teaching them from

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¹ Jacob, Clerical Profession, 312.
² G. Herbert, A Priest to the Temple 4th edn. (London, 1701), 50-51. Fletcher’s copy of this book is at MARC: MAW Fl. 30, and it appears that this copy was previously owned by Richard Baxter, whose moderating influence was so important to Fletcher. See D.R. Wilson, ‘Catalogue’, JF CW, 21 Sept. 1771.
³ Portrait, 1:368-69.
⁴ Jacob, Clerical Profession, 206-209; cf. Russell, Clerical Profession, 112-118.
family to family.'\(^8\) This served two ends. First of all, he knew that those who refused to attend church were those for whom spiritual ‘counsel is peculiarly necessary’. He was critical of clergy who spent time polishing their sermons to the neglect of the equally important duty to ‘go in pursuit of his wandering sheep.’ Such clergy, he chided, ‘imagine, that the flock were rather called to seek out their indolent pastor, than that he was purposely hired to pursue every straying sheep.’\(^9\) Secondly, pastoral visits were the foundation of ‘that vigilant inspection into families, upon which the discipline of the church depends.’\(^10\) Like Richard Baxter, who asked rhetorically how a congregation might be reformed ‘if all the work be cast upon [the clergy] alone, and masters of families neglect that necessary duty of theirs’,\(^11\) Fletcher understood the limitations of being but one person and knew that the responsibility to instruct families had to be encouraged often. ‘The power of pronouncing *exhortations* and *blessings* is not the exclusive privilege of pastors’, Fletcher wrote, ‘but belongs to all experienced believers.’\(^12\) When Fletcher was working on his controversial writings in the 1770s, and when his respiratory illness was preventing him from being able to preach regularly, he wrote to James Ireland that despite his weakness, and although his writing was not an unprofitable part of his ministry, he nonetheless continued ‘solemn praying, and visiting my flock.’ ‘I shall be glad to have done with my present avocation’, he explained, ‘that I may give myself up more to those two things.’\(^13\)

Visits to houses of the infirm and dying were more forcibly encouraged by the church. The 67th Canon emphasized and the 13th Injunction of William III recapitulated the importance of this duty: ‘When any person is dangerously sick in any parish, the minister ... shall resort unto him or her ... to instruct and comfort them in their distress’.\(^14\) Mary Fletcher testified to her husband’s ‘earnest desires & groans for ye sick & dying’, and how he ‘wrestle[d] in Prayer for them ... he wou’d say my Dear such or such are suffering ... come let us bear their Burden before the Lord.’\(^15\) Gilpin boasted that Fletcher ‘was ... anxious upon every suitable occasion to

\(^8\) Gilpin, ‘Notes’, 1:85.
\(^9\) Portrait, 1:362-63.
\(^10\) Ibid.
\(^12\) Portrait, 1:74.
\(^13\) JF›JI, 27 Mar. 1774; also see *LJF*, 167.
\(^14\) Canons, 357-49, 831.
\(^15\) Eulogies on JF (B1.9).
treat with his parishioners on subjects of a sacred nature, he was peculiarly solicitous
to confer with them, when verging toward the borders of eternity. Such was the
case when a fifteen year old boy was dying in Madeley of an incurable disease.
Fletcher sat with him for an hour, ‘setting before him the greatness of his guilt ... that
he had been so long under the rod of God, and had not been whipt out of his
careless unbelief to the bosom of Jesus Christ.’ Over the next week the boy ‘fell
under the conviction, confessed ... and began to call on the Lord’. Fletcher had
almost given up hope for the ‘poor indolent collier boy’ who, though he lived near
the church, never attended. His deathbed conversion renewed Fletcher’s hope and
encouraged his diligence in such visits.

Two other specific instances of Fletcher’s visits appear in one of his letters to
Lady Huntingdon. The first instance demonstrates that the parish priest was more
than just a spiritual guide, but was sometimes called upon as a de facto physician.
Jacob has quoted Bishop Burnet’s recommendation that the clergy apply themselves
to ‘The Study and Practice of Physick’ as a means of pastoral care, though he found
little evidence that such activity was common. Wesley was notorious for gathering
recipes for various remedies, and it may have been his influence that encouraged
Fletcher to use them in Madeley. In at least one of Fletcher’s commonplace books,
he kept a number of natural remedies. One of the problems Fletcher treated was
psychological depression, apparently common in his industrializing parish. Thus, the
first visit Fletcher mentioned in his letter:

The care of the melancholy people we have here about, hath greatly
weighed me down. One of them, a bargeman, the only visible
support of a helpless family, is gone quite beside himself this very
morning. I am just come from cutting off his hair to blister his head,

17 JF barb2right Miss Ireland, 5 Dec. 1768. For other anecdotes of Fletcher’s visits, see Cox, Life of Fletcher, 50;
WMM (1801), 92.
18 Jacob, Clerical Profession, 226-27.
19 Commonplace Book of John Fletcher (B1.1).
20 A treatment for ‘lunacy’. See J. Wesley, Primitive Physick: or An Easy and Natural Method of
Curing Most Diseases, 9th edn. (London, 1761), 136-37; On Fletcher’s own copy of this work (20th
edn., 1781), see J.P. Tuck, “Primitive Physic”—An Interesting Association Copy’, PWHS 45:1 (1985),
1-7. The Fletcher copy is at MARC: MAW G 101 L.
and have left him under a proper guard with little hopes of his recovery.\textsuperscript{21}

The second account was of a visit to a female parishioner who ‘feared she should also go mad’. Fletcher interpreted the cause in this case to be spiritual. When he went to offer consolation at her home, her ‘ever frightful symptom made its appearance, and she continued to spit at me as a mad cat for half an hour. I called for nobody, but besought the Lord, even our dear Jesus, who was called mad for our sakes, to restore the poor creature, and he was pleased to do it for his name’s sake’.\textsuperscript{22} Such fits of madness or depression were sometimes associated with religious enthusiasm, and on at least one occasion, threatened Fletcher’s credibility in both church and chapel. In 1761 he wrote to Charles Wesley that ‘a young Person [the] daughter of one of the wealthiest of my parishioners has fallen into a deep depression which has made everyone think that she has lost her wits, and I had thought so also.’ The girl had recently been converted under Fletcher’s preaching, and rumours began to spread that he ‘drove people mad’. Fletcher set aside the following Saturday for ‘fasting and prayer’, and the next Sunday he rejoiced that ‘the invalid found herself well enough to come the Church’.\textsuperscript{23} Two years later one of his society members (of his meeting in the vicarage), a nineteen year old girl, presented the same symptoms, this time with the added threat of suicidal tendencies. ‘She is exhausted by fasting, she falls into convulsions sometimes in the church sometimes in our assemblies’. He sought advice from Charles Wesley of whether he should restrict her from attendance at church and society until her symptoms subsided. In the meantime, he called his people to pray and to fast on Wednesdays (their normal fast day) on her behalf.\textsuperscript{24} It wasn’t until the following June that he wrote to Wesley that the ‘demoniac is delivered’.\textsuperscript{25}

As he exhorted his parishioners to pray and fast, so he enlisted them to join him in making pastoral visits, especially to the sick. In his sermon on Matthew 25 he urged them to ‘visit the widow & the fatherless, the sick. the Naked – You can do it as unto little ones in X’.\textsuperscript{26} It is worth noting that visiting the sick was an area of

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\textsuperscript{21} JF\textsuperscript{\#CH}, 8 Jan. 1768.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{23} JF\textsuperscript{\#CW}, 27 Apr. 1761.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid. 5 Jan. 1763.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid. 21 June 1763.
\textsuperscript{26} JF, Sermon, Matt. 25:40-46 (B1.9).
religious cooperation in the parish, and Fletcher joined with Abiah Darby as she recorded in 1766: ‘I sat while [Fletcher] discoursed with [the sick person], and finding an engagement to pray I kneel’d down ... the Parson kneeling by me’.\(^{27}\) The 67th Canon made exception for the requirement of pastoral visits to those who were known to be ‘or probably suspected, to be infectious’.\(^{28}\) However, Fletcher did not allow this for an excuse either for himself or pious members of his congregation, and when he could, he encouraged members of his flock to accompany him on such important errands. When his friend Miss Hatton was visiting Madeley in 1766, Fletcher took her with him to administer the sacrament to a sick woman. Incidentally, Miss Hatton was taken ill after her visit.\(^{29}\) Mrs Fletcher wrote that ‘in epidemic Disorders, when the Neighbours were afraid to nurse the sick, he has gone from House to House seeking Help for them; and when none could be found, has offered his Service to sit up with the sick himself.’ However, she noted that such fear-based neglect ‘was on his first Settling’ in Madeley and that by the time she arrived in the parish, there ‘appeared in Numbers a most ready Mind in visiting and relieving the distressed.’\(^{30}\) Indeed, Mrs Fletcher herself often visited the sick, and it was on such a visit that both she and her husband caught the fever that threatened her life and ended his.\(^{31}\) As one who knew him eulogized:

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Ah! Madely week—Thy pastor’s care
His doctrine pure—His fervent Prayer,
Thy Weal his only Joy.
Unwearied he, his flock attends
Nor danger fears to serve his friends,
He dies in this employ.\(^{32}\)
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**Care for the Poor**

Despite the rapid expansion of industry in Madeley, which offered gainful employment to many, poverty remained a part of the parish landscape. Poor relief

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\(^{27}\) 7 July 1766, MJAD.
\(^{28}\) *Canons*, 357.
\(^{29}\) JF→Miss Hatton, 21 June 1766.
\(^{30}\) *HLF*, 15.
\(^{31}\) JF and MF→JI, 19 July 1785.
\(^{32}\) Tindall Correspondence and Papers, vol. 2:102-109 (B1.2).
was administrated by the parish vestry, who elected overseers of the poor each Lady Day. The overseers levied rates according to estimated need, which were then approved by the vestry. Poverty increased with population growth in the parish. The rate climbed in Madeley from £120 in 1766 to £280 in 1785, with assessments increasing from once a year to at least three times a year in the same period. The overseers in Madeley appear to have been particularly attentive. Unlike their refusal to pay tithes, the Quakers paid poor rates, and Abraham Darby served for many years as an overseer alongside churchmen as well as other dissenters, such as Fletcher’s erstwhile Catholic adversary, Thomas Slaughter. 

A diligent vestry, however, did not supplant an incumbent’s responsibility for either the temporal or spiritual care for the poor. The office for the Ordering of Deacons specified that it was the clergy’s duty to ‘to search for the sick, poor, and impotent people of the Parish, to intimate their estates, names, and places where they dwell, unto the Curate, that by his exhortation they may be relieved with the alms of the Parishioners, or others.’ Clergy and laity were ideally meant to work together in this cause. Some of Fletcher’s laity heeded the call. For example, Mary Dorrel, one of Fletcher’s parishioners who, with her husband, attended both of the services at the church on Sundays as well as society meetings, was known to frequently visit ‘the abodes of the poor and afflicted ... administering to their necessities’ and attending ‘to their spiritual concerns, conversed, and prayed with them’.

Taking Christ as his model, Fletcher saw a need to ‘chiefly associate with the poor’, asking rhetorically in his Portrait whether Jesus had not insinuated that the rich ‘would, with the utmost difficulty, enter into the Kingdom of God? ... Did he not declare, that he would consider the regard shewn to the meanest of this followers, as though he himself had been the immediate object of it?’ This was not only a clerical responsibility, but Fletcher believed the clergy had a specific call to minister to the poor, which helps to explain why those who knew him would have found the ‘profusion of his charity’ to be ‘scarcely credible’ had they not witnessed it themselves. Fletcher described his call to mercy thus:

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33 MVM.
34 ‘The Ordering of Deacons’, BCP.
35 S. W[alter], ‘Account of Mary Dorrel’, WMM (1805), 463-68.
Though our Lord came principally to save the *souls* of sinners, yet he was by no means unmindful of their *bodies*. *He went about doing good*, in the most unlimited sense, daily relieving, with equal care, the corporeal and spiritual maladies of the people ... . The true minister truly imitates the conduct of his gracious Master, by a strict and affectionate attention to the spiritual, and temporal wants of his people.\(^{37}\)

This was the ideal towards which Fletcher strived. However, the challenges to care for the poor were manifest, and thus required a multifarious approach of which the work of the parish officers was but one facet. A second facet was Fletcher’s own charity, testified to by many of his parishioners after his death, as recorded by his several biographers.\(^{38}\) Mrs Fletcher wrote of ‘His Disengagement from the World, and Love of the Poor’, confirming that what he wrote in his *Portrait*, he practised in his parish. His approach was more than simply giving alms, however; it was a philosophy of Christian economy. He was wary of going into debt, because such an encumbrance was a distraction from his duty to those in need. ‘I have heard him say’, wrote Mrs Fletcher,

> he was never happier, than when he had given away the last Penny he had in the house ... if he could find a Handful of small Silver, when going out to visit the sick, he would express as much Pleasure over it, as a Miser would to discover a Bag of hidden Treasure ... He could hardly relish his Dinner, if some sick Neighbour had not a Part; nor could I sometimes keep the Linen in his Drawers, for the same Reason ... Once a poor Widow, who feared God, being brought into Difficulties, he immediately pulled down all his Pewter from the Kitchen Shelves, saying, This I can do without ... Frequently would he say to me—O Mary, can we not do without Beer? Let us drink Water and buy less Meat, that our Necessities may give Way to the Extremities of the Poor.\(^{39}\)

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37 *Portrait*, 1:169.


Fletcher claimed that good pastors should follow St Paul, whose liberality towards the poor sometimes resulted in his own indigence.\textsuperscript{40} Streiff viewed Fletcher as understanding poverty through the lens of providence, quoting a passage from a letter to his poorer parishioners in which Fletcher alluded to the Sermon on the Mount,\textsuperscript{41} stating the blessedness of not being ‘rich in the things of this world’, and commending a poverty and ‘bodily want’ which drives one ‘to the throne of grace ... to live in dependence on divine mercy for a morsel of bread.’\textsuperscript{42} Streiff’s interpretation portrays Fletcher’s theology of providence somewhat simplistically, suggesting more of a divine fatalism than a nuanced theology of free will, which was so central to Fletcher’s thought. Clearly, Fletcher believed that God’s providence was a supernatural guide. But providence did not preclude works of charity, and works of charity might themselves be a manifestation of God’s providence. ‘Cast your bread upon the waters, in a temporal and spiritual sense, and it will not be lost’, he wrote.\textsuperscript{43} Thus, while Streiff suggests that in the early years Fletcher’s work to relieve poverty ‘was limited to charitable activity’, Fletcher did not view this as a limitation but as active participation in fulfilling his providential call to the parish.

Fletcher’s resources were limited. His benefice was by no means a wealthy one, and he claimed that his pay in Madeley would go only half as far as even less money in another parish.\textsuperscript{44} This was not so much because Fletcher’s own expenses were so high, but rather because the need in the parish for him to alleviate poverty out of his own purse was so great. Fletcher’s philanthropy was not merely an expression of his own spirituality, but a model for his parishioners to follow. This introduces the third facet of his pastoral care for the poor—preaching for his flock to follow his example. This he believed was the ‘most effectual means to procure for [the poor] the generous benefactions of their wealthier companions in the faith’. For, ‘Who could possibly refuse any thing to a godly minister pleading the cause of the poor ...?’\textsuperscript{45} Indeed, Fletcher was unequivocal in exhorting his flock to obey this precept.

\textsuperscript{40} Portrait, 1:170.
\textsuperscript{41} Cf. Matt. 5:7.
\textsuperscript{42} RS, 115-116, quoting JF\(\rightarrow\)Madeley Parishioners, 30 Apr. 1766.
\textsuperscript{43} JF\(\rightarrow\)Madeley Parishioners, 26 Nov. 1777.
\textsuperscript{44} JF\(\rightarrow\)JW, 27 Oct. 1760.
\textsuperscript{45} Portrait, 1:170.
When in the summer of 1764, several needs arising from two industrial accidents, increased the burden on the parish coffers, Fletcher preached a sermon on the ‘Parable of the Sheep and the Goats’ (Matt. 25) to his congregation. He required no abstract illustrations to make his points. Instead he pointed to the real needs of those in the pews: ‘Here are little ones ... desolate wives & fatherless children, what youll do for them will be looked on as done to the departed, to X’ ... Here are 6 little ones 2 suckling babes, 3 blind, 3 young helpless children ... Here are 2 Widows . . . ’. Fletcher argued on behalf of the poor that their indigence deserved mercy. He reminded his congregation of how ‘some of you showed great readiness 2 years ago when 2 men of another parish lost their bardges’, yet in that case the families to whom they showed mercy were better off than those now in need in their own parish. Furthermore, Fletcher exhorted his congregation to consider their own situations: ‘Ye that work under ground & have been delivered ... show your gratitude ... Ye that may be also cut off & leave behind a helpless family by helping these two families show how you would have your children helped’.46 He also exhorted them to charity generally, not just in times of crisis. Thus in one of his pastoral letters he wrote to his church: ‘Do not eat your morsel by yourselves, like selfish niggardly people; but whether you eat the meat the perisheth, or that which endureth unto everlasting life, be ready to share it with all.’

Voluntary contributions were an important part of poor relief as well, and the churchwardens’ accounts record the regular upkeep of the poor box for the church.48 Outside contributions were sent by James Ireland (usually at Lady Day), and occasionally (at Christmas) by his erstwhile polemical opponent Richard Hill.49 Distribution of such presents offered the opportunity for declaring God’s provision. Thus when Ireland sent ‘a large hogshead of rice and two cheeses’ in 1774, Fletcher distributed it at the Shrove Tuesday service after preaching a sermon on Matthew 6:33, ‘Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all other things shall be added unto you.’50

46 JF, Sermon, Matt. 25:40-46 (B1.9).
47 Madeley Parishioners, 26 Nov. 1777.
48 MCWA.
49 e.g. JF→JI, July 1766; 30 Mar. 1767; 26 Mar. 1769; 27 Mar. 1774; R. Hill→JF, 6 Dec. 1784.
50 JF→JI, 27 Mar. 1774.
Times of economic crisis presented new difficulties for the poor and in turn, for the well-being of the parish in general. Food riots were not uncommon when scarcity, caused either artificially by farmers in an attempt to raise prices or by a lean harvest, provoked labourers to rise up. E.P. Thompson’s suggestion that such rioting represented a sort of communal solidarity in adherence to ‘a traditional moral economy’\(^{51}\) appears to have been true in the coalfield. There were four food riots in the coalfield between 1756 and 1795, revealing a pattern in the actions of the mobs. Rioters were known to plunder the shops of those whom they believed were responsible for either regulating prices or making provision for the poor out of their own pockets.\(^{52}\) However, as Thompson has importantly observed, there was in their behaviour a notion of legitimization by which they ‘were informed by the belief that they were defending traditional rights or customs’\(^{53}\). This is further confirmed by the fact that such riots seem to have produced the intended effect of a response by the local clergy, gentry, industrial masters, and magistrates, to enforce the rule of law, where applicable, against the rise in prices, or to subsidize prices or make provisions by other means. To some extent there was a shared, if loose ‘belief that they were in some way acting within the law’.\(^{54}\) Fletcher was empathetic to the needs of the poor who joined together on such occasions, but was intolerant of their mob behaviour.

A poor harvest season in 1782 prompted one such uprising throughout the coalfield. Trinder has described the occasion in some detail suggesting that a paternalistic model remained in effect in the region. Thus, intervention was only made when rioters forced the issue,\(^{55}\) in turn, reinforcing the belief of the lower classes ‘that the power and spirit of the mob is necessary to enforce the laws’.\(^{56}\) The riots of 1782, however, are also significant for what they reveal about Fletcher’s pastoral role in such circumstances. The crowds of labourers who gathered in protest were not always uncivilized,\(^{57}\) and it seems that threats of action came before actual rioting, giving local leaders time to meet and devise a solution. Fletcher participated in such meetings, joining with squires and other clergymen of the coalfield to quell

\(^{51}\) Cf. Thompson, ‘Moral Economy’, 96; IRS, 376-93.
\(^{52}\) IRS, 376-80; JF, Unpub. Address, MARC: MAM Fl. 17/20/1.
\(^{53}\) Thompson, ‘Moral Economy’, 78.
\(^{54}\) Ibid. 96.
\(^{55}\) IRS, 380.
\(^{57}\) IRS, 377.
the mob. However, he also took specific action in his own parish, which in the last years of his life, he developed into several initiatives for social reform on behalf of the poor. His first step was addressing the rioters who had assembled at Lincoln Hill near Coalbrookdale. He had written a six-point speech which expressed his sympathy and outlined legal and more peaceable solutions than rioting. Apparently some of the individuals in the crowd had already conferred with their pastor, claiming a desire to act within the law yet feeling the necessity of their wants. ‘I feel for you all’, Fletcher responded, ‘and should be glad to help you out of your trouble, by any lawful means ... I come, as a Brother and a Father, to inform you of what the law forbids in such a case.’ He advised them that they could not be a law unto themselves, nor was it legal for them to enforce the laws already in existence, for these were the roles of parliament and magistrates, respectively, and that therefore, their assembly was in itself illegal. His counsel then, was to take measures that were within the law. Fletcher outlined the plan in detail: (1) the workers should disperse and return to work; (2) those of good character should form an association to prosecute any who were creating an artificial scarcity; (3) if the scarcity is real, arising from a lean harvest, application should be made to the Government to import grain to sell to the poor; and (4) in the meantime the wealthier among the parish should be charitable, buying what they could and selling it to the poor under cost. In closing, Fletcher reminded the crowd that God was attentive to their needs, and that they should therefore ‘be diligent in business, sober, frugal, saving, temperate and godly’.58

Meanwhile, the then lord of the manor, Richard Reynolds, had joined with some of the other gentlemen of the coalfield to buy rice and flour from Liverpool to be sold at a low price to the poor as a temporary expedient. Their joint efforts included squires, ironmasters, and parsons to issue relief to ‘the industrious and truly indigent’59 had some effect, for Fletcher wrote to Charles Wesley that despite ‘a hearty curse from the colliers’ for his ‘plain words’, the agitation was suppressed.60 In short order, Fletcher drafted a proposal to the gentlemen of the coalfield parishes and the magistrates for forming the previously mentioned association, the benefits of which he explained would be twofold. First, it would enable a better regulation of

58 Fletcher, Unpub. Address, MARC: MAM Fl. 17/20/1.
59 Rathbone, Letters, 50.
60 JF➔CW, 19 Dec. 1782.
the market by means of both prosecuting dishonest and defending honest farmers and millers. Secondly, Fletcher reflected on the prejudices of the poor ‘that the Rich are wanting in fellow-feeling for their pityable case’, and suggested that the positive action of the wealthier class would help to dispel such notions when the poor became ‘convinced that no reasonable means is left untried in order to alleviate their distress.’ Subscriptions were thus solicited, and Fletcher and one of his religious society members, Mr Matthews, stated their initial contributions of one guinea each.\footnote{JF, Plan for the Relief of the Industrious Poor (B1.9).}

Although the aim of this association was different from his religious societies, it is apparent that Fletcher understood the cause as a religious one. One of his addresses\footnote{JF, Sermon, Heb. 13:1 (B1.9).} to the recently-formed society—a sermon—outlined both the practical application and religious foundation and motivation of such a charitable cause.\footnote{The sermon is not dated, but internal evidence suggests the aims of the association were still being discussed.} The sermon begins with statements of the temporal benefits for those of an industrial parish who were more likely to experience ‘the bad consequences of unforeseen accidents to which most of them are continually exposed from nature of their work.’ There is no way of assessing how committed society members were, but at the time Fletcher was preaching this sermon, there was already ‘common stock’—probably the net of the subscriptions solicited in the original proposal—to which the members would continue to contribute as a means of ‘taking warning by the ant who lays up food in harvest against the cold days of approaching winter.’ Those with more wealth had a particular responsibility to steward their resources on behalf of those with less. The term ‘common stock’ hints at the principle of a ‘community of goods’, but there is no indication that Fletcher perceived this as a levelling of society. It seems, rather, that he shared the ideology of the early voluntary religious organizations, which Gregory has suggested, provides ‘[o]ne of the clearest testimonies to the Church’s desire to reach the poor and uneducated ... aimed to bring about religious and social reformation through a concerted campaign at the parish level.’\footnote{RRR, 242-43.} The emphasis on the charitable duty of Christians towards one another was explicated by the Thirty-Eighth Article of the church, but, as John Walsh has pointed out, not as an imitation of the Christians in Acts 2 in forming a Christian communalism, per se, but as ‘an
incitement to almsgiving.\textsuperscript{65} Fletcher’s sermon contained three points on the ‘more glorious & More lasting end’ of the association based on the scriptural call to brotherly love. Although not under the auspices of the SPCK, Fletcher’s society in Madeley was consonant with the ethos of the church, and he superintended the meetings himself. Similar to both the SPCK and Fletcher’s other religious societies, the association was clearly meant to form an auxiliary to the working of the parish church.

Thus, whereas the poor relief fund of the church was made up of compulsory rates and donations to the poor box administrated by parish officers, Fletcher’s society members’ contributions were voluntary to the extent that their membership in the society itself was voluntary. The frequency of accidents caused the burden on the parish to increase annually. A supplemental means of relief, as Fletcher pointed out, could keep some people ‘from becoming chargeable to the parish’, thereby making the parish funds available to others. The society fund appears to have operated like a combined health, retirement, and life insurance plan. Fletcher explained the benefits:

[I]t gives relief & comfort in sickness, it affords a support to feeble old age, it extends its usefulness beyond death & consigns to the grave in a decent manner the departed member it supported in sickness & even leaves to distressed friends such relief as the loss of a parent or husband must make extreme.\textsuperscript{66}

Such an aim is significant, for it demonstrates another area in which the Establishment was able to assimilate the associational principles commonly seen as practises of ‘Methodist’ or dissenting groups, or in this case, secular friendly societies, into the programmes of local parish ministry.

One last initiative taken by Fletcher, which has been alluded to above, was his attempt to establish a more enduring peace and stability by confronting what he perceived to be the causes of indigence in parishes like his. Here he saw an overlap with the causes of religious indifference. His efforts to reduce the number of alehouses and the practice of tippling in general has been discussed in Chapter Two. But if that objective was meant to reform local practises, Fletcher perceived other

\textsuperscript{66} JF, Sermon, Heb. 13:1 (B1.9).
national contributing causes to the plight of the Madeley poor, which required reform as well. Thus, in 1783 he wrote an address to the Legislature in a letter to Lord John Cavendish, Chancellor of the Exchequer. He had it published by Robert Hindmarsh and paid out of his own pocket for its delivery to a number of MPs.

_Pastoral Letters_

Even though Fletcher was always conscientious in supplying his parish with a dutiful substitute at times when he was constrained to leave Madeley, he supplemented this pastoral care by writing letters to his flock. From his extant manuscript and published letters, it can be ascertained that Fletcher wrote at least eleven letters to his parishioners corporately between 1765 and 1781, and wrote an additional five to his curate, Alexander Benjamin Greaves, ten to parish officers or society leaders, and seven others to specific parishioners. Even so, we do not know the full extent of Fletcher’s correspondence, especially before 1778, because he destroyed his ‘loose papers’ when he was leaving the country, not wanting them to fall into the wrong hands. However, many of his letters were preserved by recipients and three were even published as early as 1767 in a collection of _Spiritual Letters_. In any case, Fletcher was a scribacious correspondent, even if he was not as prolific as those like Wesley or Whitefield, or like John Newton, the vicar of Olney, who was ‘always working from a stack of fifty or sixty unanswered letters’. A.T. Hart wrote somewhat deprecatingly of the letter-writing of the eighteenth-century clergy in general, claiming that ‘many epistles, one suspects, were written with an eye to publication.’ He considered the instance rare that there was no ‘ulterior motive’.

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67 MARC: MAM Fl. 18/3/1. It has been thought that this manuscript was never published, but in fact it was printed under the pseudonym, ‘Philanthropist’ as _Three National Grievances ..._ (London, 1783).
68 R. HindmarshÆJF, 1 Sept. 1783.
69 JFÆCH, 28 May 1777.
70 The editor of this volume is unidentified, although it was probably Lady Huntingdon or one of her preachers. Fletcher transcribed this letter at her request in a letter. 29 Nov. 17[66]; Anon. _Spiritual Letters_ (Chester, 1767), 78-91. The same three letters were published (as a ‘second edition’) alone in a twelve-page volume in 1779 when Fletcher was in Switzerland, and as stated in the preface, ‘without the Knowledge or Consent of the Rev. Author; who never intended them for the general Inspection of the Public, but solely for the Edification and Benefit of those Friends to whom they were respectively addressed’. _Christian Letters by J.F. Vicar of M—y, Salop_, 2nd edn. (London, 1779).
71 Hindmarsh, _Conversion_, cf. Fletcher’s statement to H. Brooke regarding his own delinquency in letter-writing, 6 Sept. 1772.
72 Hart, _Country Parson_, 63.
eighteenth-century parson was often consumed by those activities which would secure good social standing. Hindmarsh, in contrast, has lucidly demonstrated that the primary ‘impulse to correspond was ... religious’, serving as a means of sharing religious news and stimulating spiritual revival, which due to improvements in communications, ‘needed no longer to be local’.73

Fletcher’s letters to both individual parishioners and to his congregation corporately served a number of pastoral ends. From a distance he encouraged attendance upon the means of grace in both church and chapel, provided spiritual encouragement and exhortation, and discussed parochial matters with his curates, the leaders of the societies, and the visiting Wesleyan itinerants. In all, his correspondence reveals how deeply concerned he was for his flock.74 Lawton’s statement that Fletcher ‘never begrudged this part of his literary work as he did a good deal of his controversial writing’ is certainly accurate.75

Writing to give encouragement and exhortation is the common thread of all of his letters to Madeley, as well as some to other friends who wrote to him for spiritual counsel. Often he included the outline of a sermon, instructions for spiritual growth, or a theological reflection.76 When he heard that one of his parishioners, Mary Cartwright, who was also a society member, was ill in 1775 and unable to attend church, he wrote to her (from Madeley), ‘drawn by friendship and pastoral care’, providing a spiritual ‘meditation’ for her. When her husband died four years later, Fletcher sent his consolations in a letter to one of the society leaders.77 Benson observed that his letters commonly offered ‘advice, reproof, or consolation, and especially to such as were afflicted’.78

In one of his letters to his parishioners corporately, he reminded them of their special place in his sentiments: ‘[O]f all the children of God, none have so great a right to my peculiar love as you.’ The correlation, Fletcher inferred, was that he therefore had a special right as their pastor to exhort them to their Christian duties.

73 Hindmarsh, Conversion, 74.
74 Cf. LJF, 97, 107, 143, 193, 197.
75 Lawton, Shropshire Saint, 37.
76 It was this overtly spiritual style of writing (as distinct from polemical writing) which drew Clarke’s criticism of Horne’s publication of Fletcher’s letters, which Clarke believed presented Fletcher not as an orthodox Methodist apologist but rather as a ‘well-meaning enthusiast’. J.B.B. Clarke (ed.) An Account of the Infancy, Religious and Literary Life, of Adam Clarke (London, 1833), 252.
77 LJF→M. Cartwright, 1775; LJF→W. Wase, 15 Sept. 1780.
78 LJF, 107.
He reminded them of ‘the countless thousands of steps you have taken to hear the word ... from my despised pulpit, as well as the bonds of neighbourhood’. ‘With tears of grateful joy’, he continued, ‘I recollect the awful moments, when we have ... bound ourselves to stand to our baptismal vow:—to renounce all sin, to believe all the articles of the Christian faith, and keep God’s commandments’. Following this affirmation of his love for his people and the confessions which bound him to them, he wrote an exposition on their ‘Covenant God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost’. Such sermonic compositions as this one were instructional in their tone, providing a theological foundation from his pen when the pulpit was not available. In all of his letters to his parish there was a tone of exhortation, whether a sermon was included or not.

In addition to what his epistles tell us about his care for his people, they also demonstrate a feature of his ministry examined above in Chapter Three, namely, his multifarious strategies to extend the ministry of the church. Thus, while he sometimes wrote to the parish in general, the letters were actually sent to either his curate or to his religious society leaders, who he asked to read them aloud in the various venues for religious assembly both in and around Madeley. As Hindmarsh has observed, ‘[t]he voluminous correspondence of the evangelicals, was the paper parallel to their restless itinerancy’.79 Indeed, when his physicians forbid him preaching, Fletcher refused to be prohibited from writing.80 It was by this means that he maintained at least a minimal level of contact with both his curate’s work in the church and his society leaders’ work in the meetings. However, even then, just as when he was present in the parish, there was significant overlap between concerns for church and chapel.

Indeed, it appears that his choice to send messages to his church, sometimes in a letter to the curate and sometimes in a letter to a society leader, was a matter of convenience rather than a distinction between church and chapel as representations of ‘church’ and ‘non-church’ respectively. In fact, in one of his letters to Greaves, he enclosed two different letters, both of them brief, to be read in the different venues. In the letter to be read ‘in the church’, Fletcher requested the prayers of his flock and reminded them of their duty to ‘love one another as brethren; neglecting no

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79 Hindmarsh, *Conversion*, 74.
80 JF\rightarrow M. Onions, 11 July 1776; JF\rightarrow JI, 24 Feb. 1777.
means of grace’. A letter read in the church at Madeley, however, would only reach
the ears of people in Madeley or those from surrounding parishes who travelled to
Madeley on Sundays. The other enclosed letter, was to be read by Greaves, ‘when
you have an opportunity ... to the societies in Madeley, Dawley, and the Banks.’

Several observations are worth noting. First of all, that Fletcher asked his curate to
read the letter to the societies indicates that Greaves, in Fletcher’s absence, took on
to some degree, his employer’s habits of fulfilling not only his Sunday duty but also
his ministry of extension in the societies, a stipulation Fletcher made in a previous
letter to Greaves. Secondly, Fletcher, in one sentence, provides some insight into
the relationship between the church and the society meetings. ‘I should be glad to
hear’, he wrote, ‘that all the flock grow in grace, and that the little flock grow in
humble love.’ By ‘all the flock’, to which the first letter was to be read, he appears to
have meant the generality of his parishioners (or at least those who attended church).
Yet, by ‘the little flock’ (to which the second letter was to be read) he apparently
meant the societies. These, however, were not two distinct or competing religious
groups, but the latter was a subset of the former. The substance of both brief
enclosures was of a similar nature. However, while in the first enclosure he reminded
his congregation to seek to grow in grace, in the second he noted that the call to
grow in grace implied a command to grow, ‘consequently, in love’. We cannot make
too much of this, but it is at least suggestive (and is in no way contrary to Fletcher’s
practice as examined in Chapter Three) that participation in the societies was a
further step towards spiritual maturity which flowed out of the church services, but
did not end with them.

If Fletcher was confident in charging Greaves with the duty of church
services, and at least occasional visits to the society meetings, why did Fletcher also
write letters at times to the society lay leaders, with notes to be read at the
assemblies? The answer is two-fold. First of all, the leaders were amongst Fletcher’s
friends. One of them was his first convert, Michael Onions. Three others, Thomas
York, William Wase, and Daniel Edmunds, had worked extensively with Fletcher,
helping him with the logistics of building the meeting house at Madeley Wood in

81 JF->A.B. Greaves, 18 July, 1778. ‘The Banks’ were Dawley/Lawley Banks on the
Dawley/Wellington border and the Coalpit Bank where Fletcher first preached in the open air in
Wellington parish near Wombridge.
82 Ibid.
83 Ibid.
1777. In all of his letters to these friends, he let them know that despite his absence from the parish, his people were not forgotten. Secondly, there was a practical reason for communicating to the societies through the lay leaders. By doing so, Fletcher could encourage them directly in their leadership roles, providing advice and support, and especially encouragement to persevere in the cause of faith. Thus, Fletcher did not limit his correspondence to either his curate or the society leaders, but he wrote to both. Furthermore, relaying messages to the parish by both proxies only served to reinforce by example his frequent admonitions toward Christian love and unity.

One other aspect of Fletcher’s epistolary work suggests a ministry of extension, akin to what Hindmarsh has written about the connexionalism of Methodist polity which helped evangelical converts to see themselves within a broader community of faith and religious activity. Hindmarsh’s claim, however, that this was in contrast to the limitations of the ‘decentralized parish system of the Established Church’ is debatable since there were a number of cases of parish clergymen, like Fletcher, who participated from their parishes in the new impulse for spreading religious news and intelligence.84 Certainly Fletcher did not recognize parochial ministry as an insulation from the work of God in other parts, and it should be acknowledged that this connexional activity was not a one way correspondence from the larger religious world to the smaller Methodist societies, spread via the Methodist oligarchies of Whitefield and Wesley or their itinerants. Nor can be easily supported a claim that somehow the parish church in Madeley was, due to decentralization, insulated from the avenues of communication. Fletcher not only brought news of the extra-parochial and international work of God to his people at Madeley, but he related his people to the larger religious scene by sharing with his correspondents outside of Madeley concerning the work of God in his parish.85 His letters to Charles Wesley and Lady Huntingdon are particularly relevant examples of this, but also his pastoral letters to individuals to whom he wrote with spiritual counsel, such as Mr Vaughan (one of his earliest friends from Shrewsbury), Miss Hatton of Wem, Charity Tilbury, Miss Brain of Bristol, and

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84 Hindmarsh, *Conversion*, 72.
85 e.g. See letters to Miss Hatton of Wem, *FL*.  

211
notably, his future wife, Mary Bosanquet.\textsuperscript{86} Given the customary practice of sharing religious letters received with friends, it is certain that at least some of his letters to those outside his own parish reached a wider audience than just the recipient.\textsuperscript{87} Indeed, Hester Ann Rogers\textsuperscript{88} wrote in her journal that ‘reading three of Mr. Fletcher’s Letters to his Parishioners, was a great blessing.’\textsuperscript{89}

In this way, Fletcher ensured that his parishioners were not only the object of religious intelligence brought in but the subject of religious intelligence sent out. Of course, the clearest indication of this is to be seen in the way that Fletcher’s good work at Madeley increasingly claimed the attention of many who visited the parish just to hear him preach (like those from Coalpit Bank and elsewhere, mentioned above) or to meet him in person (such as the evangelical Independent minister, George Burder).\textsuperscript{90} Likewise, when Fletcher did leave his parish on preaching journeys, he exhorted those in his flock by his correspondence to see their role as partners in his missionary endeavours to other parts of England by joining together to pray both for Fletcher as preacher and for the awakening of those to whom he was preaching.\textsuperscript{91}

**Parish Education**

As with other aspects of Fletcher’s ministry, parish education was a process of gradual expansion, growing from the common method of catechizing into a more complex scheme, which came to include Sunday schools but also encompassed Fletcher’s attention to Madeley children at an individual level as well. Religious education was built into the structure of the church. The Liturgy of the church itself had an educational element in the recitation of its Collects, Confessions, Creeds and the Lord’s Prayer (the latter two of which also formed part of the Catechism, together with the Decalogue). Fletcher exhorted his congregation to not only memorize but to understand the words they so often repeated in church services. ‘[H]eartily believe every gospel truth’, he wrote, ‘especially the latter part of the apostle’s creed. Believe

\begin{footnotes}
\item[86] For letters to Mr Vaughan and Miss Hatton, see \textit{FL}. For letters to Miss Tilbury, Miss Brain, and Miss Bosanquet, see the ‘letters’ boxes in the FT Collection at MARC.
\item[88] On Rogers, see BI; also see H.A. Rogers\textsuperscript{90} [JF, 14 Dec. 1784, in \textit{An Account of the Experience of Mrs. H.A. Rogers} (Baltimore, 1814), 151-56.
\item[89] Rogers, \textit{Account}, 45.
\item[91] JF\textsuperscript{90} Madeley Parishioners, 30 Apr. 1766; 28 Sept. 1766; 28 Dec. 1776.
\end{footnotes}
it, I say, till your faith becomes to you the substance of the eternal life you hope for. Yet an accepted prerequisite for all educational endeavours of the clergy was the piety of the clergy themselves as models. Fletcher quoted the Synod of Berne which stated that Christian education ‘will be abundantly more effectual, if, first of all, we are careful that Jesus Christ may arise in our own hearts. The fire with which we should then be animated would soon stir up and warm the docile minds of children.’ Nor was this inconsistent with the teaching of Anglican bishops who pressed upon the clergy the importance of living an exemplary and godly life. With personal piety as his basis, Fletcher took a protean approach to education in the parish.

Catechizing

The role of catechizing by the parish clergy in promoting genuine religious practice and piety from within the Establishment has sometimes been obscured by historians’ focus on the novelty of the revival, which has emphasized the vibrancy of evangelicalism over the supposedly moribund teaching of the church. Furthermore, the church’s catechetical endeavours throughout the century have been overshadowed by the seemingly cataclysmic success of Sunday schools in the 1780s and the common supposition that the practice of catechizing declined and eventually was ‘dropped ... altogether.’ However, there was much more continuity between the educational aims and methods of the church and the methods of the Sunday schools than has commonly been suggested. Certainly in Madeley it is clear that religious education and the eventual rise and success of Sunday schools was the result of a developmental process. The later initiatives grew out of the traditional forms of education which were centred around the parish church.

Catechizing was a stated duty, enjoined by the 59th Canon. Incumbents or their curates were to ‘instruct youth and ignorant persons’ of their parish in the basic principles of the Protestant religion. Catechesis was a process meant to be carried out year round on Sundays and Holy-days, focussing on a different part of the Prayer

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92 Ibid. 26 Nov. 1777.
93 Portrait, 1:18.
94 Jacob, Clerical Profession, 204-206, 236.
95 For example, Shipley emphasized Fletcher’s preaching as the defining characteristic of his ministry, with no mention of his educational labours at all. ‘The Ministry’, 11-32.
96 Overton and Relton, English Church, 294.
97 Canons, 349.
Book Catechism each week.\textsuperscript{98} This requirement was in some places not strictly adhered to in the eighteenth century, with many clergy meeting the children only during Lent and sometimes in the summer when days were longer and there was more time between the morning and afternoon services.\textsuperscript{99} This was not necessarily a sign of decline in catechizing, nor of general neglect, for in some dioceses there were signs of improvement.\textsuperscript{100} Of course some clergymen were negligent in this and other duties.\textsuperscript{101} However in Madeley, Fletcher’s ministry of educating the parish demonstrates that in some places the ideals of inculcating religious truth were carried out by hearkening to the spirit, rather than the letter of the law. That is to say, that if we were to look only at Fletcher’s catechizing, it would appear on the surface that he performed his duty according to the minimum standard of his day, meeting the children only in Lent and sometimes in the summer. Yet if we look to his broader scheme of education, it appears that he far exceeded Prayer Book and canonical expectations.

Fletcher began catechizing the youth of Madeley between the morning and evening services during the first Lenten season following his induction but appears to have continued meeting the children after Easter.\textsuperscript{102} This does not seem to have been novel, and there is no reason to suppose he was not carrying on his predecessor’s custom.\textsuperscript{103} It may have been that Fletcher had begun with the church Catechism but found the need to supplement this with other learning resources. Shortly before Easter, Fletcher sent to Charles for two dozen copies of Wesley’s edition of Janeway’s\textit{ A Token For Children} as well as Wesley’s four-volume\textit{ Lessons for Children}.\textsuperscript{104} It is indicative of Fletcher’s emphasis on experimental religion\textsuperscript{105} that he ordered Janeway’s book for use in the parish, for it was essentially a collection of the religious experiences of other children, selected to help young readers compare with their own, but also to demonstrate that even the young need

\textsuperscript{98} BCP.
\textsuperscript{99} McClatchey,\textit{ Oxfordshire Clergy}, 114; Warne,\textit{ Church and Society}, 48-49.
\textsuperscript{102} Easter 1761 fell on 22 Mar.
\textsuperscript{103} JF\rightarrow CW, 27 Apr. 1761.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid. 10 Mar. 1761.
\textsuperscript{105} See Chapter 2.
religious encouragement. Wesley’s *Lessons* was effectively the experimental companion to Janeway’s work, being a selection of scripture passages, similar in form to what would today be termed a ‘children’s Bible’, thus offering children a collection of biblical experience by which to test their own. Fletcher continued his pattern of catechizing during Lent until his death.106

Catechisms were learned by rote, taking the form of question and answer. The church provided a standard Catechism, but there were numerous other catechisms in print. The Prayer Book Catechism was not necessarily difficult to learn, but because comprehension, not just memorization, was the goal, many clergy chose to use other popular catechisms which were published throughout the century. As Gibson has pointed out, whatever the form, most catechisms emphasized ‘the core doctrines imported by the creeds, the Decalogue, the Lord’s Prayer and the sacraments’.107 Catechism was the prerequisite to the rite of Confirmation, which preceded a child’s first Communion. Fletcher saw the need for education to continue even after the process from Baptism through first Communion had been completed. ‘[T]he true pastor’, he proclaimed, ‘instead of taking it for granted that they are become unfeigned Christians by partaking of these ordinances, examines them with diligence from time to time’.108

The proliferation of catechetical materials was to some degree the product of attempts to suit the material to various levels of understanding.109 Fletcher was aware that no overly-pedantic method would capture both the hearts and minds of his pupils, and he was known for his ability to improvise, making object lessons up spontaneously and drawing metaphors between day-to-day realities and spiritual truths. Once when he was teaching the children whose attention was waning, a robin flew into the meeting house, exciting them. Fletcher quickly turned distraction to opportunity: ‘Well, I will take that Robin for my Text’, he said. ‘He then gave them a useful Lecture on the Harmlessness of the little Creature, and the tender Care of its Creator.’110 In 1764, Fletcher wrote his own catechism in twenty-seven pages. It follows the standard maieutic form, under the heads: (1) Of the Scripture; (2) Of

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106 Anon. Eulogies on JF (B1.9).
110 *HLF*, 17; This was his practice with adults as well. For example, see JF to Madeley Parishioners, 11 Feb. 1779.
God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; (3) Of Creation and the Fall of Man; (4) Of Original and Actual Sin; (5) Of Regeneration and the New Birth; (6) Of the Law.¹¹¹ The catechism refers severally to the Articles of the Church of England, making it clear that his writing was no departure from tradition but an auxiliary to it. The content and style suggest that it may have been written for older children, or even for adults. However, shortly before his death, as Mrs Fletcher recalled, he was writing another catechism for use in the Sunday schools, but he died before it was completed.¹¹² Consistent with the design of Sunday schools in other parts, catechizing was an integral part of the education they provided, and it appears that the development, first of charity schools and then of Sunday schools, did not break with the tradition of catechizing children in the doctrines of the church, but rather, extended it.

Charity Schools and Sunday Schools

It is uncertain when the first religious school (in any technical use of the term) was set up in Madeley, but it is clear that Fletcher was also involved in the education of children in ways other than catechizing. On various occasions he was approached with requests by parents for him to take in children as private scholars. It was not uncommon for clergy, especially those in poorer livings, to supplement their income in this way. As Smith has suggested, it seems that such duties did not inhibit pastoral effectiveness and in fact, may have enhanced it by thus broadening the clergyman’s base of contact in the parish.¹¹³ Fletcher turned down several requests, in part because he thought that it might be a distraction from his duties. Even so, by 1764 he had formed some kind of parish school. About this time he took in William Marriott, the son of a London Methodist. Marriott was about twelve years old and spent an hour every morning with Fletcher who ‘took uncommon pains to inculcate the principles of Christianity in the most captivating and persuasive manner.’ Marriott in his own notes expressed gratefulness for Fletcher’s instruction ‘at school in Madeley’, suggesting that he was possibly educated with the other children in the parish.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ JF, Unpub. Catechism (B1.1).
¹¹² MF published the portion which was completed before his death as an appendix to HLF.
¹¹³ Smith, Religion, 49.
¹¹⁴ J. Rawlins, ‘William Marriott’, Gentleman’s Magazine (1817), 270; A. Mather, ‘Memoir of Mr. William Marriott’, WMM (1815), 802.
Mary Fletcher noted that Fletcher had various ‘meetings calculated for Children in wh he took great pains’, which she distinguished from his Lenten catechizing.\textsuperscript{115} It is uncertain when and where these meetings took place, but they may have been related to schools Fletcher began to establish about 1767. In September of that year he wrote to his mother: ‘It has been about a month since I opened a charity school in my house to instruct the poor children of my parish’.\textsuperscript{116} He had hired a master to teach the children who became ill the second day, leaving the students to Fletcher’s charge. It may have been shortly after this that Fletcher appointed the then twenty-six year old John Owen as schoolmaster in Madeley. Owen had studied under Fletcher’s tutelage several years before, and Fletcher formed a positive opinion of him.\textsuperscript{117} Owen continued as schoolmaster during Fletcher’s recovery in Switzerland. It was mentioned in Chapter Three that in 1777 Fletcher paid to have a house built at Madeley Wood.\textsuperscript{118} His charity school had met in the vicarage at first and afterwards in the church. In Madeley Wood, there was no facility where he could hold a school, and it was out of his primary concern for the children of that part of the parish that he built the meeting house. Of course, having a commodious building in that part of Madeley was convenient for providing a space for his society meetings as well. However, the fact that it served a dual purpose only confirms that the aims of church and chapel were intertwined.

After their marriage, both John and Mary invested themselves in the children of the parish. As a teenager, Mary had devoted herself to the calling of a virtuous woman in St Paul’s Epistle to Timothy: ‘if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers’.\textsuperscript{119} Thus, it is not surprising that when she and Mr Fletcher were married, he wrote to assure her brother that ‘The secondary inspection and care of the children and women of a flock of two thousand souls will then naturally devolve to her share, and in some sense become her duty.’\textsuperscript{120} Their joint efforts appear to have been even more effective in training the children in piety than the adults in the parish, and the children’s meetings which met on Thursdays were increasing

\textsuperscript{115} Eulogies on JF (B1.9).
\textsuperscript{116} JF→S. de la Fléchère, 12 Sept. 1767, published as ‘Lettre de Jean G. de la Fléchère a Sa Mère’, \textit{Feuille Religieuse du Canton de Vaud} (1830), 25-31; translation here by D.R. Wilson.
\textsuperscript{117} On Owen, see BI.
\textsuperscript{118} JF→T. York and D. Edmunds, Nov. 1777.
\textsuperscript{119} 1 Tim. 5:10; D.R. Wilson, ‘Afterlife and Vocation’, 71-85.
\textsuperscript{120} JF→S. Bosanquet, 22 Sept. 1781.
steadily.\textsuperscript{121} Thus, when Sunday schools began to appear from Gloucester to Leeds, Macclesfield, and Manchester, Madeley was fertile and well-tilled ground ready for adopting such a programme.

About 1783, James Ireland established a Sunday school in Bristol and wrote to Fletcher asking him to write a ‘form of prayer’ for the teachers to use,\textsuperscript{122} which Fletcher did, foreshadowing the composition of similar prayers for his own schools in Madeley. The same year David Simpson, incumbent of Christ Church, Macclesfield, who had started a Sunday-Monday charity school in his parish in 1778, invited Fletcher to preach a charity sermon to raise money for the cause. Fletcher was too busy in Madeley and declined the invitation that year and the following year, when invited a second time. In June 1784, Robert Raikes’s account of the Sunday schools in Gloucester was published in the \textit{Gentleman’s Magazine},\textsuperscript{123} and in August, Fletcher’s erstwhile curate, Cornelius Bayley, published \textit{An Address to the Public on Sunday Schools}.\textsuperscript{124} Fletcher was aware of both of these works.

From the beginning of Fletcher’s incumbency to this point, his religious schools for children had been funded (or so it appears) from his own purse.\textsuperscript{125} Before he could move forward with the organization of Sunday schools, more resources than he and his wife could offer would be needed. In June 1784, Abiah Darby wrote to Fletcher to recommend taking up Raikes’s plan in Madeley, herself having read about his successs in Gloucester. She suggested that Fletcher mention the plan in the church and encouraged him that ‘a subscription might be raised to bring it about’, adding ‘I shall be glad to contribute my mite towards it.’\textsuperscript{126} It is a testimony to the significance of popular Anglicanism in the parish that this energetic Quaker preacher, whose immediate family members were the chief employers in the parish and also had set up their own schools, saw that the best possibility for promoting Sunday schools would be for Fletcher to do so in his church. Fletcher began (or perhaps had already begun) to write just such a proposal. He prefaced it explaining that the charity of the wealthy in his congregation would be required,

\textsuperscript{121} \textit{LJF}, 286-88.
\textsuperscript{122} \textit{JI} \rightarrow \textit{JF}, c.1783.
\textsuperscript{123} \textit{Gentleman’s Magazine} (1784), 410-413; also see \textit{AM} (1785), 41-43.
\textsuperscript{124} C. Bayley], \textit{An Address to the Public on Sunday Schools} (Manchester, 1784).
\textsuperscript{125} Clerically funded schools were not uncommon. See Virgin, \textit{Age of Negligence}, 94; Warne, \textit{Church and Society}, 143.
\textsuperscript{126} A. Darby \rightarrow \textit{JF}, 22 June 1784.
along with their approval of his plan. In addition, the parish would have to provide an overseer to solicit the children (who were objects of the design), a schoolmaster to teach them and resources including books, desks, and especially schoolhouses in which the children could be met.\textsuperscript{127}

Fletcher proposed that there should be six schools, one each for boys and girls in the three primary parts of the parish, Coalbrookdale, Madeley, and Madeley Wood. In Madeley, a school room had already been built ‘adjoining the Church’, and the vestry voted to have the floor ‘laid with Boards’ to make it more suitable for the new Sunday schools.\textsuperscript{128} In Madeley Wood, Fletcher’s school, already in use on weekdays and Thursday evenings in the instruction of children, would be used on Sundays. However, Fletcher had not yet built a meeting or school house in Coalbrookdale, although he had desired to do so. The plan for Sunday schools pressed the need, and on 9 February 1785 John Fletcher enlisted a subscription ‘for Building a Meetinghouse and Sunday School in Coalbrookdale’. The total collected was 162\textshillingsl. 2s. 5d. from 389 subscribers. This was in addition to the initial subscription made at a parish meeting the previous year.\textsuperscript{129} Fletcher’s own subscription of 10\textshillingl. 10s. headed the list, followed by donations from Quaker industrialists from both Reynolds and Rathbone families.\textsuperscript{130} Demonstrating the way in which the clergy of the area cooperated to promote such efforts, four clergymen from surrounding areas subscribed, along with a donation from the patron of the benefice, Roger Kynaston.\textsuperscript{131} The Methodist preachers stationed in the Chester Circuit for 1785, Melville Horne (later ordained in the Church of England) and Richard Rodda both subscribed, as did The ‘Dale [religious] Society’. The list also included additional donations from individual society members. And one of the parish gentlemen, a Mr Yates, provided desks for the schools.\textsuperscript{132}

An initial budget was proposed for start-up and maintenance of the schools of £20: ‘namely 14\textshillingl. for the Salary of six Teachers ... and the remaining 6\textshillingl. shall be laid

\textsuperscript{127} JF, First Plan for a Sunday School (B1.9).
\textsuperscript{128} MVM.
\textsuperscript{129} JF, Proposal for Madeley Sunday Schools (B1.9).
\textsuperscript{130} It is likely that Abiah Darby also contributed, but before the official subscription was begun, for she offered her ‘mite’ when she first mentioned the plan to Fletcher. Abiah Darby\textarrow{\textrightarrow} JF, 22 June 1784. On the Reynolds and Rathbones, see IRS, 36-37, 66, 69, 360-63, 371; Rathbone, Letters, 47-51.
\textsuperscript{131} I.e. Richard De Courcy, Edward Kynaston, Thomas Hatton, and Joshua Gilpin.
\textsuperscript{132} Coalbrookdale Sunday School Subscriptions (B1.10).
out in Tables, Benches, Books, Paper, pens and ink.'\textsuperscript{133} Fletcher’s plan outlined a carefully superintended programme supported by the joint efforts of clergy and laity\textsuperscript{134} and ecumenism was encouraged. A broad cooperation of the church and the Quakers was natural for two reasons. First, because on the ideal parish model which Fletcher attempted to fulfil, children were welcomed, not based on their religious affiliation but based upon their residence within the parish. Second, it was perhaps with regard to the need for the education of children that the church and dissenters were most agreed. Thus, even though the primary leadership was rooted in the church, vested primarily in Fletcher himself, his proposals made the allowance that ‘whosoever shall subscribe a Guinea towards this charity shall be a Director of it’, thus allowing any parishioner who supported out of their wealth a role.\textsuperscript{135}

Fletcher’s proposal began with a statement of the purpose of the institution. ‘Our parochial and national Depravity’, he wrote, ‘turns upon two capital Hinges; the \textit{Profanation} of the Lord’s Day, and the \textit{Immorality} which flows from neglecting the Education of Children’ and particularly poor children, whose parents were more likely to be illiterate themselves and less likely, thus, to train them up in reading the Bible or Prayer Book.\textsuperscript{136} His preface to the proposals included long quotations from Bishop Gibson on the importance of Sabbath-keeping and from Dr Bayley’s \textit{Address on Sunday Schools} from Manchester. Sharing their rhetoric, Fletcher claimed that the demise of families, including ‘Ignorance, Vice, and Misery’, manifested in disobedient children, irresponsible workers, and ‘bad Members of Society’ was a result of their profanation of the Sabbath. Sunday schools then, provided an opportunity to break the societal pattern, promoting a new generation of pious churchgoing people, in Fletcher’s words, ‘by laying the first Principles of useful knowledge in their Minds, and of true Piety in their Hearts’. To encourage the scholars, following an earlier pattern he had practiced with catechizing, Fletcher proposed giving ‘a premium ... to the Children, who distinguish themselves by their assiduity & improvement.’\textsuperscript{137} As it turned out, even this had an ancillary purpose, for

\textsuperscript{133} JF, Proposal for Sunday Schools (B1.9).
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{136} HLF, 17-18.
\textsuperscript{137} JF, Proposal for Sunday Schools (B1.9); This was Raikes’s practice and seems to have been fairly common amongst most Sunday schools. Cf. RRR, 237.
Fletcher adopted the plan of giving the pupils hymn books, which they in turn took home to have their parents or a neighbour help them to learn.

The effects of establishing the Sunday schools was immediate. Even before all of the meeting houses were prepared and masters found, three hundred children had gathered as willing scholars. Not wanting to let the opportunity pass, Fletcher conducted meetings with them in their respective parts of the parish. Furthermore, it is worth noting that while Fletcher was still alive, there was never a full evolution from his previous school, which met on a weeknight, to the Sunday schools, for Mrs Fletcher wrote that he continued meeting the children ‘to the very last Thursday of his Illness.’\textsuperscript{138} The Quakers had had their own schools at Coalbrookdale and Ketley from the middle of the century. The iron master Richard Reynolds, who supervised (and subsidized) the schools in the 1780s, had difficulty convincing parents to send their children, especially in Ketley. However, he noted in his memoirs that ‘His exertions at Coalbrook Dale were more successful’, on account of Fletcher’s ministry in that part of the parish. Because of the value parishioners had grown to perceive in ‘a good education for their children, they eagerly availed themselves of the efforts made in their behalf.’\textsuperscript{139}

\textit{Educating Adults and Families}

Fletcher was similarly concerned for the religious education of his adult parishioners, and ‘in order to draw more persons to receive instruction he contrived a variety of Meetings, observing “something new always sticks for a season.”’\textsuperscript{140} This testimony by Mary Fletcher is suggestive of the educational aspect of some of Fletcher’s assemblies, although it isn’t clear that the meetings she wrote of here were the same as the societies. In any case, she noted that while it was customary for youth to attend his Lenten exercises, he advertised that ‘any shou’d be welcome [as catechumens] who had never been receiv’d at all ... old or young, urging ye kindness of ye command, & ye ingratitude of those who would not put themselves in ye way of at least having it explain’d.’\textsuperscript{141} Fletcher had himself modelled this (though before he came to Madeley). When attending church at Atcham, during his time as tutor in the Hill family, the minister of the church announced that he would be catechizing

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{139} Rathbone, \textit{Letters}, 46; cf. \textit{HofM}, 293.
\textsuperscript{140} Anon. Eulogies on JF (B1.9).
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid.
and invited all who wanted to learn to attend, and ‘Fletcher left his seat, and ... took his place among the children’.\textsuperscript{142}

Fletcher was also keen to encourage family prayer and education, though it is difficult to evaluate his effectiveness in doing so. He not only visited his people in their homes but would stop to exhort them in their places of employ when he was out in the parish. When Charles Simeon visited Madeley in the 1780s, he was impressed with Fletcher’s zeal, and recorded in his journal the method by which Fletcher exhorted from place to place:

He came to a smith’s shop ... And here it is astonishing how he spoke to the several persons who were labouring in it. To one of them, who was hammering upon the anvil, ‘Oh,’ says he, ‘pray to God that he may hammer that hard heart of yours.’ To another, that was heating the iron, ‘Ah, thus it is that God tries his people in the furnace of affliction.’ And so he went round, giving to every one a portion suitable to the business in which he was engaged.\textsuperscript{143}

Encouraging private instruction in families was a topic of regular conversation at the Worcester society of ministers, which Fletcher attended quarterly.\textsuperscript{144} The rules of their meeting suggest that a primary means of encouraging this, in addition to visiting house to house, was ‘instructing & exhorting them in Society’. Furthermore, the society recommended that the ministers should ensure that ‘all families (and every private Individual Person ... ) are furnished with Bibles and Common-Prayer-Books, and also, if it can be, Jenks’s Devotions or Every Man’s Ready Companion’, or other books.\textsuperscript{145} Fletcher ordered books to distribute in his parish as well, and was aware that the literature had to be suitable to the capabilities of the readers. Thus when Charles Wesley sent books that were ‘too large’ for Fletcher’s readership, he sent them back.\textsuperscript{146} When one of his parishioners was away from Madeley, he wrote to her to that if she had ‘seldom an opportunity to hear the word, read it the oftener at home’, and sent her ‘two pamphlets’ for meditation as well.

\textsuperscript{142} AM (1793), 175.  
\textsuperscript{143} Carus, Simeon, 99.  
\textsuperscript{144} Cf. Canons, 148-49.  
\textsuperscript{145} Proposal for a Society of Ministers of the Gospel (B1.1).  
\textsuperscript{146} JF CW, Aug. 1702.
One last aspect of Fletcher’s ministry of religious education is noteworthy, namely his theological writing and publication. It would have been rare to find that at almost any point in Fletcher’s incumbency, he was not engaged, along with all of his other parochial duties, in some form of this activity. Of course this encompassed sermons and addresses for both church and societies, which were sometimes circulated but also included more formal doctrinal writing. Most of his biographers, however, have not seen the latter as an aspect of parish education, but rather as primarily aimed at theological debate on the national scene. This perspective has been based upon both Fletcher’s prolificacy and by misinformed assumptions about his parochial context.

During the 1770s, Fletcher was embroiled in the Calvinist-Arminian Controversy. The Controversy was ignited by the Minutes of Wesley’s Conference of August 1770. The Conference, in their deliberations, had concluded that the Methodists had ‘leaned too much towards Calvinism.’\textsuperscript{147} The Calvinist branch of the Methodists took umbrage at the Minutes. In June 1771, Fletcher wrote to Wesley that he had heard that Walter Shirley had issued a circular letter calling on laity and clergy of the church and dissent to meet together at Wesley’s succeeding Conference on 6 August 1771 to recant the Minutes as ‘a dreadful Heresy’.\textsuperscript{148} From 1771-1777 Fletcher was a central actor in the hullabaloo that ensued. During this time Fletcher produced more than 1,800 printed pages of polemical writings.\textsuperscript{149} The first of these was a series of letters written to Shirley in defence of the Arminianism expressed in the Minutes, which would later become known as Fletcher’s First Check to Antinomianism.\textsuperscript{150} Six more Checks would flow from his pen, including his Equal Check,\textsuperscript{151} of which Fletcher’s main intent was the reconciliation and unity of Protestants on both sides of the Calvinist-Arminian theological fence.\textsuperscript{152} However, we need to take a broader view of Fletcher’s theological writing than just what was published as a result of the Controversy.

\textsuperscript{147} WJF, 1:219.  
\textsuperscript{148} JF\textsuperscript{JW}, 24 June 1771.  
\textsuperscript{149} See Appendix 6.  
\textsuperscript{150} J. Fletcher, A Vindication of the Rev Mr Wesley’s Last Minutes: In Five Letters to the Hon and Rev Author of the Circular Letter (Bristol, 1771).  
\textsuperscript{151} Published in four parts, 1774-75.  
\textsuperscript{152} For a full discussion of Fletcher’s involvement in the controversy, see RS chapters 12-13; also see B.S. Schlenther, Queen of the Methodists (Durham, 1997), 105-118.
Focus on the controversy served a rhetorical purpose for several of Fletcher’s early biographers, not least of whom was Luke Tyerman. By the end of Fletcher’s life, his Works were becoming standard reading for Methodist itinerants, recommended heartily by John Wesley.\textsuperscript{153} After Wesley’s death, there was a movement to co-opt Fletcher as Wesley’s would-have-been successor. However, to do so required that biographers provide a coherent explanation for why Fletcher never left Madeley to join Wesley as an itinerant. Love for his parish and commitment to the ideals of parochial ministry would hardly do. A different interpretation was needed, and one was provided by Tyerman who echoed Wesley’s claim that Fletcher was his designated successor. However, instead of seeing Madeley as a ‘narrow sphere’, Tyerman viewed Fletcher’s otherwise limited role in Methodism as providence, suggesting that it was precisely his parochial life that made it possible for him to come to Wesley’s defence in the Minutes Controversy, thus providing Methodism with a systematic theology:

In the itinerancy, Fletcher’s time for reading and study would have been extremely limited. At Madeley, he had abundance of leisure for both, and, during the next ten years, acquired that theological wealth, which, in the hour of need, enabled him to be of the greatest service to Wesley, by the writing of his unanswerable Checks to Antinomianism.\textsuperscript{154}

It is clear from this statement that Tyerman had but a limited idea of the scope of Fletcher’s duties and the diligence with which he performed them, and it seems that he took for granted that Fletcher’s theological works were written \textit{ex nihilo}. In contrast to this view, a closer look at Fletcher’s publications reveals that, even in the midst of controversy, his focus was on his parish. He had little, if any, leisure in the sense that Tyerman speaks of it. Writing was a supererogatory function of his ministry, and therefore, he prioritized performance of his full duty and wrote in the time that remained—which meant that he slept little and even sacrificially deferred to his parish work over spending leisure time with friends. As he wrote to

\textsuperscript{153} \textit{LJW}, 6:123-24, 134.

\textsuperscript{154} \textit{WDS}, 57.
Benson in 1775: ‘I am so tied up here, both by my parish duty and controversial writings, that I cannot hope to see you unless you come into these parts.’

Furthermore, his writing was not necessarily disconnected from his parish work. For example, a large portion of his *Equal Check* was in substance a sermon he had preached at Madeley in April 1762 and again in May 1773. The original is extant. The ‘Scripture Scales’ which made up the another portion of the *Equal Check* were rooted in his fourteen-plus years of scripture study and preaching in Madeley, and he ordered fifty copies to be distributed in his parish. Another writing project in the 1760s was his plan to write a sort of adult catechism in the popular form of an hypothetical ‘dialogue’. He had read Hervey’s *Theron and Aspasio*, (among others) but wanted to write his own, ‘not between fine gentlemen ... but between a minister and one of his Parishioners. Six dialogues upon these subjects – The Doctrine of the fall – Salv. by faith alone – The new birth – The Inspiration of the Spirit ... Each point proved by scripture reason, experience, & the authority of the Church.’

He began work on this, though it was only published posthumously. However, this work formed the foundation of his *Appeal*, which was most clearly a publication written for and distributed in Madeley. Its popularity on a national scale (it went through ten editions between 1772 and 1788) was secondary. Indeed, it was written for a particular segment of his parish. He dedicated it to ‘The Principal Inhabitants of the Parish of Madeley’—that is, the gentry. This is significant for what the publication contained and what it therefore represented. Gilbert claimed that as the ability of the eighteenth-century Establishment to ‘impose its services upon English society’ was weakened by an emerging voluntarism, the clergy increasingly relied upon a ‘squire-parson alliance’ as a means of social control by which the ruling elites could ‘dictate religious norms’. There is evidence that this was the relationship some of the gentry expected to have with Fletcher. But instead, Fletcher was just as concerned with instructing and reproving ‘the leading members

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155 JF\(\rightarrow\)JB, 12 July 1775.
156 JF, Sermon, Doctrine of Salvation (B1.9).
157 See MARC: MAW Fl. 32.3, 119.1, 123.13; SRO: 2280/16/87-89 for various published ‘dialogues’ in Fletcher’s library.
158 JF\(\rightarrow\)JW, 17 Feb. 1766.
159 ‘Dedication’, *Appeal*.
161 JF\(\rightarrow\)CH, 19 Nov. 1760.
of the laity’ as he was with reforming the lower orders of society.\textsuperscript{162} Indeed, rather than forming any kind of tacit alliance with the gentry, he preached to them on a level with the lower classes, asserting that wealth could inhibit spiritual receptiveness and insisting that the problem of man’s sinful estate required not just religious forms but conversion of heart and mind unto salvation, regardless of social status.\textsuperscript{163} Thus in his dedicatory letter of his \textit{Appeal}, he pointedly admonished the gentry for not paying as close attention to religious matters as some of his poorer parishioners:

GENTLEMEN,—You are no less entitled to my private labors than the inferior class of my parishioners. As you do not choose to partake with them of my evening instructions, I take the liberty to present you with some of my morning meditations. May these well-meant endeavors of my pen be more acceptable to you than those of my tongue! And may you carefully read in your closets, what you have, perhaps, inattentively heard in the church!\textsuperscript{164}

Realizing that such remarks could have repercussions (especially financial ones), he closed this epistle, explaining that he would ‘rather impart truth than receive tithes’. Furthermore, by publishing his \textit{Appeal}, the service to his parish was two-fold: first, by providing a spiritual apologetic for the doctrine of original sin in all of humanity, a key to convincing his parishioners of the need for conversion; and second, by giving the profit from the sales of the work to benefit the poor of the parish. Indeed, this was not an accident. Fletcher had arranged for the book to be sold ‘at the Work-house in Madeley-wood ... for the benefit of the poor’.\textsuperscript{165} Fletcher wrote to Charles Wesley that he had ‘ordered ‘600 copies to disperse in my neighbourhood’\textsuperscript{166}

When considered in context, it is evident that Fletcher’s theological writing was not simply a way of filling hours of leisure in a country hermitage but rather it stemmed from his pastoral concerns and quite literally consumed him. Such exertion took its toll. When a local preacher visited the parish in 1773, he went to see the vicar of Madeley of whom he had heard so much. When he arrived at the vicarage

\textsuperscript{162} \textit{RRR}, 240-41.
\textsuperscript{163} Cf. JF, Sermon, Rom. 7:24 (B1.1).
\textsuperscript{164} ‘Dedication’, \textit{Appeal}.
\textsuperscript{165} ‘Title Page’, \textit{Appeal}.
\textsuperscript{166} JF→CW, 21 Sept. 1771.
he found Fletcher coming ‘from his study with a pen in his mouth, a beard of many days’ growth, and a coat that appeared much the better for mending.’ It is telling that it was at the end of the Minutes controversy that Fletcher was taken ill with a severe consumption, and the wisdom of his unceasing labours has to be questioned. With regard to education in the parish, there was a steady improvement, not only in the office of catechizing but in a consistently expanding array of strategies throughout Fletcher’s incumbency, many of which anticipated the reform efforts of the following century.

167 *WMM* (1833), 650.
Chapter 6
Conflict, Confrontation and Conciliation

Fletcher’s relationship with nonconformists in his parish and his confrontation of dissent at large, demonstrates a considerable effort to oppose error and promote primitive Christianity in both church and chapel. The foregoing chapters examined Fletcher’s pastoral strategies for winning the hearts and minds of his parishioners to Christian faith, fulfilling his duty—by means of church services, religious society meetings, pastoral care, and educational tactics—‘to teach and to premonish, to feed and to provide for the Lord’s family’. Yet another aspect of pastoral obligation instructed ordinands to: ‘be ready, with all faithful diligence, to banish and drive away all erroneous and strange doctrines contrary to God’s Word; and to use both publick and private monitions and exhortations ... as need shall require, and occasion shall be given’. Both need and occasion presented in Madeley as early antagonism arose from Baptists and Quakers. In addition to tensions with Protestant dissenters, Catholic hostility also erupted at times. When challenges to the church arose, Fletcher mounted vigorous campaigns to secure the church and its gospel.

Study of conflict and confrontation in the parish informs us about the kind of religion people wanted (or did not want). As Hempton has suggested in another context: ‘Vigorous opposition shows that something important is at stake and sensibilities are being offended.’ Offence did not always arise out of complaints against clerical sloth. Sometimes, and in Fletcher’s case it appears often, that when opposition arose, it was conversely due to his adherence to his duties prescribed by Canon Law. As Fletcher preached in his sermon on salvation, ‘[D]o not you know ... that my insisting upon ... good works, and encouraging all I can to do them, is what makes me to be despised and rejected by many’, amongst which good works were ‘singing, reading, praying, and godly conversation, in private houses [i.e. meeting in societies]’. Indeed, while historians have often focused on complaints against the Established clergy for their pluralism and laxity, there remain many extant protests of a converse nature, as parishioners did at times express homologous discontent.

1 BCP.
2 Ibid. Fletcher quoted this passage of the ‘Bishop’s Charge’ in a sermon defending his society meetings on the text of Acts 5:42 (B1.9).
3 Hempton, Methodism, 8; Also see E. Griffin’s comments on opposition to JPs, MPs, and clergy who eventually quelled certain forms of popular recreation as a reflection upon popular vesting in local culture. England’s Revelry: A History of Popular Sports and Pastimes, 1660-1830 (Oxford, 2005).
4 WJP(A), 4:75.
with their pastor’s diligence, pious zeal, or, as Gregory has called it, an ‘ethical rigorism’ as an element of the ‘Puritan mentality’ now being assimilated within Anglicanism.\(^5\) Fletcher’s model for confronting error was St Paul. ‘[T]he faithful minister’, he wrote, ‘... imitates the conduct of the great apostle, who, when he saw a shameful error making its way into the church, placed himself in the gap, and gave way to the emotions of his honest zeal’.\(^6\) This chapter examines the opposition which arose from dissenters and Fletcher’s pastoral response in both the church and his religious society meetings. In most cases the discord never fully abated, but as with his preaching, tensions waned over time, and in some cases a degree of cooperation was fostered, reflecting a more general and growing evangelical consensus.

In November 1760, Fletcher wrote to Lady Huntingdon: ‘There are three meetings in my parish—a Papist, Quaker, and Baptist, and they begin to call the fourth the Methodist one—I mean the Church.’\(^7\) This statement aptly expresses his early perception of the existential threat of erroneous doctrine presented by nonconformists in his parish, and implemented a number of strategies to combat error and to strengthen sound doctrine against the church’s rivals. In part, his attempts to quell dissent stemmed from a concern for his larger calling in the parish—to proclaim the gospel—which was threatened not only by doctrinal conflict, but by the nature of dissent as schismatic, dividing the church of God generally and threatening to do so to Fletcher’s congregation at Madeley in particular. Some of the threats, as it would turn out, were relatively benign; others were potentially malignant.

The pastoral work of the eighteenth-century Established clergy—in comparison to that of the church’s rivals—to win over the minds and hearts of the people, has often been portrayed by historians as wanting energy, innovation and commitment.\(^8\) The church in this period has been seen as limited in its ability to respond to the religious needs of the populace, apart from the prescription of and authority to enforce attendance, now abrogated by the Toleration Act (1689), thus dissolving its former monopoly,\(^9\) while simultaneously limiting its ability to reach the

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\(^5\) *RRR*, 242.
\(^7\) IF→CH, 19 Nov. 1760.
\(^8\) Russell is emphatic regarding the energy dissenting clergy had compared to the Establishment clergy. See *Clerical Profession*, 89.
masses. Nonconformity, on the other hand, was allegedly more dynamic, ‘popular religion’, able to successfully attract the hordes of people not reached by the Established Church.\textsuperscript{10} Furthermore, toleration, it has been supposed, was one of a number of factors which weakened the church’s position in society by not only decreasing its authority to enforce religious practice, but by forcing its social and cultural influence to the periphery of parish life.\textsuperscript{11} Snape, along with others, has claimed the Toleration Act created a situation in which the irreligious or unorthodox ‘could stay away from church altogether on the Sabbath and flout the church’s correction courts with growing impunity.’\textsuperscript{12} As Watts expressed it: ‘in giving the citizen the choice of worshipping either at his parish church or at his dissenting meeting house, it effectively gave him the choice of worshipping nowhere at all.’\textsuperscript{13} Even so, the suggestion that there was an inherent disadvantage to the church in toleration that concomitantly became an advantage to her rivals, needs to be tested against what actually took place in the parishes. For there could be considerable variance from one parish to another,\textsuperscript{14} and the hinge pin upon which the fortunes of the church turned in this regard was the pastoral response of the clergy, despite a theoretically weakened authority.

Even if the Toleration Act made it more difficult to enforce religious practice, this did not necessarily imply a decline in religious feeling in general, nor the decentralization of the local church from popular culture. Certainly Skinner’s claim that in Shropshire in the eighteenth century there were ‘large numbers of people untouched with any form of religion’ is exaggerated.\textsuperscript{15} The idea that somehow people held any faster ‘to beliefs which the Church of England had long found objectionable’\textsuperscript{16} after toleration than before it, actually only emphasizes that prior to 1689, those whose doctrines were contrary to the church had had to be more guarded in their personal religious practice. Freedom from the need to conceal one’s


\textsuperscript{11} Snape, \textit{Church of England}, 246.


\textsuperscript{13} M. Watts, ‘Why Did the English Stop Going to Church?’, \textit{Friends of Dr. William’s Library Lecture} (London, 1993), 6; also see C. Rose, \textit{England in the 1660s: Revolution, Religion and War} (Oxford, 1999), 170-78.

\textsuperscript{14} Mather, ‘Georgian Churchmanship’, 268-70.

\textsuperscript{15} Skinner, \textit{Nonconformity}; 23.

\textsuperscript{16} Snape, ‘Response’.
differences with the Established religion, granted by toleration (of nonconformist Protestants), gradually came to be an identity-shaping characteristic of ‘enlightened’ Anglicans over and against the continued strictures of the Catholic church, which threatened persecution against any who dissented from the authority of Rome. Fletcher exhorted some of his Calvinist opponents to consider whether in their arguments they were not more like the Romanists to whom they were opposed by using a language of persecution, calling ‘the most faithful servants of God heretics’ and being restricted from real persecution, not by regenerated hearts, but by ‘an act of toleration’ which ‘binds the monster’. More directly he wrote in his Portrait:

A true Christian was never known to be a persecutor. The cruel disputes which have arisen among faithless Christians have not necessarily sprung from the nature of scriptural doctrines, but rather from the pride of those tyrannical doctors who have contended for their particular explications of such doctrines.

When considered in this light, it can be said that the church in post-toleration England, while having fewer mechanisms and limited authority for enforcing religion, had an increased facility for distinguishing its field of evangelistic mission. Skinner observed that in Shropshire in 1676, ‘there were some non-conformists in 88 of the 153 parishes’, and that by 1738 ‘there were over ninety private houses’ licensed for nonconformist worship. Thus, the number of licensed places appears to correspond roughly with the number of parishes which reported nonconformists fifty years previous, suggesting that licensed toleration and increased freedom from persecution, rather than a real increase in nonconformist numbers, was the primary difference between pre- and post-toleration Shropshire. Toleraton did not make religion voluntary (a point made by its advocates in the 1690s). Rather, it acknowledged that it was already so ontologically, even if not legally. Policy, then, was catching up to the actuality.

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17 Appeal, 124-25; Portrait, 2:270-72; WJF, (A), 9:418-27; ‘Natural Aversion of the Human Mind to that Which is Good’, in WJF (B), 6:550-55; also see MF’s observations on the same subject: MARC: MAM Fl. 37/4/1720.
18 WJF (A), 2:270-71; Appeal, 124-25.
19 Portrait, 2:270.
20 There are clearly points of interest regarding the church’s doctrine of the visible and invisible church but are peripheral to concerns in this Chapter. See Articles 19 and 26, ‘Thirty-nine Articles’, BCP. Also see B. Hindmarsh’s comments on the seventeenth-century Puritan ‘movement towards ... a more “realized ecclesiology”’. Conversion, 48-49.
21 Skinner, Nonconformity, 3-4.
Functionally, the Act mandated persuasion rather than persecution as the means by which the irreligious, heterodox, or heretical should be brought into conformity,\(^{22}\) was to many not only rational, but more importantly, concordant with the means, methods, and theology of the Primitive Christians,\(^{23}\) in contrast to the persecuting ways of the Romish church.\(^{24}\) Neither should it be missed that the influx of persecuted Protestants, particularly those of Huguenot extraction or background, like Fletcher,\(^{25}\) saw toleration as a defining characteristic of English society. Even so, Fletcher was markedly more tolerant of Protestant dissenters than of Catholics, and his earliest encounters with the Papists of Madeley were less than conciliatory. If persuasion was the primary means of evangelization and outreach, then what resources were at Fletcher’s disposal by which he could so persuade his flock? As Rose has illustrated, the post-toleration clergy were not as powerless to confront both nonconformity and religious indifference as many perceived in the early years after the Act was passed. Even though they did not have the legal resources to confront these difficulties, some clergy like Fletcher, found that one of the greatest resources available was attention to pastoral care.\(^{26}\) Amongst the models Fletcher relied upon was that of the Latitudinarian Bishop of Salisbury, Gilbert Burnet\(^{27}\) who understood the reformation of the parish clergy themselves to be the best hedge against dissent. Fletcher was conversant with Burnet’s works and quoted from them in support of his own treatises. In 1692 Burnet had written:

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\text{[I]f we [the clergy] ... applied our selves wholly to the Duties of our Profession ... studied to outlive, and outlabour those that divide from us; we might hope ... to overcome their Prejudices ... the strongest Reasonings will not prevail, till we first force them to think the better}
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\(^{24}\) See G. Burnet, *A Sermon Preached in the Chappel of St James’s Before His Highness the Prince of Orange* ([London], 1689), 28. Wesley wrote that persecution was in fact one of the corrupted doctrines of the Catholic church, which ‘utterly tears up the Second Great Commandment’, *A Word to a Protestant* (Bristol, 1746), 3.
\(^{27}\) G. Burnet (1643-1715) was appointed to Salisbury in 1689. His Latitudinarianism may best be represented by his views of moderation and toleration, as well as his Whig politics. Burnet was an advocate of broadening the communion of the church and supported comprehension of nonconformists within it. *ODCC*. 

233
of our Church ... If we did generally mind our Duties, and discharge them faithfully, this would prepare such as mean well in their Separation from us, to consider better of the Grounds on which they maintain it.28

Fletcher drew upon Burnet in support of his own views of the moderation necessary to building consensus with dissenters, while simultaneously distinguishing those forms of dissent which were harmful to both church and society.29 Echoing Burnet’s concern for pastoral care, Fletcher wrote: ‘Does it not become us to take the greatest part of the blame upon ourselves, according to the old adage, “Like priest like people?” ... Not living so near to God ourselves as we should, we are afraid to come near to the consciences of our people.’30 Also like Burnet, Fletcher saw pride and abuse of clerical authority, the ‘vices of supercilious, uncharitable, and antichristian clergy’, as the causa causans of divisions in the church and of the low view dissenters and the irreligious held of the church.31 Indeed, the text of the sermon Fletcher preached for which he was ridiculed by a neighbouring clergymen was Jeremiah 6:13: ‘For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealteth falsely’. This was one of the same texts Burnet had expounded upon for which he too was rebuked by some of his fellow clergy for being critical of the Establishment, and thus, allegedly undermining their position even more than the Toleration Act already had.32 In his sermon, Fletcher (as he explained to his clerical disputant) ‘inquired into the reasons of this misfortune [of irreligion]. And having 1st mentioned the aversion we all have by nature to have our spiritual wound probed

28 G. Burnet, A Discourse on the Pastoral Care (London, 1692), xxix-xxxii.
29 See WFF (B), 5:111-112. Fletcher also quoted frequently from Burnet’s Exposition of the Thirty-Nine Articles; see WFF (B), 3:393-94; 6:335-56. It is not clear to what extent Lady Huntingdon’s high regard for Bishop Burnet influenced Fletcher’s own views, but the resonance between her views of him and Fletcher’s is apparent. See L&TC, 1:39-40 regarding Lady Huntingdon’s admiration of Burnet’s concern for pastoral care and her relationship with Burnet’s daughter, Mrs Mitchell.
30 J. Fletcher, A Second Check to Antinomianism (London, 1772), 64-65; cf. Burnet, Pastoral Care, ix.
32 For Burnet’s exposition on Jer. 6:13, see Pastoral Care, 19-22. On the charge that Latitudinarian churchmen weakened the church, first by promoting unity with dissenters, and second, by railing self-critically against the Established clergy instead of confronting nonconformist error, see G. Sewel, The Clergy and the Present Ministry Defended (London, 1713); on the same, see the analysis in D. Spaeth, “The Enemy Within”: The Failure of Reform in the Diocese of Salisbury in the Eighteenth Century, in National Church, 121-44.
and drest I could not forshame ... mentioning the reason ascribed in the text the want of experience & diligence in the ... phisicians of souls."

For Fletcher, confrontation of these issues was, however, not merely a concern for public image and he employed a mosaic of strategies, the upshot of which he anticipated would be both an improved public image of the church and a stronger society formed by the unifying of Christians in orthodox belief and practical holiness (even though his hopes for unity were frustrated at times). Thus he submitted in his *Essay on Truth*, summarizing the Apostle Paul’s meaning in 1 Cor. 4:20, ‘true religion does not consist in fine talking, but in powerful believing and holy living’. In this respect, he did not see confrontation or controversy as inherently schismatic but as necessary at times of crisis to fulfil his pastoral calling to build and protect the kingdom of God. In his *Third Check*, he stipulated:

[C]ontroversy, though not desirable in itself ... has a hundred times rescued truth ... We are indebted to our Lord’s controversies with the [P]harisees and scribes ... And, to the end of the world, the church will bless God for the spirited manner in which St. Paul, in his epistles ... defended the controverted point of a believer’s present justification by faith ... Had it not been for controversy, Romish priests would, to this day, feed us with Latin masses and a wafer god.

He perceived the call of the church to engage in debate when truth was threatened, and he understood that some debate was intrinsic to toleration. Compared to ‘the dreadful implements of war’, the ‘implements of controversy’ were relatively harmless, and he believed that it was the duty of the clergy to confront rivals in both their creed and politics. Fletcher represented, as much as his mainstream Anglican brethren, an ideology of moderation which served to simultaneously ‘cement the public order’ and to implore Christian sensibilities at the local and national level. He hoped that Christian love would prevail and needless bloodshed would be prevented if disputants turned first their minds to Scripture and

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33 JF→Rev. Lewis, 3 Feb. 1762.
34 JF→CW, 16 Jan. 1773.
35 *WFF (B)*, 2:492.
36 Ibid. 1:421-22; also see his concluding comments in JF→CW, Sept. 1770; R. Hill, *The Finishing Stroke* (London, 1773), 30-31; also, JF→CW, 31 May 1772.
then to the work of reasoned discourse. He reflected, ‘one pen may do more execution than a battery of cannon: A page of well-applied scriptures may be of more extensive use than a field of battle: And drops of ink ... a greater effect than streams of blood.’ Indeed, as practical preparation for young candidates for ministry at Trevecca, Fletcher encouraged strength of mind and reliance on scripture to moderate controversies which he feared could spiral into savage extremes. He made the assignment to his students: ‘Write an English letter to a deist to convince him of the truth of the Scriptures.’ His dealings with opposition included confrontation, as well as making various overtures to adversaries, not to mention the practice of prayer and fasting and frequent requests for advice from those he considered judicious lovers of truth. His most consistent strategy, however, was to demonstrate concern for the well-being of his parishioners. We now look to his parish in which these strategies were employed.

**Protestant Nonconformity: Baptists and Quakers**

Madeley was not representative of the religious situation in Shropshire at large, which had been considered a stronghold of dissenters since before the Civil War. The Compton Census (1676) listed no Protestant nonconformists in the parish and only seventy-two in the coalfield. Quakers arrived in the parish during the first decade of the eighteenth century—established first in Broseley by Abraham Darby I, who, in the middle of the century, moved the Meeting to Coalbrookdale. The small Baptist congregation had no registered chapel in the parish, though they appear to have been quite active. The presence of nonconformists in Madeley and the surrounding coalfield affected the parish in different ways between 1760 and 1785. Relations were at times peaceable, even if disagreeable; at other times, divisions were introduced into services in the church (building) as well as in Fletcher’s religious society meetings. It makes sense then, that Fletcher’s response against dissent would take form in both venues, especially in consideration of the nature of his societies as localized microcosms of his church congregation at large. There was an obvious practicality to this approach, for in his societies, he was better enabled to address...

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38 J. Fletcher, *American Patriotism Farther Confronted with Reason, Scripture, and the Constitution* ... (Shrewsbury, 1776), v. This passage of writing indicates how ideals of moderation were not necessarily signs of spiritual laxity behind Latitudinarian façades, but a demonstration of attempts to compose irrational tempers with rational, scriptural Christianity.


dissent where it presented the most existential threat geographically. Thus it was in Coalbrookdale, where most of the Quakers resided and where they held their meeting that Fletcher commonly addressed their errors. In the church building itself, nearer the Catholic community, he confronted the threat of Popish doctrine.

There is some conflict in the data regarding the strength of dissent in Madeley during his incumbency. This reflects a discrepancy between the statistical facts and Fletcher’s perception of the threat posed by nonconformity. Thus, while there was little increase in the numbers of dissenters in Madeley between 1760 and 1785, Fletcher reported in 1762: ‘It should be very hard If in a place where there is 5 or six dissenting preachers not to mention itinerant ones & 4 denominations of Xns I should not be allowed to give my flock such directions whereby they may know the true sheep from the wolves in sheeps cloathing.’ Fletcher had preached against these ‘wolves’ in a sermon in his church in 1761, where they had turned up to hear him. Their presence may be indicative of the practice of some nonconformists who occasionally attended the parish church to hear a sermon, which, as Jacob has shown, was not all that uncommon in the period. And, as Malmgreen keenly observed in her study of Macclesfield, ‘The very task of assigning an individual this or that religious label can be a dubious undertaking … for many people, spiritual progress was a matter of experiment, with advances, side excursions, and retreats, frequently overstepping the boundaries of denomination or chapel.’ Even so, in Fletcher’s estimate, the dissenting preachers (including the Catholics) had drawn ‘away a 4th of the inhabitants of the parish’, and he would not neglect such a need. He saw their presence as an occasion to give in a sermon ‘a public caution’ to the dissenting clergy and ‘a public warning’ to their followers,

42 IRS (3rd), 192-93.
43 Quaker preachers visited Madeley from the time of the establishment of a Friends Meeting by Abraham Darby, I. The first Quaker meeting house in the parish was built in 1741 and from the 1750s, Abiah Darby recorded numerous visits by Quaker preachers from England, as well as from America. See MJAD, esp. entries for Nov. 1761 to May 1762. Methodist itinerancy was not established in the parish until 1764, and then, only co-opting Fletcher’s religious meetings as preaching places, although JW had urged Fletcher to invite his preachers into Madeley by 1762. JF CW, Aug. 1762. Baptist itinerants came through the area as close as Shrewsbury in 1776, but it is unclear whether there were any in Madeley during Fletcher’s time. Skinner, Nonconformity, 25, 30-31.
44 JF Rev. Lewis, 3 Feb. 1762.
45 Jacob, Clerical Profession, 208. Also see RRR, 182, 195; Gibson, ‘The Diocese of Winchester’, 113.
46 Malmgreen, Silk Town, 151-54.
47 JF Rev. Lewis, 3 Feb. 1762.
least the one should mislead & the other be misled from the way to eternal life’.\textsuperscript{48} Even though there is little evidence to suggest that either the Baptists or Quakers had many members, it is clear that both were quite active, explaining Fletcher’s perception. However, they were mistaken if they thought proselytizing Fletcher’s parish would be easy.

\textit{Baptists}

The Baptists (who probably attended the Particular Baptist meeting established in Broseley in 1741)\textsuperscript{49} took on a more adversarial stance at the outset of Fletcher’s incumbency than did the Quakers. Fletcher generally referred to all Baptists as ‘Anabaptists’, based on their rejection of infant baptism and their insistence on adult baptism, and rebaptism of those who had been baptized as infants. However, following Bishop Burnet, he did distinguish between those he considered—quoting the prelate—as ‘gentle or moderate Anabaptists’ and those of the more adversarial kind.\textsuperscript{50} Baptists in Madeley were not numerous in 1760. It seems that for most of the period they were a dwindling community, showing only occasional bursts of growth and only beginning to expand as a denominational group in the mid-nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{51} What they lacked in numbers they made up for in fervour. Fletcher wrote that they ‘exceed all others in zeal for making proselytes.’\textsuperscript{52}

He described his frustration with the situation in November 1762: ‘Matters in my parish are in \textit{Statu quo si non-quam} the Anabaptists have openly declared war on me on the question of Election.’\textsuperscript{53} This conflict with the Baptists in Madeley provides a better lens through which to view his later defence of Arminius’s theology against the Calvinist doctrine of election and tendencies toward antinomianism. He

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{49} \textit{VCH}, Shropshire, (11:67-72) suggests that a clockmaker’s house in Madeley, licensed as a dissenting meeting house in 1778, was perhaps a Baptist meeting but this seems unlikely given the waning of Baptists and the fact that even in 1790, J. Rippon’s \textit{Baptist Annual Register} listed the nearest Baptists to Madeley as those who met in the chapel in Broseley. (London, 1790); also see M.J. Collins, \textit{Shropshire Baptist History: An Account of the Baptist Churches of Shropshire and the Surrounding Areas} (Madeley, 2008); R.F. Chambers, \textit{The Strict Baptist Chapels of England}, vol. 4 (London, 1963), 46.

\textsuperscript{50} J. Fletcher, \textit{A Vindication of Mr. Wesley’s ‘Calm Address to our American Colonies}, 2nd edn. (London, 1776; first published 1776), 46; idem., \textit{American Patriotism}, 40-42.

\textsuperscript{51} According to T. Phillips, a late eighteenth-century deacon in the Baptist congregation at Shrewsbury, there were five early Baptist congregations in Shropshire but of these, Madeley was not one of them. \textit{The History and Antiquities of Shrewsbury} (Shrewsbury, 1779).

\textsuperscript{52} Fletcher, \textit{Calm Address}, 46. Fletcher added this comment in a footnote in the Second Edition.

\textsuperscript{53} JF\rightarrow CW, 30 Nov. 1762.
was driven by the same motivation in both cases—the perceived threat of antinomianism to evangelical religion. In Madeley, the Baptists’ resistance to Fletcher took the form of public taunts. They would show up at his church services to dispute his sermons afterwards—mostly with pamphlets—and contest his doctrines. This in itself could have been construed by Fletcher as a presentable offence, for the Toleration Act stipulated that ‘if any ... persons, at any time ... do and shall willingly and of purpose, maliciously or contumeliously come into any ... parish church ... and disquiet or disturb the same, or misuse any preacher or teacher, such person or persons ... to be bound by recognizance in the penal sum of fifty pounds’. Yet Fletcher took a different tack, using persuasive arguments and seeking common ground, rather than prosecuting them.

In Fletcher’s later years as vicar, it is well known that he grew weary of controversy and wrote several theological tracts in attempts to quell ‘party spirit’ among Christians. But his attempts to be reconciled with Calvinists came much earlier, as seen by his parish work, and he sought advice from Charles Wesley: ‘Do you believe that it would be possible to agree with them without exposing oneself to internal conflicts’. He was equally concerned for his parishioners, fearing that the Baptists sought to ‘sow discord among us, so that they may fish in troubled water.’ Again, Fletcher strategically utilized one of his religious societies to confront the error—presumably the society in Madeley Wood, nearest the Broseley border from which the Baptist threat came—and ‘expressly charged [his] society not to dispute with them’. His fears may have been well founded, for a similar situation arose with the Baptists in Shrewsbury, to the west and Dawley, to the north in the 1770s, leading to a pamphlet war between the Baptists and the Church of England clergyman, Richard De Courcy.

In January 1763, the Baptists were apparently attempting to draw away parishioners who attended Fletcher’s religious meetings, having written a 90-page pamphlet to circulate amongst them. Fletcher responded, not by disputing with them directly—for he found them to be ‘too desperate and infatuated to listen to reason of

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55 e.g. J. Fletcher, *The Reconciliation; or, An Easy Method to Unite the Professing People of God* (London, 1777).
56 JF CW, 30 Nov. 1762.
Scripture’—but by writing his own tract and distributing it to his society with hopes of minimizing conflict while maintaining doctrinal truth.\textsuperscript{58} Despite his best efforts, in the end of that year the Baptists intensified their attack, which Fletcher felt compelled to combat with equal tenacity, this time by writing a 102-page response.\textsuperscript{59} There is no evidence to indicate that their attacks were successful in either creating lasting schism or in drawing Anglicans away from Fletcher’s church. In 1765 they complained against Maxfield, who had been preaching in Madeley at Fletcher’s invitation. Fletcher reported that Maxfield was popular with the parish on the whole and that the only grievances had come from the Baptists, who disagreed with his Arminian preaching and his doctrine of Christian perfection.\textsuperscript{60} In the early 1770s the Baptist minister from Broseley, determined to confront Fletcher’s Arminianism, told his congregation that he would confront Fletcher directly. However, upon meeting Fletcher at the Madeley vicarage, where he was invited to prayer, and after arguing with Fletcher for some time, was himself persuaded towards a more moderated Calvinism, such that his Baptist congregation noted the change in his preaching.\textsuperscript{61}

Skinner’s analysis of Baptists in Shropshire suggests that they did not have lasting success in the coalfield or surrounding areas, strengthening only at the very end of the century under the leadership of a more charismatic pastor.\textsuperscript{62} Yalden notes the strength of Baptists was limited in northern Shropshire as well, but claims, ‘The failure of the Baptists to make any substantial progress in founding rural churches is more difficult to explain as it was certainly not for want of trying.’\textsuperscript{63} Even though Yalden mentions the efforts of De Courcy and Stillingfleet amongst Shropshire ministers of the Church of England, he speculates that ‘the strong competition provided by the Congregationalists probably did much to retard the Baptists’ advance’, while giving no credit to the pastoral work of Anglicans.\textsuperscript{64} The picture in Madeley, in contrast to this statement and in accord with what appears to have been a concerted effort by other Anglican clergy, indicates that the most vigorous competition to the Baptists’ efforts actually came from the Established Church. Furthermore, where there was agreement between evangelical incumbents in the

\textsuperscript{58} JF\textsuperscript{→}CW, 5 Jan. 1763.  
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid. 26 Dec. 1763.  
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid. 8 Aug. 1765.  
\textsuperscript{61} Crowther, Portraiture, 101.  
\textsuperscript{62} Skinner, Nonconformity, 25-27.  
\textsuperscript{63} Yalden, ‘Nonconformity’, 1:61.  
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid. On Stillingfleet and De Courcy, see BI.
region, the hedge against nonconformity was even more puissant. For example, De Courcy wrote a tract in defence of the church and her ministers, and—despite his Calvinist theology which was in conflict with Fletcher’s Arminianism—he drew upon Fletcher’s Vindication of the Rev. Mr. Wesley’s Calm Address to make his case against the Baptists (and other dissenters) in Shrewsbury.65 By 1774, the Baptists had called upon the Calvinist itinerants of Lady Huntingdon’s Connexion to strengthen their endeavours in Shropshire. Somewhat fatigued by controversy, sceptical of its ability to achieve its aim, and desiring to find commonality where he could, Fletcher wrote to Charles Wesley about the Baptists for the last time: ‘But no matter if [Lady Huntingdon’s itinerants] strengthen people’s hearts in the Lord … I am glad Christ is preached: tho’ it should be out of contention.’66 Thus, it appears that the Baptists in Madeley were an often fledgling, but occasionally vociferous, society that made few inroads where the church was strong, and it was in no small measure Fletcher’s pastoral care which provided such strength.

**Quakers**

The Quakers were less problematic from the start of Fletcher’s ministry than either the Baptists or the Catholics. Even so, he counted them among those whose doctrinal errors threatened the parishioners to whom he was called to cry ‘turn in the name of the Lord’, and his discourse with them was more protracted.67 Fletcher’s concern over how many of his flock might be led astray, may have stemmed from the fact that the iron master, Abraham Darby II, along with the iron works managers Richard and Williams Reynolds, all of them Quakers, were the chief employers in the parish. They were alleged circa 1750 to employ ‘more than 500 people’,68 and in 1776, ‘near 1000’.69 If this was the cause of Fletcher’s concern, it was probably less warranted than he supposed, for as Trinder has pointed out, ‘Membership of the Society of Friends was not a pre-requisite to success in the Shropshire iron trade’, and there is only circumspect evidence (and very little at that) of coercion as a means of proselytizing.70 The fact remains, however, that the lord of the manor was

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65 R. De Courcy, The Rejoinder ... (Shrewsbury, 1777), 311-313; WJF(B), 5:44-46.
66 JF→CW, 4 July 1774.
68 Perry, quoted in IRS (3rd), 84. This is a slight revision of Trinder’s opinion in the first edition in which he suggested that being a ‘non-Quaker’ might exclude skilled workers from ‘positions of responsibility’, implying

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Catholic and the chief employers of the parish were Quakers, meaning that with regards to either winning dissenters back to the church or propagating Anglican doctrines, Fletcher had few allies amongst the gentry of his parish in the earliest phase of his ministry, thus explaining his comments regarding the reception of his ministry amongst the poor while the wealthy of his parish were slower to rally to his cause.\textsuperscript{71}

Most of the Quakers lived in Coalbrookdale,\textsuperscript{72} where the only Quaker meeting in the parish was held twice on Sundays with an evening meeting on Thursdays. There was also a meeting in the neighbouring village of Ketley (about four miles to the north) which some of the Madeley Quakers occasionally attended, and from which some travelled for employment in the ironworks at Coalbrookdale.\textsuperscript{73} In 1762 a new meeting house was erected in Coalbrookdale and licensed to replace the others.\textsuperscript{74} While the Quaker community in Madeley was not large, it was the most continuously active nonconformist fellowship in the parish throughout the century. Their numbers did rise but did not keep pace with population increase, and by 1798 there were only 90 Quakers in the parish.\textsuperscript{75} And, these end-of-century numbers of supposed Quakers in Madeley may in fact be exaggerated, for as the Quaker minister with whom Fletcher was most familiar, Abiah Darby, wrote: ‘We don’t confine ourselves to our own Parish, but all are welcome that come. I know the poor out of eight parishes come to us’, which suggests less of a Quaker concentration in Madeley parish itself even than has usually been supposed.\textsuperscript{76} The fact that people from other parishes crossed boundaries for nonconformist worship helps to explain the nature of the challenge to the parish clergy, who were more constrained in breaching the same borders for their own ministries. Abiah, like her late husband, was well-connected, establishing, visiting, and supporting Friends in surrounding parishes including Shrewsbury.
Broseley, and to the south in Bristol, from where Abraham had originally come to Madeley.\textsuperscript{77}

\textit{The Quakers and Tithes}. Nicholas Morgan has asserted that ‘The Quaker refusal to pay tithes, either to clerics or lay impropiators, was the main cause of friction between Friends and the law in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries’.\textsuperscript{78} Parish records reveal that the Madeley Friends did refuse to pay tithes, and they knew the potential consequences for doing so. Abiah Darby recorded the names of a number of Quakers imprisoned in Shrewsbury for such refusals, but these were not Madeley residents, for Fletcher refused to prosecute the Quakers.\textsuperscript{79}

Part of Fletcher’s means to living without Quaker tithes, reducing the value of his benefice, was additional income from his family estate in Switzerland.\textsuperscript{80} Fletcher’s church extension, however, required nearly all he received from abroad,\textsuperscript{81} and his constant charity left him often with little or no excess, a point he made to Mrs Darby in response to her argument that ministers of the gospel should work freely.\textsuperscript{82} Also, the nature of industrialization meant that agricultural tithes were less reliable as industry replaced farming. If rural parsons were known to be increasingly opportunistic in pursuing their tithes during this period of agricultural technological improvements, then the analogue in Madeley came in the clergy’s attempts at recovering tithes from industrial growth in the iron and coal trades, which Fletcher pursued when he found the living was not providing enough.\textsuperscript{83} However, the situation in Madeley did not evidence the conflict or violence that conformist parishioners brought against their Quaker neighbours in counties like Staffordshire and Lancashire during the early part of the eighteenth century,\textsuperscript{84} nor was the peace kept by a ‘laxity among Friends with respect to their discipline’.\textsuperscript{85} Instead, the lack of conflict was evidence of a growing evangelical consensus between the pastoral aims

\textsuperscript{77} Information from Kelsall Diary quoted by Skinner, \textit{Nonconformity}, 30.
\textsuperscript{78} N.J. Morgan, ‘Lancashire Quakers and the Tithe, 1660-1730,’ \textit{BJRULM} 70 (1988), 61-75.
\textsuperscript{79} MJAB, 1-46; See also SRO: Lab/Abi/4/24; JF\to A. Darby, 22 Nov. 1762.
\textsuperscript{80} Fletcher did try to renegotiate tithes received from glebe coal in 1775 based on the income his predecessor derived from it. See R. Chambre\to JF, 21 Jan. and 19 Apr. 1775. See Chapter 3.
\textsuperscript{81} JF\to A. Darby, 22 Nov. 1762.
\textsuperscript{82} R. Chambre\to JF, 21 Jan. and 19 Apr. 1775.
\textsuperscript{85} Morgan, ‘Quakers’, 61-75.
of the church and the Quakers in Madeley, as seen in their early doctrinal disputes and resolution.

**Fletcher’s Disputes with the Quakers in Madeley.** One of the best sources relating to Quakerism in Madeley is the manuscript journal of Abiah Darby, a Quaker preacher who knew Fletcher and had regular contact with him and his parishioners. Some of their correspondence has survived as well. These records contain accounts of their various theological scuffles and demonstrate Fletcher’s attempts at correcting doctrine and protecting his flock from error. Of particular emphasis for this thesis, her journal provides an additional local and contemporary perception of Fletcher’s meetings, which were, in her estimation and that of her friends, clearly Anglican religious societies. In October 1760 Abiah Darby, the presumptive leader of the Madeley Friends, was in Hereford on a preaching journey where she also sought an audience with Bishop Beauclerk. When she returned from her journeys in late November, she was quite ill. This helps to explain why—given her later zeal and adversarial stance to the church in Madeley—it was not until January that Fletcher’s discourse with her commenced. It is therefore, from about four months into his incumbency that Fletcher’s relationship with the Quakers is recorded.

Fletcher’s habits of pastoral visiting have been discussed in Chapter Five, and it was on such an errand that he had his first encounter with Quakerism in his parish. On 20 January 1761, Darby wrote in her journal; ‘John Fletcher, Parson of Madeley here [i.e. Coalbrookdale] with several others, he asked us several questions relating to our Principles ... we lent him several books.’ Fletcher was earnestly seeking to understand their doctrines and principles rather than to confront them at this point. A month later he returned the books to Darby and reputedly ‘confessed to the truth of our [i.e. Quaker] principles & that our friends were greatly inspired by the Holy Spirit’. In September, Fletcher, having heard that she was preaching a doctrine of justification by works, called on her in person to offer her the chance to confirm or

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86 MJAD, 2-3 Oct. 1760. Darby, it seems, had preached in Hereford before and felt an especial burden for the people there, having written five years earlier, *An Epistle to the Inhabitants of Hereford* (Shrewsbury, 1753).

87 MJAD, 20 Jan. 1761.

88 JW had engaged in a similar process of research into Quaker beliefs when in the late 1740s several Quakers formed part of his societies. See J.C. Bowmer, ‘The Relations Between the Society of Friends and Early Methodism’, *LQHR* 175 (1950), 149-153, 223-227.

89 MJAD, 21 Feb. 1761.
refute the testimony. She denied even a hint of works righteousness to him. Indeed, she affirmed an Arminian view of the atonement, explaining the Quaker belief in the doctrine of justification of grace. Furthermore, and similar to the doctrines for which Fletcher was sometimes criticized, she explained that she was opposed to an antinomian gospel. Thus she taught her Friends ‘to deny ungodliness and the worlds lusts, [and that] we should live ... Godlikely in the present world’.\(^90\) She wrote to him a year later greeting him cordially: ‘as thou hast always treated me with Candour, I have presumed to use freedom with thee ... I make free to say that I believe thou has been of service in the Lords Hand to reform the People hereaway; but it seems to me, they ought to be brought forward’.\(^91\) Certainly this was not an aim to which Fletcher was opposed.

Despite her friendly address, Mrs Darby was not yet content to let the Doctrines of the church alone, for she believed that too much of Popish superstition still remained in the church’s rites and doctrines.\(^92\) In August 1762, she wrote to Fletcher. Having attended on several occasions his religious meeting at the Cranages’ house in Coalbrookdale, she was concerned that despite the good Fletcher had done to reform the parish so far, his meetings (as she believed of the Church of England in general\(^93\)) were but ‘dead formality’.\(^94\) She included with her letter a book by Richard Claridge, who ‘was a Priest of the Church of England several Years, but at last was oblig’d to give up on all. And follow on a crusified Saviour in simplisity and Truth’.\(^95\) Fletcher went to visit her, but after he had left, Darby ‘felt a strong engagement to go to his meeting’. At the meeting she spoke against Fletcher’s Anglican formalism, declaring not just against his meetings, but against the religion of the church, ‘to shew that many of their Ceremonies, and ordinances, as they term them, are not according to Scripture so not requir’d’. Given Fletcher’s unceasing labours to get people to attend church faithfully, this disruption would seem to have been cause for action. Fletcher, however, was confident in the liturgy and the form of

\(^90\) Ibid. 29 Sept. 1761.
\(^91\) Ibid. 19 Aug. 1762.
\(^92\) On anti-Catholic sentiment and challenges to the Established Church by Quakers, see C. Haydon, “I Love My King and Country, but a Roman Catholic I Hate”: Anti-Catholicism, Xenophobia and National Identity in Eighteenth-Century England’ in Claydon and McBride Protestantism, 50-51.
\(^93\) Darby, Epistle.
\(^94\) A. Darby→JF, 19 Aug. 1762.
\(^95\) Probably R. Claridge, A Letter ... Containing Free Thoughts About the Controversie Between Some Ministers of the Church of England and the Quakers (London, 1701).
his meetings, and as Darby admitted, 'he made some little objection, but behaved civil ... we parted very friendly.'

Darby’s visits to Fletcher’s meetings were not frequent, but became a pattern, for the following two summers she had ‘strong engagement[s] ... to go to the meeting of the Parson Fletcher and his followers’. On none of these occasions was she refused admission, though on both she took it upon herself to preach against the church. In August 1763, she ‘had close work of it for above 3 hours’, speaking against Fletcher’s ‘copyhold or Priest Craft’ and against dead formalism. Fletcher advised his people to listen, for he himself had often complained of mere outward religion without inward grace. It has been suggested in Chapter Three that the liturgy of the church formed the structure of Fletcher’s meetings, at least those parts of it touched by the Canons. Darby’s testimony appears to confirm the liturgical character of the meetings as well, for after she had finished preaching, one of the parishioners present was heard to say, ‘what shall we chuse—one is all for form [i.e. Fletcher]—& the other is for no form.’ Again, Fletcher made objections to her doctrines, but ‘upon the whole he behaved with respect.’ That year the Quakers enlarged their meeting house, which would indicate some growth or at least anticipated growth. Still, in contrast to his swift reactions to the Baptists and the Catholics around the same time, Fletcher seems to have borne with Darby and the Quakers with considerable patience, perhaps indicating his recognition of their common aims, regardless of their differing liturgical practises.

In November the following year, however, she appeared at his Coalbrookdale meeting again. It is worth quoting Fletcher’s own description of the context:

Mrs. Darby ... came into an House where I was instructing my Parishioners. I had given previous Notice of my Design to answer the Objections made by Dissenters and Infidels against the Church of England; and at her coming in, I was defending the Doctrine of the blessed Trinity as contained in Athanasius’s Creed. It was not long before she began the Attack.\(^98\)

\(^{96}\) MJAD, 19 Aug. and 30 Aug. 1762.  
\(^{97}\) MJAD, 14 July 1763.  
\(^{98}\) JF to A. Darby, 22 Nov. 1764.
It is telling of the nature of Fletcher’s early society meetings that he was using them again to combat the error of dissenters and to promote adherence to the doctrine of the Established Church. Clearly, his use of the societies to strengthen attachment to the church was an ongoing strategy, and one his parishioners were well aware of, including the nonconformists of Madeley. This being the fourth occasion of Darby’s attending the meeting to speak publicly against the church, Fletcher was growing weary of disputing the same doctrinal arguments year after year and took it upon himself to write an account of it, recording Mrs Darby’s arguments in the form of ‘queries’ and his answers, along with subsequent arguments made by her Quaker friend who came with her. ‘I think it my Duty’, he wrote, ‘to give a Written Answer to them once for all.’ In this account we are able to view exactly what it was that the Quakers were contesting and how Fletcher responded. Their discourse carried on for three months, while the written account was circulated around the parish, added to by the Quakers, followed by a finishing response from Fletcher. It is worth noting that Fletcher clarified at the beginning of his discourse, anticipating Mrs Darby’s complaint that the church did not recognize female ministers, ‘I am not above being convinced either by a Woman or a Child, if their Arguments are truly scriptural and rational; but if they prove so, only in Appearance, I make it a Point of Conscience to expose the Fallacy, lest simple Souls shou’d be led astray from Truth’. The result of this brief controversy appears to have been a better mutual understanding. Of course their doctrinal differences remained, but their common evangelical aims became the dominant influence for the ensuing years.

**Fletcher’s Conciliation with the Quakers.** Darby’s disputations with Fletcher, which came to a head in the autumn of 1764, also produced signs of evangelical consensus. Such overtures had been hinted at in previous discourses but Fletcher was explicit in his desire to find common ground in his tract answering Mrs Darby’s queries in November of that year. He expressed his hope, that ‘all Strife will be at an End between us, except that which is admitted in Heaven, the noble Contending together, who shall love God most and serve him best ... and I flatter myself, that the Bar of Opinions, that stands between you and me, will not hinder us from living in that Quietness and good Neighbourhood, which becomes Reformed Christians.’

99 Ibid.
Later in his published writings, Fletcher made a point not to lump all Quakers together. In 1772, he set aside his *Third Check* in order to write against ‘Elwall a Socinian Quaker who was tried for Blasphemy at Stafford & came off with flying colours, after fully denying the Godhead of X & Atonement.’\(^{100}\) He did not perceive Darby’s Quakerism to be of Elwall’s Socinian kind, having himself confirmed that the Coalbrookdale Friends held an orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. Thus, after numerous conversations with the Friends and after considerable study of the theology of various dissenters from the time of the Reformation—including Sewel’s *History of the Quakers*—as background for his preaching and exposition of doctrine in his *Checks*, Fletcher found some commonality between the evangelical doctrines of the church and the ‘true [Q]uakers, from their first appearance’, such as their preaching of perfection through faith and obedience and a similar detestation of antinomianism.\(^{101}\)

Even earlier, Fletcher told Charles Wesley that his *Second Check* would be a consideration of ‘the doctrine of justification by holiness, the Quakers doctrine placed upon an evangelical foundation.’\(^{102}\) At one point, he wrote to his society members regarding Mrs Darby’s arguments: ‘How much better were it for her and all, if instead of Quibbling & wresting the scriptures ... she wou’d Second my endeavours in promoting a reformation of Essentials in the parish with respect to Principles & manners.’\(^{103}\) In fact, it did not take Mrs Darby long to realize that they had similar goals with reforming the religion, and in turn, to sacralize the culture of the parish and as early as 1762 she wrote a letter to an opponent of the ‘Methodists and sober people’, particularly defending ‘every thing that tendeth to reformation in life and manners’. This was during the period that Fletcher was facing severe opposition from the Catholics (see below), and a group ‘mob’d’ one of his religious meetings. The addressee is not identified, but Darby admonished one of the aggravators for ‘joining company with revellers and mockers of God and Religion and the appearance of it in their fellow Creatures’ instead of living ‘Godly life in all

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100 JF→W. Sellon, 7 Jan. 1772. The Socinian, Edward Elwall (1676-1744) never affiliated himself with the Friends officially. His works were revived by Joseph Priestley, explaining Fletcher’s concern with his doctrine as a foundation for burgeoning Unitarianism. *DNB*.

101 WJF (B), 2:339-40; cf. W. Sewel, *The History of the ... Quakers* (Burlington, NJ, 1774), 16, 44-45, 88-89; On Darby’s view of the ‘new birth’ or ‘new creation’, see *Epistle*, *passim*.

102 JF→CW, 13 Oct. 1771.

103 MARC: MAM Fl. 20/4.
sobriety’. Furthermore, she equated his opposition to the ‘Methodists’ with ‘making a mock and derision of everything that tendeth to reformation in life and manners.’

Even if Fletcher and Darby disputed theology, there was consensus regarding the meaning of the new birth, and regardless of their differences, she was keen to second him where his ministry was aimed at religious reformation. Thus, (although tensions did arise on a few occasions after 1762) the relationship between the church and the Quakers followed a pattern of conciliation throughout Fletcher’s incumbency, paving the way for a degree of evangelical consensus and joint effort in proclaiming the gospel. There was much to unite them once clarifications on theological differences had been resolved. Indeed, it was in the first year of their discourse that affinity for combating vice in the parish was noticed between the church and the Quakers, but it continued thereafter. Fletcher’s preaching against the wakes, alehouses, and bull-baiting were joined by Darby’s publication of *An Expostulary Address to all Who Frequent Places of Diversion and Gaming, &c.* Lest it be thought this was meant for use amongst the Quaker assemblies as an exhortation to uphold their moral doctrines, she made it clear that it was aimed at the dominant population of Anglican churchgoers. And like Fletcher very often did with his parishioners, she reminded her readers of their baptismal vows:

‘Remember what you promised, or what was promised for you, in what you call Baptism: i.e. to renounce the Devil and all his Works, the Pomp and Glory of the World ... Also in what is called the Order of Confirmation by your Bishops, you then again renew all these Promises and Vows ... Are these Promises made in Sincerity of Heart, or are they barely Words of Form? I humbly desire you will examine yourselves.’

Then, in 1769, around the same time Fletcher was writing his *Appeal* to defend the doctrine of original sin and declare the necessity of the new birth, Darby was writing *An Exhortation in Christian Love, to all Who Frequent Horse-Racing, Cock-Fighting, Throwing at Cocks, Gaming, Plays, Dancing, Musical Entertainments*,

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104 MJAD, 21 May 1762.
105 A. Darby, *An Expostulary Address to All Who Frequent Places of Diversion and Gaming, &c.* (Salop, 1765), 8.
or Any Other Vain Diversions.\textsuperscript{106} If we add to this their joint efforts at conducting Sunday schools in the parish (discussed in Chapter Five), a picture emerges of a growing evangelical consensus between the Quakers and the church in Madeley. Reynolds remarked on Fletcher’s usefulness,\textsuperscript{107} and upon hearing of Fletcher’s death, Mrs Darby wrote to his widow that he was ‘an Eminent Instrument for good to this parish and a very Exemplary Patern of humility, Patience, self-denial and Piety ... I believe he acted up to the knowledge and discoveries revealed to him by the great Master.’\textsuperscript{108}

**Catholics in Madeley**

It was against the Catholics of Madeley that Fletcher was most virulent in his attacks on nonconformity. However, his recorded actions against the ‘Papists’\textsuperscript{109} of Madeley and his claims regarding their place in relation to the church, cannot be taken \textit{prima facie}. It was the nexus of two coincidental circumstances which shaped Anglican-Catholic relations in the parish during his incumbency and which created the tensions reflected in Fletcher’s accounts. First of all, Madeley was not like every other parish when it came to Papists; it was the Catholic centre of the coalfield and had been at least since the mid-seventeenth century.\textsuperscript{110} Secondly, Fletcher, though well-assimilated into British society,\textsuperscript{111} was part of that ‘Protestant international’\textsuperscript{112} which resonated with a broad tolerance within Protestant Christianity, reflected in sympathies with the persecuted Huguenots, who had sought refuge both in his homeland of Switzerland as well as in England,\textsuperscript{113} but which could paradoxically be manifested in a thoroughgoing intolerance of Catholic belief. Bell ringers were paid by the vestry for tolling 29 May and 5 November, periodic reminders of England’s Protestant identity. And, like that of his adoptive English countrymen, Fletcher’s anti-

\textsuperscript{106} Idem, \textit{An Exhortation in Christian Love} (Shrewsbury, 1769).
\textsuperscript{107} Rathbone, \textit{Letters}, 46.
\textsuperscript{108} A. Darby\textsuperscript{MF}, [Aug. 1785].
\textsuperscript{109} Cf. Streiff’s note regarding Fletcher’s use of ‘Papist’ instead of ‘Catholic’, \textit{Reluctant Saint}, 123.
\textsuperscript{110} Bossy, \textit{Catholic Community}, 100-101, 259-60.
\textsuperscript{111} See E. Barrett, ‘Huguenot Integration in Late 17th- and 18th-Century London’, in \textit{From Strangers to Citizens}, 375-82. Barrett provides a helpful synopsis of A. Trlin’s outline of the process of assimilation, which allows for the ‘oscillation backwards and forwards between old and new’ in relation to the shaping of the identity of immigrants, which effected various experiences of integration. Fletcher visited Huguenot families in the Cévennes in the south of France on his visit to the Continent in 1770, specifically to converse with the children of the persecuted Protestants of the previous generation, indeed, one of the primary reasons for his journey. JF\textsuperscript{JI}, 30 Dec. 1769; Gilpin, ‘Notes’, 1:166-67; \textit{LJF}, 122-28.
Catholicism was rooted in fear and in the way that he, like ‘Britons chose to remember and interpret their own past’. His own experience in Switzerland, where Protestant refugees were still fleeing during his childhood and young adult years generated a parallel sentiment to the English fears of Jacobite risings and the advance of Catholicism in this country. As G.M. Ditchfield has observed, ‘One of the legacies of [the] Protestant diaspora was a profound anti-Catholicism, evident in Evangelical writing and preaching’. Fletcher’s ‘toleration for wide variations in Protestantism’, confirming Chamberlain’s claims, was mirrored by a larger ‘gulf than ever between Protestantism and Catholicism’. This section examines the nature, causes and forms of tension with and opposition brought by Catholics in his parish, Fletcher’s reactions to them, and the changes in these tensions which had occurred by the end of his incumbency.

The Catholic Community in Madeley

The Catholic priest, Edward Matthews, served Madeley from 1750-1769 and was responsible for surrounding parishes as well. His successor was John Matthews, who died in 1782. According to Fletcher’s Return of Papists (1767), the priest officiated at worship every third Sunday, though he did not specify the substance of Catholic worship. Duffy’s research suggests that preaching and catechizing were the dominant characteristics of Catholic priestly duty and that itinerancy was as common amongst Catholic missioners as it was other dissenters. This appears to have been the case with the priests of Madeley, who Fletcher reported, only sojourned in the parish, thus explaining the infrequency of services. But it was not with the itinerating Catholic clergy that Fletcher faced conflict, but rather, with the Catholic laity. The Compton Census of 1676 recorded fifty-one adult papists for the parish, with a total adult population of 451. This represented roughly seven percent of the total population of Papists in Hereford Diocese, twenty percent of the Catholic population of Shropshire, and fifty percent of the Catholic population of the

114 Colley, Britons, 18-19.
116 J.S. Chamberlain, ‘The Jacobite Failure to Bridge the Catholic/Protestant Divide, 1717-1730’, in Gibson and Ingram, Religious Identities, 82-83; also see Colley, Britons, 19-23.
118 Papist Returns (Madeley) 1767 (B1.6).
120 Papist Returns Madeley, 1767 (B1.6).
121 Whiteman, Compton Census, 259.
East Shropshire coalfield. In 1767 there were 72 Catholics in Madeley. To these could be added the seven reported in Broseley parish, who were also served by the priest(s) of Madeley, one of whom had Madeley familial ties and was lord of the manor of Broseley, Edward Purcell. There were numerous others who had land in Madeley but resided elsewhere. Some of these, however, were not far removed, living in just the next parish, including several who owned shares of the manor of Madeley. These would not have been counted in Fletcher’s 1767 tally given that they were not technically in his parish, but as it turns out, their connections with the parish were not severed. Like the Catholics of Broseley, they were served by the priest of Madeley. Nor did their residence in another parish prevent them from causing problems for Fletcher.

The manor was parcelled up in the early eighteenth century, being held by Catholics (who apparently were occasional conformists and had taken the oath of allegiance) in five families, until between 1774 and 1781, the parts were successively bought by the Quakers, Abraham Darby III and Richard Reynolds, with Reynolds bringing the whole of the manor into a single share again. Between 1760 and 1774, the largest part of the manor was held by a descendant of the Brooke family. John Smitheman appears to have been a Protestant, but his four female cousins and one of their husbands were Catholics living at Madeley Wood. Smitheman was the high sheriff of Shropshire from 1759 until at least 1761. During Fletcher’s curacy in Madeley (1757-1759), Smitheman lived in Madeley Wood where he had opposed Fletcher. But this obstacle was displaced when he removed to West Coppice, Buildwas, bordering the western edge of Madeley in 1760. He was also the principal partner of the Madeley Wood Company, a chief supplier of coal to

122 S. Sogner, ‘17 Parishes’, 140.
123 Papist Returns Madeley, 1767 (B1.6).
125 Cosin, *Names*, 94-100.
126 Until the first Catholic Relief Act (1778), Catholics were not allowed to inherit estates; instead, inheritance passed to the next living Protestant relative. Haydon, ‘I Love My King and Country’, 47-48.
127 This case confirms Gilbert’s assertion that, despite legal penalties against Catholics, including ineligibility to ‘inherit or purchase real property’, such restrictions were not often enforced. Religion and Society, 14; H.F.J. Vaughan, ‘Inscriptions from the Parish Churches of Tong and Domnington’, TSAS (1882), 313-38.
129 Madeley Wood Co. Agreement, 5 Sept. 1760 (B1.10).
130 JF→CH, 3 Oct. 1760.
the Coalbrookdale ironworks.\textsuperscript{131} Amongst the other twelve partners were the two William Hintons, (see Chapter Four) and apparently with whom Smitheman cooperated to incite agitation against Fletcher’s Madeley Wood meeting via Slaughter. The other half of the manor was held by Rose Giffard, also a descendant of the Brooke family, who died in 1763 and whose share passed in eighths to her four daughters, Barbara, Anne, Mary, and Rose. Rose sold her share to her sisters, Anne and Mary Giffard, both spinsters, who had also moved to West Coppice sometime before they sold the manor to Darby in 1774.\textsuperscript{132} Thus, of those holding shares of the manor, only Barbara Giffard and her family remained in Madeley. She married Thomas Slaughter Jr.,\textsuperscript{133} with whom Fletcher faced the most severe Catholic opposition and whose uncle was a Catholic priest in another part of Shropshire, from 1741.\textsuperscript{134} Before looking at this opposition in detail, it is worth noting the broader context, which indicates that conflict was not constant, nor was anti-Catholic sentiment necessarily shared by all Protestants in the parish, and the Catholic community, for the most part, lived at peace with their Protestant neighbours.

Wanklyn, in his study on Catholics in Madeley, convincingly argues that Catholics, like their dissenting Protestant nonconformist counterparts were integrated into the larger economic and social community in which they lived.\textsuperscript{135} Moderate nonconformists, including Catholic occasional conformists, utilized the religious rites of burial and baptism of the Church of England, so long as it did not require compromising their beliefs.\textsuperscript{136} The key Catholic families were mostly skilled labourers, many of whom worked in the collieries in Coalbrookdale and Madeley Wood.\textsuperscript{137} The growth of the Catholic community in Madeley was primarily endogamous, rather than a result of proselytizing.\textsuperscript{138} Intermarriage with Protestants was not altogether uncommon,\textsuperscript{139} nor was a shift in allegiance unusual from one

\textsuperscript{131} IRS, 37-41, 403.
\textsuperscript{132} Papist Deeds (B1.10).
\textsuperscript{133} See BI.
\textsuperscript{134} On James Slaughter, see BI.
\textsuperscript{135} Wanklyn, ‘Catholics’. Unfortunately, Wanklyn repeats some of the mistaken facts from Tyerman (\textit{WDS}) but offers an important representation of the changes in the Catholic community in Madeley up to 1770; also see Clark, \textit{English Society}, 31.
\textsuperscript{136} See Mad. Bur. Reg.; Wanklyn, ‘Catholics’, 210-36. Wanklyn’s view is in contrast to Colley’s focus on inter-Protestant conflicts, and ‘what was still the most striking feature into the religious landscape, the gulf between Protestant and Catholic.’ \textit{Britons}, 18-19.
\textsuperscript{137} Wanklyn, ‘Catholics’, 227.
\textsuperscript{138} The Return of Papists for 1767 lists only 20 different surnames.
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid. 219-23.
generation to the next, and at times, Catholics supported the local Anglican church in various forms of charity. When the new vicarage was being built in 1716, Wanklyn notes that two main Catholic families, ‘the Purcells and the Heatherleys headed the list of those paying for the construction’.

Catholics were able to maintain more than a semblance of conciliation with the church, giving funds for the maintenance of the fabric and serving on the vestry as either overseers of the poor or churchwardens. Slaughter served on the parish vestry (1767, 1771, and 1772) and as overseer of the poor (1773 and 1774). Despite his conflict with Fletcher, he was not listed on Fletcher’s 1767 Return of Papists—in fact, his father was the only member of the family listed. Even though the picture portrayed by this evidence would suggest a peaceable relationship between Catholics and the church in Madeley in general, there was considerable tension at times, which reflected the way anti-Catholic sentiment could be stirred up by perceived threats to public order or obstacles to the progress of Reformation in the parish. As Rack has noted, ‘What counted most in the uneasy relationship between Catholics and evangelicals of all sorts was not so much the realities of developing Catholic life in the towns as the black Protestant legend which was all too easily revived in the inflamed imaginations of evangelical zealots.’ When the ‘evangelical zealot’ was the parish incumbent, the potential for conflict was ever-present.

Fletcher and the Catholic Community

Fletcher’s concern over the Catholics in his parish must be viewed in the larger context of his general anxiety that many of his parishioners were not truly religious. In his Works there is no scarcity of complaints regarding the general stupidity of his parishioners in religious matters, and his preaching reflected the extent to which he believed much of his ‘conformist’ congregation was yet un-Christianized and likely prey to his dissenting rivals. His frequent allusions to the Homilies, Articles, and liturgy, as has been suggested elsewhere in this thesis, served an apologetic purpose, confronting those who were prone to view Fletcher’s...
evangelicalism as irregular. However, these may be (concomitantly) interpreted another way as well. Fletcher’s repeated references to Anglican tradition might be seen as reflecting his concern that many of his flock were familiar with the forms of religion, most notably attendance at church and even at communion, yet still unfamiliar with sound doctrine. Even if they were knowledgeable in things of faith and able to recite the liturgy from memory, ‘babbling over the Lord’s Prayer and the Creed’, they were still unconverted spiritually. ‘Nominal Christians’ were, in Fletcher’s view, only slightly better off than their Catholic neighbours. They had rejected the superstitious beliefs of the Romish Church but remained ‘carnal professors’ of faith, unable to see the difference ‘between the means of grace and grace itself, between the form and the power of godliness’. Given his fear that his parishioners might be easily enticed by false doctrine, he was wont to strengthen ‘the nominally Protestant base’, employing special measures when such threats appeared more imminent or formidable. Such work was actually suggested by the Canons of the church.

Thus, he envisioned his work in the parish as a continuation of what had been set in motion under Henry VIII yet was unrealized in the lives of his parishioners. This formed part of Fletcher’s rhetoric used to persuade his parishioners to progress further towards Protestant belief. ‘You are nevertheless modest’, he wrote, ‘when compared with your brethren of the Romish church’. Yet even these Protestants he considered as merely ‘baptized heathens’, those who believed ‘that religion is nothing but a monstrous compound of superstition, enthusiasm, and priestcraft’. Fletcher drew comparisons between the errors of Calvinism and Catholicism, and he feared that those tempted by one might be as

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146 JF→CW, 15 Sept. 1776; JF, Sermon, Doctrine of Salvation (B1.9).
147 JF, Fast Day Sermon (12 Mar. 1762), Ezek. 33:7-9, WJF(B), 7:315.
148 FL, 326-31, 344; ‘On Evangelical Mysticism’, in WJF(B), 6:495-505; Phenomenon, 43.
149 Appeal, 81; 2 Tim. 3:5; also see Fletcher, Discourse on the New Birth in WJF (A), 7:277-304; JF, Sermon, 1 Cor. 2:14, WJF(B), 7:205-218; Cf. Gregory, ‘Making of a Protestant Nation’, 307-333.
151 Canons, 357.
152 JF→JW and CW, 17 May 1778.
153 Ibid. 141.
154 JF to [Rev. Prothero], 25 July 1761. Wesley referred to such antinomians or hypocrites as ‘open heathens’. Letter to a Roman Catholic ([first published: Dublin, 1749]; Belfast, 1968), 52.
156 Ibid. 3:389-91. Here Fletcher was alluding to the Works of Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621), a Jesuit and Catholic Cardinal who actually frequently contested Calvin and other Protestant reformers in his
easily enticed by the other. This helps to explain his concerns regarding the
Particular Baptists in his parish and his fears that the spiritually immature might be
drawn back to Popish belief. For each of these dissenting denominations represented
extremes, Popish Pharisaism at one end and Calvinist antinomianism at the other. In
this light, it appears that the pastoral task in Madeley was not merely maintaining an
Anglican hegemony, but continuing the work of the Reformation.

As with the other areas of pastoral concern, Fletcher’s efforts at reform took
place both in church and chapel, and it is worth briefly revisiting Thomas Slaughter’s
invasion of Fletcher’s Madeley Wood meeting (the ‘Rock Church’) from the
perspective of Catholic tensions. The event occurred in May 1762, but there is some
evidence which suggests that several circumstances precipitated Slaughter’s and his
mob’s action. In January, England had declared war with Spain, hitherto neutral in
the Seven Years War (1756-1763) but now allied with Catholic France.157 Anxiety
over French invasion had waned following the defeat of the Jacobite Rebellion of
1745 and the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1748 but began to rise again after war
commenced between Britain and France in 1756. Fletcher alluded to these anxieties
in one of his letters to Charles Wesley in 1759, implicitly indicating that his
preference for staying in England stemmed in part from concerns over the conflicts
on the Continent.158

Now, in 1762, when the threat of national security seemed imminent, a
proclamation was made159 for ‘A General Fast and Humiliation before Almighty
God, for obtaining Pardon of our Sins, and for averting those heaving Judgments
which our ... Provocations have most justly deserved; and imploring his Blessing and
Assistance on the Arms of his Majesty by Sea and Land’.160 Fletcher took up the
cause with a sermon on the text of Ezekiel 33:7-9, decrying the sinfulness of the
nation and specifically his own parishioners in a typological list of sins. While the first
six types of wickedness were addressed in a general way (including prayerlessness,
injustice and oppression, uttering oaths and curses, adultery and fornication, and
vanity), his seventh point made the officers of his parish a specific target, and he

writings, but who made a comparison between Catholic and Calvinist doctrines regarding the
reprobate state of un-baptized infants.
157 Lond. Mag. (1761), 792-94.
158 JF CW, 4 Sept. 1759.
159 The proclamation was made 16 Jan. of a fast to be held nationally on 12 Mar.
160 Abstract of the Form of Prayer to Be Used on Friday, March 12, 1762 ([London?], 1762).
charged them with perjury and the failure to repress wickedness, ‘I shall not say in
one, but perhaps a hundred instances.’ The effect of the offence he gave to the
magistrates and parish officers was to be felt several months later in his conflict with
the Catholics, which had been initiated with the preaching of the fast day sermon as
a ward against the advances of Catholics in Europe.

The following month (April) Fletcher agitated further by targeting the
Catholics of his parish in a sermon on ‘The Doctrine of Salvation by the Covenant of
Grace’. He wrote the manuscript of the sermon in full, prepared it for circulation
in his parish, and prefaced it thus:

Grant these sheets an impartial perusal, they contain ... the Doctrine
of Salvation by Faith alone, as it is preached in Madeley Church.
They will (it is hoped) answer the objections that are made against
this important Doctrine, or at least they will give you a fair
Opportunity of finding out the error & stopping the spreader of it.

The context for the sermon is indicated in several places in the text: some of
his parishioners had been falsely spreading rumours that he was known to preach in
Madeley church against good works. These complaints had been made by some of
his Papist parishioners. Fletcher prefixed his sermon with eleven pages of extracts
from the Homilies and Bishop Latimer’s sermons, several of which were strongly
anti-Catholic, and his entire fourth point was an argument against ‘the Old Popish
Cavil: “If good works will not save us why should we do any ... ?” Clearly, Fletcher
was mounting a campaign against the Popish error of Pharisaism in a similar fashion
as he contested the Particular Baptist’s antinomianism. That this sermon was
designed to stave off the advance of Papists is evidenced more clearly by the fact that
Fletcher appended to his manuscript sermon for circulation printed copies of
Wesley’s Word to a Protestant and The Doctrine of Salvation, Faith, and Good
Works. The first of these publications begins:

161 WJF (B), 7:321.
162 JF, Sermon, Doctrine of Salvation (B1.9).
163 Ibid.
164 See discussion on Slaughter’s correspondence with JF below.
165 e.g. Bp. Latimer’s Sermon on St Stephen’s Day; idem, Sermon on Twelfth Day. See Fletcher’s
Extracts from Latimer (B1.1).
166 Wesley, Word to A Protestant; Idem, (ed.) The Doctrine of Salvation, Faith, and Good Works,
Extracted from the Homilies of the Church of England, 10th edn. (Bristol, 1748).
Do not you call yourself a Protestant? ... Do you know what the word means? ... I suppose you mean one that is not a Papist. But what is a Papist? If you do not know, say so ... You call yourself a Protestant; but you do not know what a Protestant is. You talk against Papists; and yet neither do you know what a Papist is.\textsuperscript{167}

The combination of the anti-Catholic sentiment evoked by the national fast and Fletcher’s preaching against the authorities in his fast day sermon, followed by his discourse against the Catholic doctrine of salvation by works, began the fomentation that resulted in his early confrontations with the Slaughter family. After preaching the latter sermon, Fletcher expounded further upon the same subject at his Tuesday night meeting at the Rock Church. Once again demonstrating the non-exclusive character of Fletcher’s early meetings, Thomas Slaughter Sr. was allowed to visit the Madeley Wood meeting (this was prior to his son’s disruption of a later meeting in the same place) at which he attempted to rebut Fletcher’s claims regarding both the doctrine of salvation by faith and claims that the doctrine had been corrupted by Catholics in the parish. It is noteworthy that Slaughter seems to have attended Fletcher’s sermons in the parish church, as this would indicate more than an occasional conformity, even amongst the most vocal Catholics (which incidentally, protected them against recusancy laws).\textsuperscript{168} Slaughter was personally offended by Fletcher’s sermon, and his visit to the religious meeting, he asserted, was ‘only to vindicate myself from slander and misrepresentation, and to declare that in a large Sermon you had charged us with holding and teaching a doctrine that we abhor and detest’.\textsuperscript{169}

In the meeting, Fletcher offended him further by listing multiple errors of Rome, such as the Catholic worship of images, the ‘design to keep [the laity] from the knowledge of their duty’ by hiding the Scriptures from them, and prayer to the Virgin Mary and the saints. Fletcher had written a tract for his parishioners listing precisely these errors among others.\textsuperscript{170} How the meeting concluded is not given in either Slaughter’s or Fletcher’s accounts, but a few days later when Slaughter wrote

\textsuperscript{167} Wesley, \textit{Word to a Protestant}, 2.
\textsuperscript{168} 1 Eliz. c.2, 23 Eliz. c.1, 29 Eliz. c.6, 35 Eliz. c.2, 3 Jac. I. c.5, 7 Jac. I. c.6, and 3 Car. I. c.2; J. Raithby (ed.) \textit{Statutes of the Realm}, vol. 5 (1819), 894-896; E. Burton, ‘Catholic Recusants’, in \textit{The Catholic Encyclopedia} (New York, 1911).
\textsuperscript{169} T. Slaughter\textsuperscript{\textcopyright}JF, [c.20 Apr. 1762].
\textsuperscript{170} Cf. JF, ‘Answer to Popish Quibbles’ (B1.9).
to the vicar, he went so far as to offer a confession of faith that would suggest that even amongst some Catholics in the parish (at least the Slaughter family), there was less of a chasm between their belief and that of Protestants than suspected, perhaps indicating the limited ability of the Catholic priests in Madeley to compete with the Church of England by inculcating their own doctrines amongst their congregation. Slaughter’s ‘confession’, for lack of a better term, was a denunciation of several ‘false doctrines’ enumerated by Fletcher at the Rock Church meeting or listed in Wesley’s *Word to a Protestant*. For instance, Slaughter denied belief in prayer to the saints, the doctrine of transubstantiation, the selling of indulgences, or the holding back of the Word of God in the scriptures from the laity.¹⁷¹

Fletcher’s reply, if he made one, has not been preserved, but it is clear that it was not to the satisfaction of the Slaughters, for it was less than a month later that Slaughter’s son, Thomas Jr. showed up at Fletcher’s Tuesday night meeting, this time with a mob made up of at least some non-Catholic parishioners. The rising tensions between March and May had mounted enough to instigate disruptions in Madeley which, counter to Fletcher’s design, united his adversaries. Similar to other regions in which mobs were roused by the local gentry, Slaughter’s activity, if not initiated, was not discouraged by the parish squirearchy. Although it is speculative to draw lines between Fletcher’s fast day sermon and the turning of the parish officers and gentry against him, the suggestion is not without some support. At the least one of his parishioners took the sermon as a call to action and attempted to ‘enforce the act for the suppression of oaths against one of the Officers’.¹⁷² Fletcher was able to at least temporarily quell the anger of these ‘half-gentlemen’ but was unable to alter their general opinion towards him. Agitation about Fletcher’s meetings had already turned the local magistrates against him. The lord of the manor was Fletcher’s ‘greatest opponent’: ‘[h]e says that he will make me pull my gown over my ears.’ And William Hinton sided with the rabble, assembling ‘the parishioners to instigate them’, rather than backing Fletcher.¹⁷³ Thus, the local gentry of both Catholic and Protestant persuasion conspired together against Fletcher’s religious meetings.¹⁷⁴ Fletcher understood his meetings in Madeley Wood to be a key strategy in

¹⁷¹ T. Slaughter→JF, [c.20 Apr. 1762].  
¹⁷² JF→CW, 16 May 1762.  
¹⁷³ Ibid.  
¹⁷⁴ Ibid.; 8 June 1762.
combating dissenting error, not so much as converting the Catholics, as strengthening the Protestant interest.\textsuperscript{175} He wrote to the bishop explaining this necessity: ‘I thought it hard ... the papists [should have] one meeting-house, and the dissenters three or four, in my parish, undisturbed, and that I should be disturbed, because I would not have God’s Word confined to one house.’\textsuperscript{176} He received no reply.

Fletcher was frustrated further by finding no recourse in presenting Slaughter (as discussed in Chapter Three) at the church court, for when he did so, neither of his churchwardens\textsuperscript{177} would testify to the charge.\textsuperscript{178} Worse yet, the lord of the manor and the churchwardens threatened Fletcher with presenting him to the spiritual court for holding conventicles instead of supporting his anti-Catholic initiatives in the village. Ironically, while Fletcher was attempting to combat the errors of Papists, the local officers and magistrates saw his efforts as disruptive to the peace and in need of control, calling him ‘a Jesuit &C’. He was then threatened by ‘3 false witnesses [who] offer to prove by oath that I am a liar’.\textsuperscript{179} From one of Fletcher’s replies to Charles Wesley, it is clear that Charles had warned him against his confrontational approach of presenting Slaughter at the church court, but the letter arrived after Fletcher had already departed for Ludlow.\textsuperscript{180}

His failed attempt he chalked up to experience ‘although at my own expense’. However, he did not drop the case, and he was still hoping the witnesses would second him at the court as late as Autumn, for Fletcher was unwilling for any attempt by Papists to gain ground in his parish to go unanswered. Clearly his experience had not taught him to find another, more irenic strategy but rather that he should have had his case in order prior to the presentation. In September, Thomas Slaughter Sr., who had yet to see exactly what his son was accused of, visited the diocesan registrar when he was in Hereford on other business. Finding that Fletcher had charged his son with the equivalent of Jacobitism, as well as

\textsuperscript{175} JF, Sermon, Acts 5:42 (B1.9); see Gregory, ‘Making of a Protestant Nation’, 315.
\textsuperscript{176} Fletcher’s letter to the bishop is not extant, but he rehearsed it in JF\textsuperscript{D}. Simpson, 4 Aug. 1770, \textit{WJF} (D), 9:236-37.
\textsuperscript{177} The churchwardens were Richard Beard, a barge owner, and Fletcher’s later associate in promoting religious meetings in the parish, Daniel Edmunds. MCWA begins at 1765, but the burial registers list the wardens for 1762-63.
\textsuperscript{178} JF\textsuperscript{CW}, 19 July 1762.
\textsuperscript{179} Ibid. 8 June 1762.
\textsuperscript{180} Ibid. 19 July 1762.
recusancy and disruption of public peace, he wrote to Fletcher in some dismay but with candour. Fletcher had (mistakenly) charged Slaughter with being a recusant, a more serious offence legally than simply attending Catholic worship. Slaughter complained to the Registrar of Hereford and apparently evoked the sympathy of the court, for he wrote to Fletcher that his charge ‘was looked upon by all that were Present as a very wrong as well as a very spitefull & malicious step’.

In defence of his son, Slaughter countered Fletcher’s charge with a claim that their family was ‘as well affected [to the Government] as any of our Neighbours.’ Regarding the charge of ‘open contempt of the Lord’s prayer & the Liturgy of our Church’, Slaughter wrote: ‘I know he says the former Every day of his life and as to the Latter he is so far from Confirming it, that ‘Tis often remarked by those of your Parish that we think it worth our while to correspond with [the liturgy] in all disputes that have happen’d with your Professed meeting followers, where my son & self have been Present’. Furthermore, he attested to his son’s belief that the Anglican liturgy was indeed ‘a very solemn laudable and Decent Address to the Almighty’. Turning the criticism against Fletcher’s meetings, he accused one of Fletcher’s own society members of using ‘ill language’ and reflecting on ‘the whole Body of the English Clergy (Except yourself)’, for which the person ‘was Reprimanded for it by a worthy member of the Established Church.’ Like Wesley had with the Methodist societies, Fletcher admonished his society members telling them not to speak ill of those not in society, nor to think highly of themselves for being members thereof, but he was periodically disappointed by some of his parishioners’ failure to live up to this ideal. When a ‘professor’ of the faith misrepresented the aims of the society, such as by complaining against the clerical body of the church, it reflected back on Fletcher and made him liable to charges like this one by Slaughter.

Fletcher had paid a visit to his adversaries at their home, recommending ‘Harmony of Good Neighbourhood’, of which Slaughter was keen to remind him, urging Fletcher ‘to drop [the case], as its Continuance will be a misery of Putting the Parish to a deal of Trouble’. Fletcher replied, noting first of all that those who had spoken badly of the Established clergy were only ‘pretended’ followers of him and

181 T. Slaughter→JF, 21 Sept. 1762.
182 Slaughter Charge, (B1.9)
183 T. Slaughter Sr.→JF, 21 Sept. 1762.
184 e.g. WJW, 20:57; Fletcher, Rules, 12, 16-17.
his ministry, and these were probably those of whom Fletcher wrote to Charles Wesley the same month as Slaughter’s letter, ‘I have banished from my Society two false witnesses’. Furthermore, he argued that Slaughter’s disruption of the meeting, particularly interrupting the prayer for the King and Queen especially in a drunken state was evidence of the low respect in which the liturgy was truly held, regardless of what credence to it he claimed. While he spoke on one hand of living in harmony with dissenters, Fletcher was unwavering on the other in his principled stance against disruption of the work of God by those who would lead any of his flock astray. In short, Fletcher wrote to the registrar to clear Slaughter of the charge of recusancy, admitting his ignorant mistake but refused to drop the other charges ‘as if [they] were false & groundless’. To do so, he explained, would be to ‘make way for further ... disturb[ances].’ However, he offered: ‘But I am most ready to drop it as a neighbour upon terms that will secure me & ... people of the established Church from Popish opposition & persecution ... desiring nothing more then to live in harmony with all mankind, even the persons [whose pri]nciples are most different from those of [John Fletcher].

Whether Fletcher eventually dropped the case, or whether he failed to secure witnesses to second him at the court is uncertain but either way, it was dismissed on 12 October 1762. As was typical of Fletcher, when he felt his own ignorance, he turned to his library or the recommendations of books by others. Finding a volume of works in his library by the seventeenth-century Catholic spiritual writer P.F. Guillore, Fletcher read it and was ‘surprised to find in them so many good things’. The following month his attention was directed against the rising agitation by the Baptists, and there is little in his letters during the following seven years that would indicate that opposition from the Slaughters, or the Catholic community in general, was sustained, other than a request to Charles Wesley for a ‘commination of my papist’ in December of 1763, and a sermon he read in his church in 1763/64. The sermon was written by Walter Shirley, a later adversary in the Calvinist-Arminian

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185 JF→CW, 20 Sept. 1762.
187 UL, 150, n.87.
188 JF→CW, 30 Nov. 1762. This volume has apparently since been lost as it is not among any of the known collections of Fletcher’s library. D.R. Wilson, ‘Catalogue’. See Gregory’s notes regarding the use of edited Catholic works by Protestants in RRR, 217-18. On Fletcher’s recommendation to read the works of adversaries, see WJF (B), 3:571.
189 JF→CW, 26 Dec. 1763.
controversy. Fletcher had ‘cut [the sermon] out of the volume in which it was bound, put it in my sermon case, and preached it in my church ... to convince Papists and Pharisees that we are accepted through the alone merits of Christ.’ At the end of the decade however, the Catholic encroachment on Fletcher’s parish became more visible.

About 1760, Rose Giffard donated land and a house for the purpose of erecting a Catholic chapel in Madeley. For some reason, quite possibly Fletcher’s arrival around the same time and the ensuing conflicts described above, no further action was taken. However, they had begun construction of a chapel on High Street by December 1769 that would seat 200 people. The project was largely funded by Catholics outside of the parish at a cost of £500—more than double what Fletcher paid to have his school house built in Madeley Wood seven years later. Not only were the Catholics expanding their capacity for worship, but they were showing signs of new missionary activity in the parish. Two of Fletcher’s ‘poor ignorant churchmen’ left the church to join the Catholics in their new endeavour, signalling to Fletcher the need for renewed vigilance. At the time, Fletcher was planning to make his first trip back to Switzerland since his arrival in England, sponsored by James Ireland. He circulated a tract in his parish against the Papists and postponed his trip to deal with the rising tensions. Again in a sermon, his most common method of ‘disseminating anti-papish ideology’, Fletcher ‘declared war’ on the rising Papists and wrote that he planned ‘to strip the Whore of Babylon and expose her nakedness’ the following Sunday in another. As had happened seven years previous, Fletcher’s sermon stirred the embers of anti-Catholic sentiment. Describing the rising tensions he wrote to Ireland:

All the Papists are in a great ferment, and they have held meetings to consult ... One of their bloody bullies came to ‘pick up,’ as he said, a

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192 Wanklyn says this was in Madeley Wood, which was where the Giffards lived, but High Street appears on early maps to be in Madeley Town near the church. ‘Catholics’, 232.
195 JF→JJ, 30 Dec. 1769.
197 Ibid.
quarrel with me, and what would have been the consequence had not
I providentially had company with me, I know not. How far more
their rage may be kindled tomorrow I don't know.\textsuperscript{198}

Fletcher preached the promised sermon in his church the following Sunday\textsuperscript{199} on the
text, 1 Timothy 4:1-3, an extract of which reads: ‘... in the latter times some shall
depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;
speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their conscience seared with a hot iron ...’

Again, he provoked the anger of Slaughter, who ‘called out several times in
the church yard as people went out of church, that, “there was not one word of truth
in the whole of my discourse, and that he would prove it”’. Slaughter promised that
one of the Catholics (presumably the priest) would in the near future provide an
answer to both Fletcher’s sermons and the tract circulating in the parish.\textsuperscript{200} As
Haydon has explained, ‘there was a profusion of anti-popish books’ published
throughout the century, including almanacs, which were ‘virulently anti-Catholic and
xenophobic.’\textsuperscript{201} Incidentally, surely for their useful information relating to agriculture
but possibly as check to Catholicism as well, almanacs were a regular annual
purchase by the vestry in Madeley.\textsuperscript{202} Apparently nothing came of Slaughter’s threat
and as Benson’s account suggests, ‘This little storm seems to have been chiefly blown
over before the middle of January’.\textsuperscript{203} However, the threat of Catholics in his parish
was not far from his mind. The next month he left with Mr Ireland for the Continent
on his postponed journey.\textsuperscript{204} Seeing the opportunity to increase his knowledge and
thus his strategy against dissent in Madeley, Fletcher took detours into France and
Italy to engage with Catholics. As Ireland recounted it:

Fletcher ... attended the sermons of the Roman Catholic clergy,
visited their convents and monasteries, and conversed with all the
most serious among them whom he met with, in order that he might
thoroughly know their sentiments concerning spiritual religion. And

\textsuperscript{198} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{199} i.e. 31 Dec. 1769; see JF\textsuperscript{\rightarrow}JI, 13 Jan. 1770.
\textsuperscript{200} Ibid. 13 Jan. 1770.
\textsuperscript{201} Haydon, ‘I Love My King’, 41.
\textsuperscript{202} MCWA.
\textsuperscript{203} LJF, 125-130.
\textsuperscript{204} One of Fletcher’s brothers had been recently converted and was evangelizing the rest of the
family. He requested Fletcher’s visit, and having not seen his family for over a decade, he wanted to
comply. See JF\textsuperscript{\rightarrow}CH, 10 Feb. 1769.
he was so very particular in making his observations respecting the gross and absurd practices ... we were frequently in no small danger of our lives. He wished to attend the pope’s chapel at Rome, but I would not consent to accompany him, till I had obtained a promise from him, that he would forbear to speak.205

Fletcher had returned to Madeley by summer and controversies with the Catholics eventually simmered down after this. Perhaps it was because Fletcher became wearied with the various controversies, or possibly because of the effectiveness of his pastoral strategies. What is clear is that Catholicism in the parish did not increase much during Fletcher’s incumbency and by no means kept pace with population growth. When Benson was writing his biography of Fletcher, he wrote to ask Mrs Fletcher about her late husband’s conflicts with the Catholics. She replied that she could not recall his ever mentioning it; that the Catholics are at present (& have been ever since I have been here (almost 22 years) at a very low Ebb there is still a Mass House & a priest but when our new Bishop ... askd ... ‘what number of papists – Mr Walter gave answer about a Dozen Families. I believe not so many.’ & I never hear of any fresh person joining them.206

A Slow Process of Conciliation

The evolution from conflict to conciliation between the church and its rivals varied in speed, depending on the level of aggravation or contrarily, the level of cooperation. Fletcher’s early mode of dealing with the church’s rivals was one of confrontation: preaching against their errors in the church, expounding further in his meetings, and circulating both hand-written and published tracts. His approach was largely in reaction to the disruptions dissenters made in and after Madeley church services and, particularly, their attendance at religious society meetings in order to rebut Fletcher’s teachings in a public forum. When such tensions were low, his strategy was primarily one of preaching and teaching, and fulfilling the requirements of pastoral care in the parish. However, if his ideal was one of zealous moderation,207 he struggled at times to fulfil it. His lack of moderation initially stemmed from the

205 LJF, 125-130.
206 MF→JB, 14 June 1804.
207 JF→CW, 4 July 1774.
tension he perceived between the fact that England had a national church set on so solid a foundation as to be seen in her reliance upon scripture and her tradition in the first place and the fact that despite such a blessing from God, there were so many who were either un-Christianized or only nominal Christians.\textsuperscript{208} Even though the culture was infused with religion (as seen in the parish festivals, Anglican rites, and the church’s continued role in administrating poor relief, apprenticeships, and even settlements), Fletcher found little evidence of an Anglican hegemony when it came to actual religious belief.\textsuperscript{209}

The Baptists, considered by Fletcher as antinomians, and the Catholics, considered by Fletcher as superstitious, ignorant, and theologically opposed to salvation by grace, seemed to him to conspire against his aims. The Quakers’ opposition was more peaceable than that of the Baptists or Catholics. However, in all three cases, Fletcher’s first response was to differentiate for his parishioners between the true faith of the primitive church, represented by the ideals of the Establishment and the errors of dissent, which effectually corrupted the two gospel axioms, ‘believe and obey’. This differentiation produced both dialogue and confrontation, both of which resulted in a new understanding between religious rivals. With the Slaughter family, Fletcher found that their ‘Catholicism’ was more Protestantized than he assumed, and as Streiff astutely observed, Fletcher altered his view between the first preaching of his sermon on ‘Salvation by Faith’ in 1762, and the second preaching of it eleven years later.\textsuperscript{210} When it was published as part of his \textit{Equal Check}, he apologized for his former ‘protestant bigotry’. Clarifying his matured understanding, Fletcher wrote: ‘Though the Papists lean in general to [the Pharisaical] extreme, yet many of them have known and taught the way of salvation by faith that interests us in the Redeemer’s merits ... I would no more be a bitter Protestant, damning all the Papists in a lump; than a bitter Papist, anathematizing all Protestants without exception.’\textsuperscript{211}

With the Quakers, he found common ground, partially in their similar belief in gospel holiness,\textsuperscript{212} and partially in their shared contempt for vice, which flowed

\textsuperscript{208} \textit{Appeal}, 44.
\textsuperscript{209} This is in strong contrast to the depiction of an Anglican confessional state by Clark. \textit{English Society}, 26-34, 215-16, 273-75.
\textsuperscript{210} \textit{RS}, 124.
\textsuperscript{211} \textit{WJF} (A), 4:66, n.
\textsuperscript{212} \textit{JF} \textit{CW}, 13 Oct. 1771.
from their business concerns as well as theological ones. With the Baptists, his early
efforts were met with a measure of success in quieting them, if not stemming their
growth altogether. His grander controversies with churchmen over Calvinism and
Arminianism helped to temper his confrontational tendencies, as his works intended
to bring unity only widened the fissure. Yet, in a finishing attempt to unite
evangelical churchmen based on their common aims, he was able to write in 1773
that consensus and cooperation amongst evangelicals ‘whether they belong to, or
dissent from, the Establishment’ was an ideal worth aiming for. As he summarized:

I would extend my brotherly love to all Christians in general, but
more particularly to all Protestants, and most particularly to all the
Protestants of the Established Church ... But, God forbid that I should
exclude from my brotherly affection, and occasional assistance, any
ture minister of Christ because he casts the gospel-net among the
Presbyterians, the Independents, the Quakers, or the Baptists! ... So
far as they cordially aim at the conversion of sinners, I will offer them
the right hand of fellowship.213

He continued for several more pages on the importance of toleration as the
proper assurance of ‘quietness, peace and mutual forbearance’. It is not surprising
that the greatest degree of consensus and cooperation was with the Quakers, who
shared the common goal of conversion and the common methods of society
meetings and religious education. Some evangelical consensus seems to have spread
throughout Madeley. When in 1782, Elizabeth Smith published a poem about the
life of the evangelical Anglican, Walker of Truro, her subscribers included twenty-
eight people from Madeley, some from each of the three villages, representing a
range of churchmanship. The list included, along with Fletcher, the Anglicans and
erstwhile opponents of Fletcher, Daniel Edmunds, and Richard Beard; Mr Ford and
Mr Darby, both Quaker ironmasters from Coalbrookdale, and the industrialist
Quaker businessman, Joseph Rathbone; John Reynolds, a wealthy farmer from
Madeley; and Anne Hughes, an erstwhile Catholic of Madeley Wood. Of course, we
cannot infer too much from a subscription list, but given Walker’s reputation as an
evangelical whose practises of developing societies in his parish, drawing together
likeminded clergy, and preserving Methodism within the Church of England, were

213 WJF (B), 3:560-61.
so like those of Fletcher and the fact that Smith’s *Poem* actually included various expositions of the creeds, the *Te Deum* and various formularies of the Anglican liturgy, it is at least suggestive of a growing consensus.\textsuperscript{214}

Conclusion

Studies of John Fletcher have tended to focus either on his contribution to Methodist theology (as the product of the Calvinist-Arminian controversy), or on his designation as Wesley’s successor as the leader of the Methodists. He has typically been viewed as a low churchman whose parish was a place of semi-retirement, providing him with ample leisure to either write on Wesley’s behalf or to focus on pious devotions after his perfunctory duties as vicar of Madeley were performed. Madeley has been, for the most part, peripheral to Fletcher studies. The present thesis, however, has aimed to examine Fletcher in his parochial context; to study both what the parish tells us about Fletcher, but also what Fletcher tells us about the parish, and more specifically, about the church in the eighteenth century in a local context.

Three recent works have helped to mark the way for such an approach. Trinder’s revision of *The Industrial Revolution in Shropshire*, Streiff’s *Reluctant Saint*, and Forsaith’s *Unexampled Labours*, all attempt to place Fletcher firmly within his parochial context. These three scholarly studies provide a triad for understanding Fletcher: (1) in his industrial context; (2) in his theological context; and (3), in his relationship with leaders in the Evangelical Revival. This thesis has sought to examine a fourth component: Fletcher’s work as an ordained clergyman of the Church of England, that is, in his ecclesial and ministerial context. This thesis also builds on the growing body of scholarship which has emphasized the good work of the Established Church in the eighteenth century, particularly by focussing on the church (and in this case, Methodism as well) in the localities. Neither the church nor Methodism looked the same wherever you found them; rather, there were variations from one region to the next, and sometimes even from one parish to the next.

Madeley, upon Fletcher’s arrival, had characteristics of both an industrializing and a rural Midlands parish. Its location in the centre of the East Shropshire coalfield, situated on the River Severn, made it an ideal location for various forms of innovation. At the same time industrialization presented challenges for the provision of pastoral care. The population was already in 1760 four times larger than the seating capacity of the church. The majority of the inhabitants lived not in the ancient village near the church, but in the newer villages of Madeley Wood and Coalbrookdale. Long work days and the high rate of accidents and death created a
culture in which recreation was an important outlet for coping with the anxieties that accompanied these realities.

Such a setting has typically been associated with the weakness of the Established Church when compared to its dissenting and Methodist rivals. The present thesis, however, has challenged this pessimistic assessment of the Hanoverian church in two key ways. First, it has not accepted the assumptions that the eighteenth-century church was set on a trajectory of irreversible decline from the passing of the Toleration Act, nor that the good work of the church was only revived with the reforms of the early nineteenth century. Instead, it has asked the question of how the church at the parish level could adapt to its industrializing context, and how the ideals of the Reformation continued to shape the clergy’s understanding of the pastoral task into the eighteenth century. Second, this thesis has not accepted the assumption that Methodism was a monolithic movement under the sole authority of John Wesley, nor that it was set on a trajectory of separation from the Church of England, forming a competing body of ministers, more capable of responding to industrializing conditions. Rather, it has looked at the ways in which there was continuity between the church and Methodism as well as the ways in which the Anglican clergy assimilated evangelical emphases and methods into their parish work. To do so, this thesis has focussed on John Fletcher, and the Shropshire parish of Madeley as a case study of pastoral ministry and the relationship between Anglicanism and Methodism in (roughly) the third quarter of the eighteenth century.

Worship services were central to pastoral duty, especially preaching, according to both clerical and lay expectations. Fletcher almost immediately upon his induction to the parish not only established a pattern of preaching on Sabbath Days, but also expanded preaching to weekday services. His conduct of worship services demonstrate his earnest desire to fulfil the Anglican ideal of performing his whole duty. Communion was offered with supra-canonical regularity, and as much as it was in his power, Fletcher strove to increase attendance at church and to encourage his parishioners to receive the Sacrament. Baptisms, weddings, and funerals were performed not only out of a sense of obligation, but with a view towards proclaiming the gospel. Furthermore these rites were for the most part universal, drawing all parishioners to the church at one point in their life or another, excluding perhaps only the Quakers, who had their own burial ground. It is difficult
to measure the impact Fletcher’s assiduousness had on the practice of religion overall. Yet it is evident that few excuses could be offered for irreligion in Madeley in this period. Fletcher’s own words to his parishioners summarize it best:

Thou canst not name one means of improving in divine knowledge and grace but what God has blessed thee with. Sacraments, plain sermons, and lectures, reading of the word of God and the soundest pieces of practical divinity, spiritual conferences, public and private prayers, instructions, singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs,—all these means thou hast enjoyed ...

What is clear is that there was an identifiable improvement in attendance at both church services generally, and in participation in the Sacrament. When Fletcher arrived in Madeley, only thirty communicants were to be counted. By the end of his incumbency there were more than two-hundred. Similarly, attendance not only increased at church services, but parishioners began to desire subsequent meetings for the encouragement of their faith.

Fletcher, responding to this need, helped to set up religious societies in the parish, particularly in the villages of Madeley Wood and Coalbrookdale, which were remote from the church. The societies were not just an outlet for Christian fellowship, but formed an elemental part of Fletcher’s strategy at extending the reach of the church, using methods typically associated with Methodism or dissent. Fletcher insinuated his leadership into the meetings, but also appointed lay leadership locally which he supported throughout his incumbency. Fletcher’s view of the coalfield, including his parish, as a mission field, shaped his endeavours to proclaim the gospel. By 1764 he had extended his ministry beyond the confines of his own parish, and even preached in the open air, all the while continuing to perform his duty at Madeley. At times, his societies brought him into conflict with local clergy and gentry who saw his Methodistic ministry as a disturbance to the public order. These conflicts petered out eventually, but not before Madeley was made a part of a Methodist circuit. Because of the challenges he was already facing from opponents to his societies, Fletcher was reluctant to welcome Wesley’s preachers into Shropshire. However, once they had come, he invited them to share

1 WJF(B), 7:255-67.
2 JF CH, 6 Jan. 1761; ‘In the Harness’, 1107.
in his evangelistic ministry. Fletcher’s meeting houses, built largely at his own expense, were convenient places to gather for fellowship and for Wesley’s itinerants to preach, but more significantly, they eventually came to operate as de facto chapels of ease. As one who had observed the pattern wrote of this ingenuity:

Those who could not by reason of distance, or other circumstances, remain [after church for the evening service], now repaired to their homes, to be in readiness for the evening services in their own vicinity, there being several large chapels in the populous parts of the parish, at each of which the [Anglican] Minister officiated every Sabbath evening alternately, as well as occasionally on the week-days, always announcing at the close of the afternoon service in the church at which chapel he should preach that evening. This plan was adopted by Mr. Fletcher, and was followed by his evangelical and pious successors, for upwards of forty years.3

Fletcher’s chapels were never officially consecrated, but such formality was not necessary for people to associate them with the church. Further evidence of this is provided by the published Account of Benefices and Population of 1818. In this assessment of accommodation for the parishes, Fletcher’s meeting houses were not counted as Methodist or dissenting places of worship, but as ‘Chapels of the Establishment’.4 The number of people which could be accommodated was said to be 1,600 in one church and three chapels.5 Thus, the fruit of Fletcher’s societies was not only increased attendance at church and sacrament, but a long-term legacy of church extension.

To assess whether Fletcher’s mode of extension was typical of what was possible or practised by the clergy generally would require more local studies of the type which have been so helpful for enhancing our understanding of clerical expectations and roles as they were fulfilled in the parishes. However, the picture which is developing from such studies suggests that the work of the clergy in extending the reach of the church in the eighteenth century demonstrated

4 T.B. Clarke, Account of Benefices and Population; Churches, Chapels, and Their Capacity ... ([London], 1818], 95.
5 One of the three chapels was built after Fletcher’s death by his widow and her coadjutors at Coalport.
considerable energy and creativity in some parishes. Thus, even though her examination of Oxfordshire in the eighteenth century confirmed the general picture of a church in need of reform, McClatchey still noted: ‘Herbert has had his companions in spirit in every age—men who attempted to meet the needs of their parishioners at every level, who scorned no by-way or bridle-path as being too humble a highway to the gates of Heaven ... Such men were no monopoly of the nineteenth century’.

Walker of Truro and Grimshaw of Haworth were not the only instances of a Methodistic clerical devotion that were rooted in the parishes. An example remarkably similar to Fletcher’s work at Madeley can be seen in the ministry of James Creighton. Like Fletcher, he saw the need to work diligently to keep Methodism in the Church of England while practising some of its irregularities in his own parish as part of an extension strategy. He wrote about his Irish parish to John Wesley: ‘I began to use Divine service and to preach in a Barn, in part of my parish which was about four miles from the church, and where the greater number of Protestant inhabitants lived.’ Creighton’s success, in fact, inspired the inhabitants to build a chapel of ease in the parish. Furthermore, in the 1780s Creighton established a preaching rota in his parish, noting that he

was among [his parishioners], to meet them three times every Lord’s-day; (not indeed the same congregation, for they could not all conveniently assemble at any one place, the parish being extensive, and the roads bad.) Some of them I met, exhorted, and prayed with early at my own house, or some other house most convenient for them: then I went to the Church; and afterwards returned, read the service and preached in the Chapel in the evening. The week days I spent ... in preaching in other parts of the parish.

Given the parallels with Fletcher’s practice, it is not surprising that Wesley recommended Creighton as a curate to Fletcher when he was about to depart for the Continent during his illness in the late 1770s. To this example could be added the work of those like Vincent Perronet, John Crosse, Walter Sellon, James Stillingfleet,

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6 McClatchey, *Oxfordshire Clergy*, 91.
8 *LJW*, 6:356.
and Henry Venn, who like to Fletcher, held meetings in their vicarage kitchens. Then there were those who extended their ministry by gathering to encourage their clerical brethren and joining in pulpit exchanges to bring freshness to church services, such as James Brown, Edward Stillingfleet, Edward Davies, and others who joined quarterly in conference at Worcester. But to look no further than Shropshire, Thomas Hatton’s shared ministry with Fletcher at Coalpit Bank demonstrates the lengths to which some clergy went to care for areas otherwise under-served by the church.

The church in Madeley between 1760 and 1785 was characterized by a gradually-extending ministry of church and chapel. Chapels in Madeley, however, were not indicative of an ever-separating group of sectaries. Instead they operated as a means of Anglican church extension, making lines between ‘Establishment’ and ‘Extra-Establishment’ difficult to delineate. Yet for Fletcher, the ministries of church and chapel were not always coextensive. While he founded societies, preached and prayed extempore, and developed a local ad hoc preaching rota in his own parish—which eventually expanded to include an itinerancy into neighbouring parishes—there were limitations to Fletcher’s ‘Methodism’. These limitations, however, were built upon the same foundations which he believed gave him liberty to introduce some pastoral irregularities—the Canons, Articles, Homilies, and Liturgy of the church. Thus, although he believed the Canons allowed preaching as he practised it in house meetings by right of necessity, sacraments were offered only in the actual church. Such limits are hardly remarkable when we consider that, other than geographical inconvenience, there would have been little reason for the society members, who were mostly if not exclusively church members, to expect the sacraments in the societies when they were so readily and frequently provided by Fletcher in the church. Those who were not able for whatever reason to make it to the church on Sundays could find their customary forms of worship at Fletcher’s meetings in the abbreviated Liturgy the Canons prescribed for all preaching.


10 See *JF→CW*, 3 June 1764; *JF→CW*, 29 Apr. 1765; Forsaith, ‘Worcester Association’.

11 *Canons*, 342-45.
Conversely, lay preaching was the preserve of the societies in Madeley. Fletcher did not invite lay preachers into his pulpit, yet welcomed them to the societies, and after he had himself preached in the open air in 1765, he allowed visiting preachers to do the same thereafter.

It was Wesley’s claim that Methodism was to be spiritual leaven in the Church of England, but it has often been asserted that the Establishment was too lethargic to either ‘initiate pastoral developments’ or to integrate the strengths of chapel religion. Furthermore, the parochial infrastructure, it has been claimed, undermined the church’s ability to extend its reach in even the most basic sense by providing increased accommodation, rendering it a church of diminishing success when faced with a rising population and new socio-cultural challenges presented by industrialization. Church-building, however, was not the only (nor ostensibly the best) means of this. Fletcher’s ministry at Madeley is a demonstration both of the potential that existed in the parishes under the care of a diligent incumbent to extend the reach of the church and of the creative ways in which such potential was exploited. His gradual expansion of pastoral care from the regular services of the church to weekday services, religious society meetings, and a local Anglican itinerancy in cooperation with other clergy and Wesleyan preachers, helped to lay the foundation for future church extension in Madeley.

From the mid 1760s, a Madeley parishioner would have found it difficult to find a day of the week on which some kind of worship service was not provided by the church. Russell concluded that generally, ‘the policy of multiplying services’ in the early nineteenth century was the re-establishment of an ‘almost totally neglected element’ of pastoral duty by eighteenth-century clergy. If this was the case elsewhere, it was in no manner representative of Madeley, for Fletcher's work—sometimes in continuity with the common practises of the coalfield clergy and sometimes innovative—set the standard for the decades following his death. In 1793, Joseph Plymley, Archdeacon of Salop visited Madeley to assess the fabric of the churches. Although the church was in need of repair, what impressed Plymley was the pattern of worship which included two services on Sundays, prayers on Saint’s Days, and sermons ‘twice every week on the evenings of working days in rooms.

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12 LJW, 7:326-27, 331-34; Minutes (1744), 14.
13 Russell, Clerical Profession, 66, 75-76.
appropriated for that purpose’. He did not scruple with the preaching that took place at times in Fletcher’s un-consecrated rooms but acknowledged that they were in ‘the most populous part of the parish and at a considerable distance from the Church.’

He was also aware of how the pattern in the parish was established and noted the advantages of Fletcher’s late diligence:

This custom originated in the time of Mr. De la Flechere whose zeal for the propagation of Christianity was much adorned by his charity and benevolence ... The people are much attached to their evening preachings, and the Quakers ... encourage it very much, perceiving the good effects it has upon the Workmen, the persons who attend the meetings frequent the Church on Sundays.

Vigorous devotion to worship and church extension did not negate the need for pastoral care. In an industrializing parish where work seldom stopped, it was not uncommon for pastoral needs to arise day or night. Mrs Fletcher recalled that no hour was too late for her husband: ‘If he heard the Knocker ... his Window was thrown up ... and when he understood that Somebody was hurt in the Pits, or that a Neighbour was likely to die ... this uniform Answer was sure to be given, I will attend you immediately.’ Such spontaneous ministry, however, was joined by his more systematic visits from house to house, and to the workplaces of his parishioners. Care for the poor was not just a matter of giving of his own economic resource, but of administrating the parish both via the vestry, and by preaching Christian duty to the poor from his pulpit. This was, in fact, a strategy he employed to encourage visiting the sick, caring for those in need, encouraging the downtrodden, confronting vice, and exhorting towards Christian devotion. Building on the educational structures of the church, primarily to be found in catechizing, but also in the model of charity schools, Fletcher established his own schools, wrote his own catechisms, and distributed literature. These educational initiatives were designed to cater to differing capacities in order to provide building blocks of faith.

Fletcher was no less likely to teach and admonish the gentry of his parish than he was the colliers and forgemen, and indeed, he frequently reminded them of their

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14 Plymley, ‘Ecclesiastical Notes’.
15 Ibid.
16 HLF; 15; also see LJF; 61-63, 337, 357; WJF (B), 1:407.
17 LJF; 65-66, 290; Portrait, 1:358.
duty to act as examples to the less-educated of the parish. His earlier initiatives had laid the foundation for Sunday schools, and when he had heard of the successes of Raikes, Bayley, and others, he had little difficulty garnering support for such a plan in Madeley. In this he was joined by church people and dissenters alike.

His strategies toward Christian education, which looking back on his incumbency appear as relatively successful, were not without conflict, for an integral part of the education of the church was propagation of Anglicanism, over and against the threat of heterodoxy. In Madeley, and for Fletcher, this meant confronting the Baptists, Quakers, and Catholics in his parish. His zeal toward this end was met with considerable aggravation at times. Despite the noise of opposition, however, Fletcher’s most active opponents were louder than they were strong, and the misunderstandings which characterized the first five years of his ministry were eventually resolved, in part by Fletcher’s success in stemming the growth of dissent, and in part by finding commonality with his erstwhile adversaries.

The Baptists waned, at least in part due to Fletcher’s efforts, as well as the efforts of other Shropshire clergy, showing only brief revivals. The Quakers became increasingly reconciled to Fletcher and he to them, cooperating towards the end of his incumbency in the establishment of Sunday schools and helping provide alternatives to the alehouse. Only a few years after Fletcher’s death, the Friends (i.e. Quaker Meeting) still supported weeknight [Anglican] ‘preachings’ in Coalbrookdale,\(^{18}\) and the Quaker industrialist Richard Reynolds was instrumental in securing the living of the neighbouring parish of Buildwas for the evangelical and erstwhile curate of Fletcher, Joshua Gilpin.\(^{19}\)

The Catholics maintained a steady, but not increasing congregation, though its opposition died down after the confrontations of the early 1770s. It is difficult to quantify the effectiveness died down after the confrontations of the early 1770s. It is difficult to quantify the effectiveness of Fletcher’s attempts to shape religious sensibilities and promote religious orthodoxy through his polemical debates with dissenters in the parish and to know how far his preaching and writing to his people altered religious practice, but it is evident that he perceived the threat of heterodoxy or heresy and was constantly on guard against it. Qualitatively, however, it is clear that there were indeed many in the parish who were turned from their contempt for Fletcher, or for

\(^{18}\) Plymley, ‘Ecclesiastical Notes’.

\(^{19}\) Rathbone, \textit{Letters}, 46.
the Gospel he preached, by his undying efforts utilizing both the pulpit and the press. A growing evangelical consensus was both initiated and fostered by Fletcher, whose irenicism matured over time. What Gibson has said of the diocese of Winchester was similarly true of the parish of Madeley. It ‘thrived and reached its highest point since the Reformation. The principal measure of success of the Church was its triumph over Catholic and Protestant nonconformity ... The means of this success lay principally in the level of professional duty achieved by the clergy’. Fletcher used all available peaceable resources to maintain orthodoxy, even attempting to present disruptive Catholics at the ecclesiastical court. His failure in doing so only confirmed the need for pastoral persuasion where legal means of challenging dissent were unavailable.

The ‘chapels’ in Madeley were all inextricably associated with the local church and Fletcher’s ministry, providing another sphere of pastoral activity where rival theologies to the church could be confronted and the church defended; and indeed, Fletcher used these means strategically. What is most apparent is that no religious group in Madeley rivalled the church in its diligence in providing for the spiritual and religious needs of its industrial population. If the plurality of denominational options representing the voluntary religion permitted by the Toleration Act promoted competition in the religious marketplace, in Madeley, it was the church which both set the standard for religious provision and showed the greatest increase in attendance between 1760 and 1785.

Despite the positive outlook of this thesis, it should be noted that Fletcher himself was often discouraged by the state of the church in his day. He, like many of his contemporaries, complained of the selfishness, sloth, and irresponsibility of many of the ‘clergy of the present age’. Indeed, as Holmes and Szechi have observed regarding other studies which demonstrate the positive work of the eighteenth-century church, the Establishment was ‘yet still quite full of features that were very disturbing to those who at the time were genuinely concerned themselves at the direction in which the Church, and the Faith, appeared to be going.’ Fletcher’s

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*Portrait* was an attempt to provide a manual for reforming the body of the clergy, one by one, encouraging each to take seriously the call of the Holy Spirit to so important a task. His *modus operandi*, however, was to promote reform by both teaching as well as by setting an example of piety for others to follow. For him, that meant a firm commitment to the parish to which he was called.

In an odd irony, this commitment to reform brought him in to conflict with John Wesley, whose aims to reform the pastoral work of the church were similarly stated. Yet Wesley was sceptical of the possibility that reform could be stimulated from within the parochial structure, and he depended increasingly upon the irregularities of his Methodist Connexion, while downplaying the work of those who limited themselves to a parish. Despite Wesley’s authority and friendship, Fletcher resisted his forceful invitations to leave Madeley, and stood by his conviction that a parish ministry was none-too-narrow a sphere for the work of God. Forsaith’s suggestion that Charles and Fletcher’s friendship was closer because of this shared ideology is compelling, and in no way contradicted by this thesis. Indeed, Fletcher had little trouble envisioning a pro-Anglican Methodism that left control of societies in the hands of the incumbent while being supported by Wesley’s preachers, a model he exemplified in Madeley.

Overall, Fletcher’s pastoral ministry represents some of the best work of Anglicanism in the eighteenth century. While the stereotypical view of the eighteenth-century church has been pessimistic towards what improvement was even possible given the constraints of the parochial system and the corruption or laziness of the clergy, the industrializing parish of Madeley is an example of the potential that may have existed in other regions as well. Not unlike Oldham and Saddleworth in Smith’s study, the church in Madeley was impressive, ‘judged by almost any standards’. In terms of not only Sunday attendance, but by religious participation more generally, there were steady signs of improvement. Fletcher’s own variation of Methodism was a component of his pastoral strategy, characterized first by his evangelical theology and preaching, but also by his development of a multifaceted ministry of extension via his chapels and the societies that met in them. His pastoral duties were carried out vigorously and demonstrated considerable creativity. His long term commitment to his parish became one of his greatest assets for

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accomplishing his aims. He arrived in Madeley as an outsider, set on ushering in a revival amongst a few parishioners he knew from his curacy but mostly amongst those unknown to him. Over time, however, relationships were nurtured by his ceaseless visits to parishioners, his genuine concern for the poor and the sick, and his frequent gatherings with his flock for ‘social worship’, either between services over a shared meal at the vicarage or at the society meetings. Consistency communicated reliability, and helped to sustain the place of the church in society. Joshua Gilpin who had spent formative years as a curate in Fletcher’s employ penned a testimony to this end in the parish register upon Fletcher’s death:

He was one of the most apostolic men of the age in which he lived. His abilities were extraordinary, and his labours were unparalleled. He was a burning and shining light; and as his life had been a common blessing to the inhabitants of this parish, so the death of this great man was lamented by them as a common and irreparable loss.25

Map 1
Clergy of the Coalfield to c.1785

Map 2
Fletcher's Extra-Parochial Preaching Journeys
Map 3
The Shropshire Coalfield
Map 4
Madeley Meetings 1760-1785

Map of Church and Chapel Meetings, in the Coalfield 1760-1785

Sources: FCH, Shropshire, 11:399-301, 393; Influx Rev. Selby, 188, 270; JP to CW, 5 June 1764; JP to CW, 12 Apr. 1765; JP to CW, 22 Apr. 1769; JP to CW, 10 May 1765; JP to William Ley, 9 May (1765); JP to [Lord Gower], MARC, MAM, M, 394; MARM (1800), 219, 221; MAB, 66; Randall, History of Madeley, 139-44; SRC: 403456.
Appendix 1
Fletcher’s Sermons

The Content and Style of Fletcher’s Sermons

Fletcher, it appears, often attempted to provide a sense of continuity in his preaching from service to service and from one week to the next. The content of his evening sermons built upon those of the morning service: ‘[T]his morning I shall describe to you ... And, in the evening ... I shall endeavour to point out a little farther ...' Likewise, many of his sermons begin with phrases like: ‘I described, in my last discourse ...’ or ‘Last Sunday I delivered to you ...’, and, ‘If I stron[g]ly inforced last sunday & propose to inforce again this evening ...' Sometimes this meant preaching from the set readings, and other times it meant building on his own choice of texts. However, if there was a larger scheme of organizing the content of his preaching, it was according to a scheme of evangelical Christianity. This Appendix examines this scheme as Fletcher practised in Madeley.

Preaching Evangelical Religion

In 1776 Fletcher wrote to his parishioners:

The sum of all I have preached to you is contained in four propositions, First, heartily repent of your sins ... Secondly, believe the gospel of Christ in sincerity and truth. Thirdly, in the power which true faith gives ... run with humble faith the way of God’s commandments ... Fourthly, by continuing to take up your cross, and to receive the pure milk of God’s word, grow in grace, and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

This is a fair summary of the content of Fletcher’s preaching as evidenced by his extant sermons, which clearly indicate that the new birth was the central theme of his pulpit ministry. Indeed, Fletcher believed preaching was God’s ordinary means of ‘awakening sinners'. In his Portrait, he again enumerated the principles of what he termed the ‘preaching of the true minister ... through which God employs his power for the conversion of sinners.’ In a word’, he wrote, ‘the good pastor preaches

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1 Ibid. 7:207.
2 WJF (B), 7:219, 255, 298; ASW: A/1,2(a-b).
3 JFMadeley Parishioners, 28 Dec. 1776.
4 WJF (B), 7:220ff.
repentance, faith, hope, and charity. These virtues include all others.\textsuperscript{5} As concise and useful as this summary is, Fletcher actually had a more complex understanding which framed his preaching, which he referred to in various instances as ‘evangelical’. His expectation was that godly and truly evangelical preachers:

1. Preached the gospel according what he called (and developed in his theology as) the ‘dispensations’ of grace;
2. Preached ‘experimental religion’; and
3. Preached according to the various capacities of his hearers.

Fletcher’s doctrine of the dispensations\textsuperscript{6} has been discussed elsewhere.\textsuperscript{7} However, because it played a significant role in shaping his preaching, it is worth summarizing briefly here. Fletcher perceived in the scriptural witness of both Old and New Testaments three dispensations of grace. That is to say, three distinct Trinitarian manifestations of God’s grace to his people. In this, it is clear that Fletcher viewed both the church, and the revelation of God progressively, speaking of the dispensations as ‘different states of advancement in the Christian faith’.\textsuperscript{8} Thus, the three dispensations included that of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. The first was represented by the age before the Advent of Christ; the second by the age between Christ’s birth and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost; and the third by the by the age from Pentecost until the \textit{parousia}. Fletcher made an analogy of the dispensations to various degrees of natural light. For example, star-light, moon-light, and the rising sun are all degrees of light, with each improving upon the former. So God’s grace was revealed progressively. A table of Fletcher’s dispensations might be made in the following way:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Father</th>
<th>Son</th>
<th>Holy Spirit</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Examples of Biblical</td>
<td>The time before Christ</td>
<td>The time between the birth of Christ and Pentecost</td>
<td>The time from Pentecost to the Second Coming of Christ</td>
<td>Fletcher, \textit{Third Check to Antinomianism}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| References | Fletcher, \textit{Third Check to Antinomianism} |

\textsuperscript{5} \textit{Portrait}, 2:2.
\textsuperscript{6} Not to be confused with the later dispensationalist theology developed by John Nelson Darby or his successors.
\textsuperscript{7} RL, 201-211, 258-60, 269; Wood, \textit{Meaning of Pentecost}, 6, 102. The summary of Fletcher’s dispensationalism which follows here is based upon Fletcher’s own works, primarily his \textit{Portrait}, and sermons to be found at ASW: A/1/2.
\textsuperscript{8} \textit{Portrait}, 2:151.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Representatives</th>
<th>Father</th>
<th>Son</th>
<th>Holy Spirit</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Abraham, etc.</td>
<td>Disciples</td>
<td>the New Testament Writings</td>
<td>Antinomianism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promises of the Various Dispensations</td>
<td>Promise of the Son (fulfilled in the Advent of Christ)</td>
<td>Promise of the Spirit (fulfilled at Pentecost, and being fulfilled in those who are baptized in the Holy Spirit)</td>
<td>Promise of the Second Coming of Christ (Yet to be fulfilled)</td>
<td>Portrait, 2: 137-44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biblical Descriptions of the Various Dispensations</td>
<td>‘God is love’; ‘Without faith it is impossible to please God’</td>
<td>‘Ye believe in God, believe also in me [Jesus]’</td>
<td>‘In the last days I will pour out my spirit; ‘But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you’</td>
<td>Portrait, 2:153-56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characterized by</td>
<td>‘Much greater degree of fear than love.’</td>
<td>‘Love begins to gain the ascendancy over fear’</td>
<td>‘Perfect love casteth out fear’</td>
<td>Portrait, 2:150.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Response Under the Various Dispensations</td>
<td>‘O wretched man that I am ...’ (Acknowledgement of sin)</td>
<td>‘I thank God ... through our Lord Jesus Christ’ (Desire to ‘flee the wrath to come’)</td>
<td>‘We have not received a spirit of bondage, but the spirit of adoption’ (Striving to ‘be perfect even as’</td>
<td>Portrait, 2:150-151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proclamations</td>
<td>Repentance Towards God</td>
<td>A Living Hope</td>
<td>A Lively Faith</td>
<td>Portrait, 2: passim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Role of the Evangelical Pastor</td>
<td>‘[T]he true minister discovers to their view the corruption of the heart, with all the melancholy effects it ...’; ‘he proceeds to lay open, before the eyes of professing Christians, the two greatest sins which are committed under the Gospel dispensation ... want of that living faith, which unites us to Christ, and that ardent charity, which binds us to mankind in general, as well as to believers in particular’</td>
<td>The true minister will ‘proclaim the glad tidings of the Gospel, through faith in Jesus Christ; laying as much stress, in all their sermons, upon this efficacious grace, as [St Paul] was accustomed to do, in all his epistles.’</td>
<td>The true minister proclaims a lively hope, joy in affliction, and peace.</td>
<td>Portrait, 2:15-16, 52-54, 86-100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table of Fletcher’s Dispensations
The dispensations thus formed the structure of Fletcher’s *ordo salutis*. Under the first dispensation, the ‘dispensation of the Father’, people remain ‘unawakened’ to their sin and to their need of a new birth. Like the Jews, they are reliant upon the Law (i.e. Torah). In his contemporary setting, Fletcher saw these as people who were either barefaced sinners or ‘formalists’, Christians by name only, perhaps baptized in the church and even steady churchgoers, yet lacking the power of religion. To these must be preached—the next dispensation—that ‘of the Son (Jesus Christ)’ in order that they might progress in faith. Those under the second dispensation, are people who are convinced and convicted of their sinful state (i.e. of both original and actual sin), and recognize that in their sin they are completely unable to save themselves. These are those who ‘have a desire to flee from the wrath to come’ and seek God and salvation in the ‘means of Grace’ (primarily the sacraments and preaching, but also religious conversation or religious society meetings). Fletcher called these ‘awakened sinners’. To these must be preached—the next dispensation—that of the Holy Spirit. Those under the dispensation of the Spirit are those who have an ‘experimental knowledge’ of faith, that is, they have received assurance of faith in their hearts by the testimony of the Spirit and continue living in obedience by the power of the Spirit. Fletcher called these ‘converted sinners’.

In one sermon, Fletcher outlined the dispensations or ‘classes of people’ for his congregation specifically, inviting them to evaluate their own spiritual states. ‘[T]he first class’, he wrote,

... contains unawakened sinners ... easy in the form without the power of Religion, The Second contains awakened sinners, those who see their wretchedness ... and by an unfeigned repentance seek to recover God’s favour. In the Third are those that having gone through the rough and craggy path of repentance are at last arrived at an assurance of the Mercy of God in Christ Jesus.10

This scheme is comparable to the pattern of conversion described by many evangelicals in the eighteenth-century, only with a specific hermeneutic and vocabulary used to support it.11 Fletcher thought that confusion was often caused by

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9 2 Tim. 3:5.
10 JF, Sermon, Rom. 7:24 (B1.1).
ministers who did not pay close enough attention to preaching ‘the truths of the Gospel in their proper order’. ‘He who preaches the Gospel’, he explained, ‘without tracing out the lines which separate the three dispensations of grace, may be said to exhibit a sun dial upon which the hours are unmarked’. He was aware that his congregation would always contain individuals of varying levels of religious education and experience, and that therefore, a strategy for helping each person progress was essential. Thus in his sermons he made specific applications to the corresponding ‘three sorts or classes of people’ to be found in ‘every congregation’. This was a hallmark of Fletcher’s sermons, a majority of which he concluded with a three- or four-point application. For example, the application to his sermon on John 19:30.

Careless Sinners. Know /hate your sins. See your doom.

Selfrighteous ones. Take no more X\textsuperscript{th} office upon you.

Convinced ones: hear, believe, be saved, rejoice.

Believers. Be above sin, doubts, fears. believe for a thro’ cure as well as for a partial one.

Several other examples of how he outlined these in his actual sermons are represented in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dispensation of the Father</th>
<th>Dispensation of the Son</th>
<th>Dispensation of the Spirit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unawakened Sinners</td>
<td>Awakened Sinners</td>
<td>Converted Sinners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptized Heathens</td>
<td>Convinced Sinners</td>
<td>Converted Sinners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Careless Sinners</td>
<td>Distressed Souls</td>
<td>Children of God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unconverted</td>
<td>John’s Disciples</td>
<td>Believers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinners</td>
<td>Mourners</td>
<td>Believers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worldlings</td>
<td>Seekers</td>
<td>Believers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Careless Souls</td>
<td>Seeking Souls</td>
<td>Blessed Souls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Lost Sheep</td>
<td>The Returning Lost Sheep</td>
<td>The Lost Sheep that is Found</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\cit{12} Portrait, 2:171-206.
\cit{13} JF, Sermon, Rom. 7:24 (B1.1).
\cit{14} See his ‘Thirty Sermon Outlines’ in WJF (B), 7:466-519; also Mss sermons at MARC and ASW.
\cit{15} JF, Sermon, John 19:30, Aug. 1765 (B1.9).
Because of Fletcher’s hermeneutics of the dispensations—that is, seeing the light of God’s grace in every biblical age—he was able to preach the principles of conversion from almost any biblical text. Furthermore, he believed that the dispensations were not only found in scripture, but spoken of in the Articles and Offices of the church, (even if the word dispensation was not to be found therein). However, to preach the dispensations effectively, Fletcher believed the minister must himself have ‘experimental knowledge of these several states’. This formed the second aspect of Fletcher’s evangelical preaching.

**Preaching Experimental Religion**

Fletcher was critical of pastors who did not ‘preach Christ’ (a metonymy for preaching evangelically according to the dispensations) because they ‘are incapable of doing anything toward the furtherance of that living faith, of which Christ is the grand object, and that lively hope, of which he is the inexhaustible source.’ In other words, preaching dry morality apart from the importance of experiential faith or hope animated by the Holy Spirit, was futile. Instead, faith was to be lived experimentally. At a basic level, experimental religion was that practice of faith which one had tried for oneself and proven to be true by experience. Rivers has concisely and accurately described this experimental religion, which not only had roots in sixteenth-century Puritanism, but which was a shared tenet across the evangelical spectrum of churchmanship:

... experimental knowledge, [meant] both the believer’s own experience of religion, and an acquaintance with the variety of the experience of others, and the central function of the heart and affections in religion in relation to the will and understanding.

This threefold matrix of (1) one’s own experience, (2) attention to the heart as well as the mind in religious understanding, and (3) the experience of others (including biblical characters), worked together with Fletcher’s dispensationalism to shape not only his sermons, but his larger ministerial strategy, of which preaching was an elemental component. That is to say, the sermon was the first step in awakening sinners by helping them not only to cognitively assent to the doctrines of

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16 *WJF* (B), 1:269-70; 4:214-23.
17 *Portrait*, 2:90.
sin, grace, and salvation, but to feel their sense of depravity in order that they might repent. As Fletcher preached:

[T]he awakened sinner not only sees, but feels by an emotion of soul which he cannot describe ... He feels that the wages ... of his sin ... is death ... The vain conceits he entertain'd of his goodness being now dispell'd he feels the anguish of a wounded spirit ... He feels sorrow of heart for the blessings he has lost ... Then and not till then can he say that he feels there is no health in him ...\(^{19}\)

Thus, a congregant in any given dispensation was invited in the sermon to consider her religious experience in light of (or in comparison to) the principles and narratives of scripture, and in the Liturgy to express the want of health and repentance. Experimental religion according to the first aspect was introspective, focussed on the need to ‘correlate experience with biblical theology,’\(^{20}\) and thus had a direct relationship with preaching.

The second aspect of experimental religion also had a direct connexion with preaching. According to this principle, experimental religion meant being spiritually affected towards conversion, not simply rationally convinced.\(^{21}\) Fletcher articulated this more specifically than some of his contemporaries, writing: ‘The things of the Spirit of God cannot be discovered, but by spiritual, internal senses, which are, with regard to the spiritual world, what our bodily, external senses are with regard to the material world.’\(^{22}\) This being the case, Fletcher believed that it was a minister’s duty to encourage sinners with hardened hearts to feel their need. ‘They feel little enough already’, he wrote to a neighbouring minister who thought his experimental preaching was a sign of enthusiasm. ‘[W]hy should they be encouraged from the pulpit to feel less still?’ he asked.\(^{23}\) Fletcher supported his insistence upon religion of the heart with biblical examples such as David in his contrition, Jeremiah in his lamentation, and Paul in his epistles, and with extracts from the Liturgy and Homilies of the church. Concluding his argument, Fletcher wrote that upon the non-experimental scheme,

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\(^{19}\) JF, Sermon, Rom. 7:24 (B1.1); The phrase ‘is no health in him’ is taken from the Order for Morning Prayer, \textit{BCP}.


\(^{21}\) JF\(\rightarrow\)Rev. Prothero, 25 July 1761.

\(^{22}\) \textit{FL}, 315.

\(^{23}\) JF\(\rightarrow\)Rev. Prothero, 25 July 1761.
a man may be a believer if he give a rational assent to the doctrines of Christ, and has a ‘form of godliness,’ though he never felt the power of it in his heart. But upon the Gospel scheme, he is to ‘believe with the heart unto righteousness,’ before he can make a confession with the mouth unto salvation ….”

These and many more arguments Fletcher offered for the validity of experience in religion, and the importance of preaching for that experience. At the same time, he was careful to clarify that such animations of the Spirit were not the same as ‘impulses … the thrilling of weak nerves … or flights of heated imagination’. Rather, true feeling of heart was tested—experimentally—in comparison with the teachings of the church, but also in fellowship with other believers, thus the third aspect of experimental religion.

If in preaching Fletcher attempted to promote religious understanding in both minds and hearts, the third aspect of experimental religion required the creation of a venue in which such experience could be shared and compared. To accomplish this, Fletcher followed the example of others, including the early Anglican religious societies, and those of Wesley’s Methodists in forming religious associations in the parish. Indeed, Fletcher often encouraged ‘religious conversation’ as a means of grace, but also as an outlet for the devotion which grew out of the church services.

Preaching Themes and Texts

According to Benson, Fletcher chose the content of his sermons based upon the leadings of providence experienced in times of preparatory prayer in which petitioned God for a ‘subject adapted to the conditions of his people.” Fletcher sometimes took the set reading or Psalm for Morning or Evening Prayer for his text, and at other times chose an alternative. In all, the most consistent content of Fletcher’s sermons was conversion. He did, however, occasionally preach series on select themes. One year he preached eight successive sermons on the Lord’s Prayer from the Gospel of Matthew. The outlines of these sermons are extant, but

24 Ibid.
25 e.g. JF, Sermon, Rom. 7:24 (B1.1).
26 JF, Sermon Notebook, 1764 (B1.1).
27 LJF, 118.
unfortunately undated. Another time, he preached a series that made such an impression on his parishioners, that they implored Mary Fletcher to revive the series, preaching the themes herself, many years after her husband’s death. In 1775 and 1776, parishioner told Mrs Fletcher, that her husband ‘used to speak every Lords day on one of the titles given to our Saviour in the Scripture’. After searching Fletcher’s manuscripts, she could not find her husband’s list, so she started her own list based on biblical study, and began preaching what became known in the parish as ‘the Watchwords’ at each society meeting. A selection from the first titles of Christ taken from scripture and exposited by Mrs Fletcher included: Babe (Luke 2:12), Bread (John 6:35-36), Bridegroom (Matt. 9:15), Corner Stone (Eph. 2:20), etc. Surely there were other themes and series, but these are the only two that are apparent in his extant sermons.

Preaching Morality

Moralism, it has often been claimed, was the content of most Anglican preaching in the eighteenth century, as opposed to the pietistic preaching of the seventeenth or the evangelical preaching of the nineteenth centuries, often interpreted as evidence of a process of secularization of which social reform as opposed to religious reform became a distinguishing mark. Gilbert, for example, saw moralistic preaching as an example of the way in which the clergy were less concerned with meeting the religious and cultic needs of the populace than with impressing their social superiors and conducting their part of the squire-parson alliance. The inference has consequently been drawn by many historians that preaching in the mainstream Church of England was dominated by latitudinarian style, more concerned with social control and reform than true religious devotion.

28 The paper, penmanship, and style of outline of these suggest that they may have been preached the same time as a similar sermon for which the date is known to have been 1774. MARC: MAM Fl. 20/17.
29 A partial list of these recorded by the parishioners, a ‘Brother Hughes’, can be found at MARC: MAM Fl. 10/6, dated from 24 Sept. 1775 and continuing for at least 25 weeks.
30 MJMF, 21 Nov. 1798, MARC: MAM Fl. 39/9. Some of MF’s Watchwords have recently been published Asbury Journal 61:2 (Fall 2006).
32 Gilbert, Religion and Society, 70-71.
Stout has cleverly noted that one reason for such interpretations has come from the sources available at large, namely, printed sermons.\(^{34}\) Many of the sermons which were published were what Stout has termed ‘occasional’ sermons, preached on a designated occasion to a special audience providing application to ‘social and political circumstances’. Stout’s context of study was New England, but the analogue might be made in England to the various charity sermons, sermons before Parliament, or sermons on special fast or feast days intended to draw the attention of the hearer to the connexion between their morality and the state of the nation intermittently at war or threatened by war. This genre Stout differentiates from ‘regular’ sermons preached in parish churches on Sabbath days which were less-frequently published, existing still in only manuscript form. Regular sermons, he explains, are predominantly to be found in ‘the handwritten notes of ministers carried with them into local pulpits’ These, in contrast to the polished form of published occasional sermons, contained ‘numerous divisions and subdivisions of sermon “heads” … recorded in phrases that could be expanded during delivery.’\(^{35}\) When regular sermons are taken into account, Stout suggests that a different picture from that of secularization and dry moralism emerges, revealing that throughout the eighteenth century preaching ‘remained consistently otherworldly’ in continuity with the pious aims of the previous century.\(^{36}\)

If we are to take Fletcher’s interpretation, such continuity of preaching gospel piety was not as common as Stout posits. For example, when Fletcher wrote to his future Shropshire colleague Thomas Hatton, he expressed his gratitude that Hatton was ‘not led away with the generality [of the clergy], into dry empty notions of morality and formality’,\(^{37}\) and Fletcher commonly lamented the then obscured ideals of the ‘pious reformers’ of the church, and of the ‘golden age’ of the Apostles.\(^{38}\) However, as Gregory has pointed out, interpreting such comments is difficult because to some degree, they represent a ‘feeling of nostalgia held by many clergy (and some modern historians)’ for a previous age in which circumstances were much closer to their ideals.\(^{39}\) In any case, Fletcher was no less likely to preach morality in

\(^{36}\) Ibid. 6, 157.
\(^{37}\) JF\(\rightarrow\)T. Hatton, 4 Aug. 1762, *WMM* (1829), 175.
\(^{38}\) *Portrait*, 1:6, 59, 186; 2:134.
\(^{39}\) *RRR*, 255.
his parish than another. Indeed, this formed a part of his evangelical preaching. The difference for Fletcher between the preaching of morality by evangelicals compared to that of the ministers of ‘the present age’ was a gospel footing, and in fact, he even admonished some evangelicals for not being ‘sufficiently careful to insist upon morality: while philosophers, for the most part, as wholly taken up with morality, treat the doctrines of the Gospel with neglect and disdain.’ This lack of integration prompted Fletcher to write an entire section developing his system of theological ethics in his Portrait entitled ‘On the Connexion of Doctrines With Morality’. The foundations for Christian (and all true) morality, Fletcher found in the revealed Gospel as expressed in the dispensations, and as learned by the practice of experimental religion. Thus, many of his sermons emphasized morality as the fruit of gospel Christianity.

By a dialectical necessity, preaching morality also meant preaching against immorality, and for Fletcher this typically entailed preaching against popular customs in the parish. Barrie Trinder has examined the relationship between Fletcher’s evangelicalism and popular culture in the coalfield at some length. As he has pointed out, the testimonies by those like Fletcher, Abiah Darby, and other evangelicals, may have been over-rhetorical in their descriptions of the division between sacred and secular culture. He is undoubtedly correct that there were many individuals who saw no contradiction between ‘Religion, in the form of adherence to chapel or church, and recreation, exemplified by attendance at pubs and the great annual festivals’. However, this is one point on which Fletcher probably did not exaggerate, for he never denied that such blurring of social identity was common. Indeed, Fletcher’s complaint was that this was too common. In his sermons on Christian morality, he argued against hypocrisy and lukewarmness, asserting puritanical values which he believed flowed through the services of the Prayer Book. For Fletcher, his evangelical views on the customs of the parish, particularly those related to drinking and drunkenness, were concordant with his understanding of the religious requirements of the Church of England. Even though Fletcher met with

40 Portrait, 2:2, 109.
41 Ibid. 2:221.
42 JF, Sermon, 1 Cor. 2:14, WJF (B), 7:213; cf. Wood, Meaning of Pentecost.
43 IRS (3rd), 196-207.
44 Ibid. 204.
45 FL, 403-410.
resistance (particularly from those who stood to lose money when he preached against their trade), he was also joined by the parish vestry, the gentry, and the local magistrates in curbing the influence of the alehouse, even if their motivations were variously derived.46

46 IRS (3rd), 196-97.
Appendix 2

Table of Fletcher’s Sermons

There are literally hundreds of Fletcher’s sermons in various archives that remain unpublished and uncatalogued. This table provides a list of those that I have been able to verify are indeed Fletcher’s work, and a brief note of where sermons can be found in either published works or archives. In addition, if the date the sermon was preached is known, it is listed as well. Sermons with no known text or date can be found at the end of this list.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Text / (Date If Known)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gen. 1:26</td>
<td></td>
<td>Works (B), 7:466-467</td>
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<td>Gen. 1:26</td>
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<td>Gen. 27:38</td>
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<td>Gen. 45:4</td>
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<td>Works (C), 7:492-93</td>
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<td>Gen. 47:9</td>
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<td>Ex. 3:14</td>
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<td>Lev. 10:2-3</td>
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<td>Num. 16: 30-3428 / May 1773</td>
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<td>Num. 23:10</td>
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<td>Deut. 32:29 / c. 1757-60</td>
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<td>Deut. 32:29</td>
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<td>Works (C), 7:268-280; WMM (1821), 174-84.</td>
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<td>2 Sam. 12:7</td>
<td>ASW: A/1/2</td>
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<td>1 Kings 22:8</td>
<td></td>
<td>Works (B), 7:488-89</td>
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<tr>
<td>Job 19: 25-27 (after 1758)</td>
<td>ASW: A/1/11</td>
<td></td>
<td>Appended to the front of printed pages taken from W. Romaine, Twelve Discourses Upon Some Practical Parts of Solomon’s Song. Preached at St. Dunstan’s Church in the West, London (London, 1758), 207-234. Fletcher made multiple notes and excisions in Romaine’s text, and it seems as though Fletcher was preaching by reading Romaine.</td>
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<td>Ps. 2:12 / (1758)</td>
<td>MARC: MAM Fl. 31 (H)</td>
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<td>Ps. 32:1-2</td>
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<td>Ps. 33:18-19</td>
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<td>Non-extant; Referred to in JF CH, 10</td>
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<td>Ps. 34 (6 Nov. 1768)</td>
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<td>Ps. 36:7 (7 Aug. 1785)</td>
<td>Unpublished; Quoted from in J. Gilpin → J. Thornton, Esq., 19 Aug. 1785 in <em>The Melvilles and the Leslies</em>, 290-92; Mentioned in Fletcher, <em>Letter to H.L. de La Flèche</em>.</td>
<td></td>
<td>This was JF’s final sermon, and was on a sacrament Sunday.</td>
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<td>Ps. 43:3-4 (1764)</td>
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<td>Ps. 85:10-11 (25 Dec. 1765)</td>
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<td>Ps. 90:12 (1758/59)</td>
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<td>Ps. 118:27 (Morning [c. 1758-60])</td>
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<td>Ps. 130</td>
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<td>Ecc. 11:9</td>
<td>Wesley College, Bristol: D6/1, p. 242(e)</td>
<td>The manuscript also contains headings of sermons on Luke 18:3; Is. 27:13; John 9:30</td>
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<td>Isa. 1:18-20 ([c. 1757-60])</td>
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<td>Isa. 6</td>
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<td>Isa. 9:6 (25 Dec. 1758)</td>
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<td>Isa. 12:3 (Sept. 1784)</td>
<td>MARC: MAM Fl. 20</td>
<td>Non-extant; Referred to in H.F.E.A., ‘Recent Deaths’, <em>WMM</em> (1847), 1039.</td>
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<td>Isa. 26:3 (1763)</td>
<td>Works (C), 4:257</td>
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<td>Isa. 26:9</td>
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<td>This was a funeral sermon. Non-extant; Referred to in his sermon at the Birches, <em>Works (C)</em>, 67.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Isa. 27:13</td>
<td>Wesley College, Bristol: D6/1, p. 242 (e)</td>
<td>The manuscript also contains headings of sermons on Luke 18:3; Is. 27:13; John 9:30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Isa. 42:14 etc. (4 July 1773)</td>
<td>Non-extant; Preached at Hennington in Shifnal parish at the request of people there after an earthquake, apparently similar to the one at Madeley/Buildwas 27 May 1773. Cf. JF, <em>A Dreadful Phenomenon</em>, (1773), 26</td>
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<td>Isa. 52:1</td>
<td>Works (B), 7:474-475; Also pub. in</td>
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<td>Isaiah 53:11</td>
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<td>The Preacher’s Analyst (1884)</td>
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<td>Isaiah 66:2</td>
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<td>Jeremiah 17:19</td>
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<td>Works (B), 7:477-79</td>
<td>'Headings of sermon on Jerem. 23, v. 5f, in hand of Fletcher’, from D. MacCulloch Catalogue</td>
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<td>Jeremiah 23:5-6</td>
<td>Wesley College, Bristol; D6/1, p. 242 (c)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ezekiel 2:7 (Dec. 1761)</td>
<td>Works (B), 7:255-267; WMM (1821): 321-25, 361-66; WDS, 68-69 [extract]</td>
<td>Published manuscript sermon.; ‘Last Sunday I delivered to you, my dear brethren, the most awful message that was ever sent from God, the mighty God, to his undone creature man... I besought you to enter into covenant with him, yea, to accept your Maker for the husband of your souls... However, as it is to be feared, that the last sermon we have heard, and the last communion we have received, have not had a better effect upon most of us than the foregoing ones; the want of outward reformation among us last week having visibly betrayed the want of inward conversion, I propose to-day to expostulate with these my unconverted hearers, and to show them that, notwithstanding their coming now and then into the house of the Lord, they are most rebellious against him.’ [1]</td>
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<td>Ezekiel 18:31/Matt. 18:3 (24 Feb., 1762)</td>
<td>MARC: MAM Fl. 20</td>
<td>Works (B), 7:517-19</td>
<td>'This Sermons was preached on a Fast-day, in 1762.' (Fn. of JB in Fletcher, Works). Introduction begins: 'The King, by his pious proclamation, the Church, throughout the service we have performed, and God himself, in the solemn words of the text, call upon all preachers to shake off the dust of indolence, and put on the armour of God, on this mournful day.' (7:313). There was a fast proclaimed by the King for Friday, 12 March 1762. There were (at least) three other sermons, published individually for this fast day by John Edwards, Leeds (Is. 55:7), Richard Penneck, St. Catherine, Cree (Ps. 4:5); James Sheeles, St. George the Martyr, London (Jer. 3:21-22)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ezekiel 28:31</td>
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<td>Works (B), 7:571-19</td>
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<td>Daniel 3</td>
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<td>Ref'd. in The Furious Butcher Humbled.</td>
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<td>Joel 2:13</td>
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<td>Amos 6:12</td>
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<td>Works (B), 7:507-509</td>
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<td>Zech. 4:6-7</td>
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<td>Works (B), 7:483-85</td>
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<td>ASW: A/1/2</td>
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<td>Matt. 5:3-4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Matt. 5:20</td>
<td>ASW: A/1/2</td>
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<td>‘This is the reason why our holy Church concludes asserts in the 13 of her 39 articles that works done before the grace of Christ and the inspiration of his Spirit are not pleasant to God and for as much as they are not done as God commands, none ought to doubt but they have the nature of sin’.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Matt. 5:44</td>
<td>Wesley College, Bristol: D2/114; (copy; on same sheet as letter, D5/49); Duplicate at D6/3/1, p. 73</td>
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<td>Matt. 6:9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Matt. 6:33</td>
<td>MARC: MAM Fl. 20</td>
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<td>Possibly the sermon he preached to a ‘numerous congregation’ on Shrove Tuesday, 1774? See JF→JI, 27 Mar. 1774, FL, 221-22.</td>
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<td>Matt. 7:13-14</td>
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<td>Matt. 9:16-17</td>
<td>MARC: MAM Fl. 20</td>
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<td>Matt. 11 (1758)</td>
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<td>Matt. 11:12 (1763)</td>
<td>Hand written copy</td>
<td>Works (C), 4:261-63</td>
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<tr>
<td>[Martindale?] at SRO: 2280/16/80;</td>
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<td>Unpublished outline sermon. Note on handwritten copy reads: 'This is a copy of one of Mr. Fletcher’s memo or notes of a sermon – taken from a scrap of paper &amp; which was in his own hand writing – This scrap of paper &amp; Mr. Fs writing was given to a Mr. Smith of Sheffield.' How this scrap got from Mr. Smith to Drew University is unknown.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Matt. 11:28</td>
<td>GCAH: John Fletcher’s Sermon Notes, 1306-5-3.2/C; Hand written copy at SRO: 2280/16/23</td>
<td>‘Original Outlines of Two Sermons’, ed. by S. Brocksop, in CMFV (1848), 171-72</td>
<td>Applications for various states of conversion drawn directly from the text via metaphors</td>
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<td>Matt. 14:24-27</td>
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<td>Matt. 14:30</td>
<td>Works (B), 7:487-488</td>
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<td>Matt. 21:38</td>
<td>Works (B), 7:469-70; Also pub. in The Preacher’s Analyst (1884), p. 206.</td>
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<td>ASW: A/1/8</td>
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<td>Luke 2:14</td>
<td>Works (B), 7:506-507</td>
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<td>Luke 4:4, 18-19</td>
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<td>Works (B), 7:482-83</td>
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<td>Luke 12:20</td>
<td>Works (C), 4: 263-67; Cox, Life of JWF.</td>
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<td>Luke 15:24</td>
<td>MAM Fl. 31 (H)</td>
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² There was an eclipse on 1 April 1764, and given Fletcher’s title of this sermon, it seems likely that this would have been the occasion for his sermon. See Samuel Dunn, ‘Observations on the Eclipse of the Sun, April 1, 1764, at Brompton-Park’, Philosophical Transactions 54 (1764), 114-117.
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<td>Wesley College, Bristol: D6/1, p. 242 (a)</td>
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<td>John 3:14-15</td>
<td>GCAH: 1306-5-3:2/A</td>
<td>Works (B), 7:511-512; Works (C), 4:217-18</td>
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<td>John 3:36</td>
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<td>John 5:40 (Jan. 1762)</td>
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<td>Works (B), 7:298-312; WMM (1821): 651. Ref. to this sermon in WDS, 70.</td>
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<td>John 7:37-38</td>
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<td>Wesley College, Bristol: D6/1, p. 242 (e)</td>
<td>Headings of sermon on John 9:30 on single folded sheet with sermons on Luke 18:8; Ecc. 11:9; Isa. 27:13</td>
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<td>Acts 1:5</td>
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<td>Works (B), 7:473-74; Also pub. in The Preacher’s Analyst (1884), p. 208</td>
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<td>Acts 13:40-41</td>
<td>Works (C), 7:496-97</td>
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<td>Acts 26:28 (Dec. 1765)</td>
<td>MARC: MAM Fl. 20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acts 26:28 (1782)</td>
<td>MARC: MAM Fl. 20</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ref’d in a footnote by Moore in his Life of Mrs. Fletcher: ‘Mr. Fletcher’s text was, Almost thou perswidest me to be a Christian, Acts xxvi, 28. He showed what it was to be a Christian, from the liturgy which had just been read: beginning with the general confession, and the authoritative declaration of pardon to those &quot;who truly repent, and unfeignedly believe his holy Gospel,&quot; and going on to that &quot;cleansing of our hearts by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love him, and worthily magnify his holy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord.&quot; He then proceeded to persuade them, with an earnestness and power that astonished the congregation, some of whom seemed to doubt if he were not more than human.'</td>
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<td>Rom. 1:16</td>
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<td>Rom. 2: 4-5</td>
<td>Cliff College, ASW: A/1/2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rom. 6:14</td>
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<td>Works (C), 7:231-253; WMM (1821): 161-65, 201-05</td>
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<td>Cf. L.F. Church, ‘Fletcher of Madeley—An Interesting Manuscript’, <em>LQHR</em> 176 (1951), 97-101; (Mss. includes 5 diff. outlines for this sermon)</td>
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<td>Works (C), 7:490-91</td>
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<td>Works (C), 7:501-; Works (D), 4:211-14; Re: Date, cf. JF to James Ireland, 30 Dec. 1769 and 13 Jan. 1770.</td>
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<td>This was the last sermon Fletcher preached before he died.</td>
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<td>2 Tim. 3:5</td>
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<td>Heb. 1 / 27 Jan. 1765</td>
<td>Miss Hatton, 31 Jan 1765 in <em>FL</em>, p. 155-56</td>
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<td>Heb. 2:3</td>
<td>'Original Outlines of Two Sermons', ed. by S. Brocksop, in <em>CMFV</em> (1848), 203-204.</td>
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<td>Cox, <em>Life of Fletcher</em> (1825), 81.; Unpublished sermon referenced by Cox being reported via Mr. Gorham who had it from Mr. [Henry] Venn.</td>
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<td>Christmas 1757</td>
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<td>[He that is born of God . . .]</td>
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<td>[Signs of uprightness/Natural Sin]</td>
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<td>New Chapel, City Road, London</td>
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<td>In JB’s notes in Fletcher, Works (C), 7.457: ‘Calling at London, Mr. Fletcher preached at the New Chapel, City Road, slept at Newington, April 27, and the next day set out for Bristol.’</td>
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<td>[Headings of sermon on Thomas]</td>
<td>Wesley College, Bristol: D6/1, p. 242</td>
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<td>[Thomas Lydia a New Creature]</td>
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Appendix 3
Fletcher’s Views on Children and Childhood

Fletcher’s educational strategies were shaped not only by ecclesiastical requirements but also by his philosophy of childhood and his theology of sin and salvation, about which he was explicit. In light of this, it is somewhat surprising that, while Fletcher’s late establishment of Sunday schools in his parish has been generally celebrated by biographers, little has actually been written on his early educational practises in the parish or his views on childhood and children which undergirded them, other than in passing remarks. One such comment intimates a contradiction between Fletcher’s allegedly strict views on children and his compassionate efforts at ministering to them in his parish:

Robert Southey wrote that ‘Mr. Wesley’s notions concerning education must have done great evil. No man was ever more thoroughly ignorant of the nature of children’ ... Fletcher’s views were scarcely different. ‘How excessively foolish’, [Fletcher] wrote, ‘are the plays of children. How full of mischief and cruelty the sports of boys’.

The Fletcher extract in this quotation is, however, taken quite out of its context. Fletcher’s statement was made in his Appeal, in which he was theologizing about the human condition of original sin and depravity from the least (i.e. children and youth) to the greatest (i.e. adult women and men). Rather than suggesting children were especially deviant, he was making a case that even in children the sinful nature can be observed. And unlike Wesley, whom Southey criticized for his exhorting ‘parents never to commend their children for anything’, Fletcher believed that praising them for their progress in faith and piety was essential, and he was commonly to be found among children, advocating for their earnestness and

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1 The first official Sunday schools in Madeley were established only a year before Fletcher’s death. See below in this chapter.
2 e.g. LJF, 64, 257; Cox, Life of Fletcher, 2nd edn., 94-95; MacDonald, Fletcher of Madeley, 176.
spiritual impressionability. Thus, it is worth exploring briefly Fletcher’s theology and views concerning children, from which his educational strategy flowed.

Fletcher, like many of his contemporaries, saw childhood as a distinct phase of human development, a topic much debated since the publication of Philippe Aries’s *Centuries of Childhood,* with an emerging, if loose, consensus that a ‘new world of childhood’ emerged in the eighteenth century. Fletcher’s poem, *La Grace et La Nature* (written towards the end of his life), is informative regarding his beliefs concerning the spirituality of children and the importance of nurturing them in faith while at an impressionable age. His poem in twenty-three cantos (originally titled *La Louange* [Praise]) was intended to evoke praise to God based on God’s goodness as seen in the whole of creation and upon the reasonableness of faith. His eighth canto contained ‘articles’ or sections which called people to worship according to their stage in life. Thus, his articles were written to: 1. Children; 2. Young Men; 3. Young Women; 4. Men (Fr: *Les Hommes faits*); and 5. Those in old age. Clearly Fletcher understood some distinction between the Sitz im Leben of children and that of maturing youth and mature (working) adults, yet all these he viewed as providentially guarded by grace and capable of praising God. Infants he called to acknowledge God’s providence, ‘with Prattling lips attempt to lisp his praise’. For boys in their youth, Fletcher held up the examples of young Daniel, Samuel, Joseph, and David from the biblical narratives, and not least, the ‘Prince of Peace’, Jesus Christ who

Tho’ young amidst the dang’rous snares of sense,

He kept, inviolate, his innocence.

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7. J. Fletcher, *La Grace et la Nature*, Poème, 2nd edn. (London, 1785), M. Martindale (trans.) *A Poem Entitled Grace and Nature*, (Leeds, 1810). Many of Fletcher’s footnotes were extracted and added to the various editions of his collected *Works* after the standard edition was published by Benson, 1806-1810 (*WJF* (A)). The 1810 edition of the poem was printed and bound, matching the nine-volume *WJF* just mentioned, so as to form a supplemental tenth volume. It has not, to my knowledge, appeared in any edition of his *Works* since.
9. ‘Infants’ would typically have included children up to seven years of age. See *OED*, Mad. Bur. Reg.
11. Ibid. 10:123-25.
To girls in their youth he held up the examples of Esther’s modesty and urged them to resist ‘impure desire’ and to aspire to the ‘virtue, grace, and wisdom’ of Jesus’s mother, ‘Bless’d Mary’.12 From the two sections which follow in the poem, having working (i.e. employed) adults and the elderly as their subjects, it can be inferred that Fletcher’s distinction between age classes was shaped by: (1) graces prevalent in the respective life stage, and (2) temptations to sin particularly presented by each stage.13

In many ways, Fletcher adopted Enlightenment thought14 which shaped the way he developed religious education for children in his parish. Gregory has observed that the Lockean ‘concept of mind as a tabula rasa placed the decisive role on the religious teacher’, which impressed upon the clergy the significance of their role in the duty of Christian education. Fletcher’s view of original sin, however, placed the issue in even gloomier light, for the mind was not a blank slate, but rather, because of original sin, was prone towards actual sin and rebellion against God from birth. Yet Fletcher drew upon Locke’s philosophy to support his theology in defence of human free will,15 which was foundational to his Arminian belief that children must be taught Christian principles if they were to be convinced of the truth of God’s grace and their duty to obey God in response to that grace; for contra-Calvin, God will not compel anyone. Fletcher believed they must be taught the principles of grace, because even from a very young age, children experience their own tendency towards actual sin (as opposed to original sin).

Fletcher’s concern for children was also quite practical, and despite the fact that he was not a social reformer in the sense of challenging the norms of his day, such as child labour,16 he had a particular compassion for children. Far from a stern breaking of the will, Fletcher’s method was to exhort and encourage. Sometimes he contrasted the softness of heart in children to the hardness of ‘grown up people [who] stand fast in their stupidity’.17 Benson who witnessed his work with children in the parish wrote:

12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
14 RS, 201-205.
16 IRS (3rd), 194-95.
17 JF→JI, 15 July 1778.
Wherever the smallest religious desire was expressed, he pronounced a blessing upon it; and wherever the weakest endeavour after spiritual attainments was discoverable, he encouraged it with his congratulations, and strengthened it with his prayers.\textsuperscript{18}

During Fletcher’s convalescence in Switzerland, when at times he seemed to be recovering from his illness, he would visit with the children from the surrounding villages. He began by speaking to and writing hymns for them. He quickly became so popular that crowds of nearly a hundred began to gather when he would speak, some of whom were parents brought by their children to hear their pastoral friend.\textsuperscript{19}

His ministry in Switzerland reminded him of his dear children in Madeley, and he wrote to his curate: ‘I recommend to our care the most helpless of the flock, I mean the children … they most want your help; and they are the most likely to benefit by it … children are not yet quite hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.’\textsuperscript{20} One of the children of the parish who grew up under Fletcher’s watchful care, John Fennell, described Fletcher’s method in dealing with children individually:

[H]e spared no pains to reprove, rebuke, or exhort us; sometimes appearing among us with all the majesty of a judge, minutely examining every part of our conduct, and at other times with all the affection and sympathy of a tender Father, with his eyes brimful of tears, and lips open in blessing and pious admonitions.\textsuperscript{21}

It was in this part of his duty that Fletcher appears to have experienced the most success and enjoyment, for he wrote to his schoolmaster, ‘If I were not a minister, I would be a schoolmaster, to have the pleasure of bringing up children in the fear of the Lord.’\textsuperscript{22} In truth, Fletcher’s role in the parish was never far from that of a schoolmaster.

\textsuperscript{18} *LJF*, 81.
\textsuperscript{19} *JF\rightarrow JI*, 15 July 1781. During this time in Switzerland, there was an educational reform movement around J.H. Pestalozzi. It is uncertain whether Fletcher came into contact with the movement. However, given Fletcher’s increased work with children during this period of his life and the fact that upon his return to England, some of his most formative work was with children, it is curious. I owe this observation to P.S. Forsaith.
\textsuperscript{20} *JF\rightarrow A.* Greaves, 7 Mar. 1780.
\textsuperscript{21} *WMM* (1801), 92-93; On Fennell, see BI.
\textsuperscript{22} *JF\rightarrow J.* Owen, 14 Feb. 1781.
Appendix 4
Biographical Index

This index includes all of the major figures mentioned in this thesis, along with numerous others, primarily Madeley or Shropshire coalfield residents who were either church members, society members, or both. Codes have been used to identify the various roles or connexions of individuals to Madeley. There were some, mostly parishioners, who Fletcher mentioned by name in his letters to the parish but little or no information is available for them. They are listed here because they were significant enough for Fletcher to mention and thus this table may serve as a reference point for further researches. The following codes are used to identify the various connexions of individuals:

- **A** = Acquaintance of JF
- **C** = Madeley Churchgoer
- **CF** = Coalfield Resident
- **L** = Local Preacher
- **R** = Church of England Clergyman (i.e. Reverend)
- **S** = Religious Society Participant
- **W** = Wesleyan Itinerant
- **O** = Other

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<th>Person</th>
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<th>Codes</th>
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<td>Aston [née Wood?], S[arah?]</td>
<td>Aston was a coalfield resident mentioned in Fletcher’s correspondence. <strong>Sources:</strong> JF → W. Wase, 15 Sept. 1780.</td>
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<td>Banks, T</td>
<td>There were several Banks families throughout the coalfield. A T. Banks was mentioned by Fletcher in a letter to his parish, indicating that a religious society met in his house sometime prior to and after 1779. <strong>Sources:</strong> JF → M. Onions, 18 May 1779; JF → J. Owen, 14 Feb. 1781.</td>
<td>C, CF, S</td>
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<td>Barnard, Mary (c.1707-97)</td>
<td>Mary Barnard was one of Fletcher’s ‘first children’ [i.e. converts]. The <strong>BCP</strong>, particularly the Collects were influential in her conversion. She lived at Coalpit Bank, but attended church at Madeley. <strong>Sources:</strong> M. Fletcher, ‘Account of Mary Barnard’, <strong>WMM</strong> (1800), 223.</td>
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<td>Bartlam, Elizabeth (1758-1835)</td>
<td>Elizabeth Bartlam was the daughter of Richard and Ann Bartlam of Madeley Wood. She was a member of the Fletchers’ society in Madeley Wood from 1783 and was also a member of John Fletcher’s class meeting. Her brother was John Bartlam, who had begun attending Mr Fletcher’s class meeting the previous year, and it may have been her brother who brought her into the class meeting. <strong>Sources:</strong> <strong>WMM</strong> (1835), 318; Mad. Bap. Reg.</td>
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Bartlam, John (1766-1828)

John was born in Madeley, the son of Richard and Anna Bartlam. He was a collier by trade. He was ‘thoughtless’ in his youth but was impressed towards religious things in ‘meetings for reading and prayer, held by Mrs. Fletcher in the Vicarage’ around 1782. John Fletcher, observing Bartlam’s attendance at the meetings ‘soon took him by the hand’, and he became a member of Mr. Fletcher’s class meeting. After John Fletcher’s death in 1785, Joshua Gipin took over the leadership of the class meeting, in which Bartlam continued a member. In 1789 he married Elizabeth Nicholls of Madeley. Sometime thereafter he moved from Madeley (Town) to Madeley Wood where he was appointed a class leader himself and a position in which he served until his death. By the encouragement of his friends, he was also appointed a local preacher. He attended both Madeley church and chapel meetings in the parish from the time of his conversion. 

Sources: WMM (1828), 212-213.

Bayley, Cornelius (1751-1812)


Beard, Richard (?-1764)

Beard was one of Fletcher’s early adversaries. He was a ‘mariner’ by trade. Sources: MWCA; Mad. Bur. Reg.; N. Cox and B.S. Trinder, Miners and Mariners of the Severn Gorge (Chichester, 2000).

Benson, Joseph (1748-1821)

While still quite young, Benson impressed John Wesley with his knowledge and devotion, and was thus appointed classics master at Kingswood. Benson attempted several times to procure Anglican ordination, but was never successful. His Methodism brought him into conflict when he was at St Edmund Hall, Oxford. He served under Fletcher’s authority as headmaster of Lady Huntingdon’s college, a position which he resigned due to the Countess’s reproach of his Arminian doctrines. He became a Wesleyan itinerant in 1771. He knew Fletcher well, and spent time with him in Madeley on several occasions. He wrote a biography of Fletcher, and was the first editor of Fletcher’s Works (1806-1810). It was his proposal for reforming Methodism as a daughter denomination within the Church of England that prompted Fletcher’s own plan. Sources: J. Benson, Memoirs of the Rev. Joseph Benson. J. McDonald (ed.) London, 1822; Treffry, R. Memoirs of the Rev. Joseph Benson. New York, 1853; DEB.
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<tr>
<th>Person</th>
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<tr>
<td>Berridge, John (1716-93)</td>
<td>Berridge was the evangelical and Calvinist, vicar of Everton and he employed an energetic preaching ministry in his parish which was akin to that of William Grimshaw. Fletcher seems to have met him in March 1760 when he travelled to Everton, meeting up with John Wesley there and hearing Berridge preach. Sources: JF→CW, 1 Mar. 1760; DEB.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blakemore, John (1778-1861)</td>
<td>Blakemore was born in Waters-Upton, the parish of Thomas Hatton, a friend and ministerial colleague of John Fletcher. Blakemore’s father was converted under the preaching of Hatton and his mother under the preaching of Fletcher. He remembered sitting under Fletcher’s preaching as a young boy, and had ‘vivid recollections’ of hearing Mrs Fletcher. He was thus raised in the Established Church and also receptive to the Methodists, one of whose preachers he himself was converted under in 1800. He became a local preacher in 1804, a position in which he served for 55 years. Sources: WMM (1861), 857-58.</td>
<td>CF, L</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blummer, Margaret (1750-?)</td>
<td>Margaret Blummer was the daughter of Richard and Margaret of Madeley. Fletcher sent greetings to her in a letter to William Wase in 1780. Sources: JF→W. Wase, 15 Sept. 1780.</td>
<td>CF</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brooke, Mrs</td>
<td>Brooke was a common name, and there is not enough information to assess who this was, other than that she was a parishioner to whom Fletcher sent greetings in a letter to Michael Onions in 1779. Sources: JF→M. Onions, 18 May 1779.</td>
<td>CF</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brown, James (??)</td>
<td>Brown served at various times as Fletcher’s curate at Madeley. Sources: LJF, 124; Wesley, Works, 21:454, n. 69.</td>
<td>R</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cartwright, Henry (1732-79)</td>
<td>Henry Cartwright was a Madeley churchwarden 1771-72 and the husband of one of Fletcher’s society members, Mary Cartwright.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cartwright [née Dodd], Mary (a.k.a. Molly) (1730-1812)</td>
<td>Mary was the wife of Henry Cartwright and the mother of Mary and Patty Cartwright, all of whom appear to have been members of Fletcher’s religious societies. In 1775 when Mary was taken ill, Fletcher wrote a meditation for her, sent in a letter from the vicarage, to encourage her faith. Her husband died in 1779 while Fletcher was on the Continent, and he wrote to comfort her through William Wase. She had six children, only three of whom survived beyond infancy (Nancy, Henry, Martha, Elizabeth, Mary, and a child whose first name was not recorded in the register, suggesting a death during childbirth). Sources: JF→M. Cartwright, 1775; JF→T. York and D. Edmunds, Nov. 1777; JF→W. Wase, 15 Sept. 1780; JF→M. Onions, Mar. 1781; JF→W. Wase, 15 Sept. 1781; JF→J. Owen, 14 Feb. 1781; JF→M. Onions, Mar. 1781; Mad. Bap. Reg.; Mad. Mar. Reg.; Mad. Bur. Reg.</td>
<td>C, CF, S</td>
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</table>
Cartwright, Patty (1770-85)
Patty was the daughter of Henry and Mary Cartwright of Madeley. She was a member of one of Fletcher’s societies in Madeley and was also his goddaughter. Sources: JF→W. Wase, 11 Feb. 1779; JF→M. Onions, 18 May 1779; JF→J. Owen, 14 Feb. 1781. Mad. Bur. Reg.

Chambre, Rowland (1728-96)
Chambre was vicar of Madeley from 1753-60. He was related by marriage to several prominent Shropshire families, including the Hills and including a Rev. Prytherch with whom Fletcher was opposed briefly in 1761/62. He was a subscribing member of the SPCK from 1762 and seems to have had an earnest concern for the salvation of his parishioners. Sources: An Account of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (London, 1776), 21.

Child, Francis (1740-1806)
Child was born in Shifnal, Shropshire, but settled later in London where he was eventually made a Local Preacher by the Methodists there. Sources: WMM (1807), 281.

Costerdine, [Robert]
Costerdine was the Wesleyan preacher of the Chester Circuit (of which Madeley was a station) in 1778-1779. Sources: Hills Arrangement, JF→W. Wase, 11 Feb. 1779.

Cox, Robert (?-?)
Perpetual curate of St Leonard’s Church, Bridgnorth from 1819-1824. He did not know John or Mary Fletcher personally, though he may have known Mary Tooth and drew upon his personal correspondence with Melville Horne for his writing of The Life of the Rev. John William Fletcher, Late Vicar of Madeley, Shropshire, 1st edn. (London, 1822); 2nd edn. Revised and Enlarged by the Insertion of Several Documents (London, 1825). Sources: (see above).

Cranage, George
George was a loam workman. The first Coalbrookdale religious society met in his house. He bought his land from Abraham Darby (a space of 30 by 22 yards) in 1748. Cranage’s daughter Jane (a.k.a. ‘Jany’) married William Wase who was one of Fletcher’s lay helpers in managing the societies. Sources: SRO: 1987/31/1-2; JF→W. Wase, Nov. 1777.

De Courcy, Richard (1743-1803)
De Courcy graduated from Trinity College, Dublin, and after being refused orders by the Archbishop there, removed to England where he was ordained. After serving as a curate in several parishes, he was eventually appointed to St Alkmund, Shrewsbury where he served from 1774 until his death. Fletcher had a hand in his coming to England and settling in Shropshire, with hopes that his evangelicalism would strengthen the Church in the district. Sources: JF→CH, 12 Apr. 1769; JF→CH, 27 May 1769; DEB. On De Courcy’s evangelical influence in the area, including cooperation with Methodists with whom Fletcher was also familiar, see ‘Memoir of Mrs. Sarah Hill, of Liverpool’, WMM (1851): 1-5.
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<tr>
<td><strong>Dorrel, Mary (née Moore) (1744-1804)</strong></td>
<td>Mary was born in Bileston, Derbyshire, the daughter of John Moore. She was hired out at a young age to a respectable family in which domestics were required to attend church (apparently in Shifnal). She married Joseph Dorrel (alt. Darral) of Coalbrookdale, Madeley, an iron founder in 1776. She and her husband attended both morning and afternoon services in Madeley church faithfully, where she was converted under the preaching of A.B. Greaves during the summer of 1778. Sometime thereafter, she and her husband joined a society and continued their attendance at the church. She was a frequent visitor of the sick and the poor and shared openly at society meetings. Samuel Walter, curate of Madeley, preached her funeral sermon from the text of Numbers 23:10 in February, 1804. Walter wrote her biography for publication in the <em>WMM</em>. <strong>Sources:</strong> [Samuel] W[alter], ‘Account of Mary Dorrel’, <em>WMM</em> (1805), 463-468.</td>
<td>C, CF, S</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Dorrel (alt. Darral), Joseph (c.1751-?)</strong></td>
<td>Joseph was born in Shropshire (possibly in either Shifnal or Dawley). Before his marriage he moved to Coalbrookdale, Madeley, where he was religiously active. In 1776 he married Mary Moore, a domestic working in the neighbouring parish of Shifnal. Joseph and Mary attended both morning and afternoon services in Madeley church faithfully. Sometime after the summer of 1778, they joined a society and continued their attendance at the church. <strong>Sources:</strong> [Samuel] W[alter], ‘Account of Mary Dorrel’, <em>WMM</em> (1805), 463-468.</td>
<td>C, CF, S</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Edmunds, Daniel (1712-?)</strong></td>
<td>Daniel, though an early adversary of Fletcher’s ‘Methodism’, was reconciled to Fletcher’s methods and was involved in building the school house at Madeley Wood. He was married to Winifred Edmunds (née Roberts). Their son, John, became a local printer and printed several of Fletcher’s posthumously published works. Daniel Edmunds was a churchwarden at several points during Fletcher’s incumbency. <strong>Sources:</strong> JF→T. York and D. Edmunds, Nov. 1777.</td>
<td>C, CF, S</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Edmunds [née Roberts], Winifred (1711-?)</strong></td>
<td>Winifred was born in Madeley, the daughter of Peter and Elizabeth. Her husband was one of Fletcher’s early adversaries who later became both an advocate and a member of Fletcher’s societies. Winifred appears to have been a member of the society as well, and Fletcher sent her greetings through correspondence with her husband. <strong>Sources:</strong> Mad. Bap. Reg.; JF→T. York and D. Edmunds, Nov. 1777.</td>
<td>C, CF, S</td>
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Eyton, John

Eyton was vicar of Wellington from 1804 to 1823, though he knew JF well before his death in 1785. He gave the eulogy at MF’s funeral in 1815. John and subsequently, Mary Fletcher, were influential in the lives of many who came to take Orders in the Church of England. Also see the recent articles which make connections between the Fletchers’ ministry and the Brontë family. Sources: M. Walker, ‘William Morgan, B.D. 1782-1858’, Brontë Studies 30 (Nov. 2005), 213-30; I. and C. Emberson, ‘Turns in the Circle of Friendship: “Uncle Fennell”, 1762-1841’, Brontë Studies 30 (July 2005), 141-50.

Fennel, John (1762-1841)

Fennel was the son of Thomas Fennel and Mary (née Hodgkiss) Fennel of Madeley. He was also John Fletcher’s godson. Fletcher visited his house weekly to encourage him in faith and/or admonish him. He eventually took Anglican Orders and became, through marriage, related to the Brontës. Sources: M. Walker, ‘William Morgan, B.D. 1782-1858’, Brontë Studies 30 (Nov. 2005), 213-30; I. and C. Emberson, ‘Turns in the Circle of Friendship: “Uncle Fennell”, 1762-1841’, Brontë Studies 30 (July 2005), 141-50; WMM (1801), 92-93.

Fennel [née Thursfield], [Eleanor] Nelly (1743-?)

Eleanor ‘Nelly’ Fennel was born in Broseley and married Thomas Fennel there in 1775. She was, with her husband, a religious society member. She moved to Madeley with her husband after their marriage. Sources: JF-W. Wase, 15 Sept. 1780; JF-J. Owen, 14 Feb. 1781.

Fennel, Thomas (1741-?)

Born in Madeley, Thomas Fennel was a society member and husband of Nelly (Thursfield) of Broseley, whom he married in 1775. Sources: JF-W. Wase, 15 Sept. 1780; JF-J. Owen, 14 Feb. 1781.

Ford, Mrs [Charlotte?]

Mrs Ford is unidentified other than being mentioned in one of Fletcher’s letters by name. Sources: JF-M. Onions, 18 May 1779.

Freeth, John (1731-1808)

Freeth was a publican who owned a coffee house in Birmingham. Nightly he sang his own songs to familiar tunes. A Unitarian and politically radical in his ideas, he agitated against the American War and Lord North’s ministry. Sources: J. Money, Experience and Identity: Birmingham and the West Midlands 1760-1800 (Manchester, 1977), 103-104; J.A. Langford, Notes and Queries (1870), 10-11.

Gilbert, Nathaniel (1761-1807)

Gilbert resided in Madeley in the early 1770s and attended the meeting at Madeley Wood. Sources: WMM (1830), 650.
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<tr>
<td>Gilpin, Joshua (1755-1828)</td>
<td>Gilpin served as unofficial curate in Madeley after Fletcher's return from the Continent, in 1781 and perhaps part of 1782. He took a room in the vicarage. He had not yet been ordained, and it seems likely that it was Fletcher's influence that led him to take holy orders. In any case, Fletcher's instruction was formative for Gilpin: 'I thankfully embraced the offered privilege of spending a few months beneath the roof of this exemplary man, to whom I was at that time an entire stranger: and I well remember how solemn an impression was made upon my heart, by the manner in which he received me.' He was instituted to the parish of Wrockwardine on 19 Dec. 1782 and to Buildwas (neighbouring Madeley) in 1796. Between 1796 and 1822 he held both incumbencies, thereafter serving only Wrockwardine until his death in 1828. Wrockwardine was a parish several miles north of Madeley in Shropshire. He was presented to the incumbency by Charles Talbot (1753-1827), Earl of Shrewsbury. It was largely through the influence of the Quaker ironmaster, Richard Reynolds, that Gilpin was appointed to the parish. Of his ministry, one of Gilpin's parishioners wrote of his being 'a very delightful Preacher but what is generally term'd a Methodist· but much more liberal in his Opinions then the generality of that sect'. <strong>Sources</strong>: Episcopal Register for Coventry and Lichfield, LRO: B/A/1/24. See his obituary in <em>The Episcopal Watchman</em>, 2 (20 Sept. 1828), 27; F.S.-&gt;[Henrietta Pennington, 5/6 Mar. 1802, SRO: 665/5972; Rathbone, <em>Letters of Richard Reynolds</em>, 46. Cradock Glascott-&gt;[CH, July 1781, extract printed in 'Biographical Sketch–The Rev. Cradock Glascott', <em>The Christian Treasury</em> (Edinburgh: John Johnstone, 1848), 100.</td>
<td>CF, R</td>
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<td>Glascott, Cradock (c.1743-1831)</td>
<td>Glascott was an Anglican clergyman who was Calvinist in persuasion. He was friends with Lady Huntingdon, and supplied Fletcher’s cure at times when Fletcher was at Trevecca. <strong>Sources</strong>: <em>DEB</em>, MABI; ‘Biographical Sketch–The Rev. Cradock Glascott’ in <em>The Christian Treasury</em> (1848), 99-100; Mad. Mar. Reg.</td>
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<td>Greaves, Alexander Benjamin (1750-1834)</td>
<td>Greaves matriculated from St Edmund Hall, Oxford in 1775, was ordained in the same year, and was licensed for a stipendiary curacy at Glossop. How Greaves was introduced to Madeley we can only speculate, which is perhaps why the question has not been addressed in other biographies or histories. Greaves was also entered (presumably to obtain a higher degree) in the books at Trinity College, Cambridge as ‘a Ten-Year Man’. His educational timeline places him in St Edmund Hall during the controversy over the expulsion of six evangelical students. Fletcher himself was implicated in the case when the Vice Chancellor charged one of the six students, James Matthews, with ‘being acquainted with reputed Methodists, Mr Venn, Mr Newton, Mr Townsend, and particularly with Mr Fletcher and Mr Davies.’ He also would have known Fletcher’s Trevecca colleague and classical master of Wesley’s Kingswood School, Joseph Benson, who was a student at St Edmund’s from 1769 to 1770. Benson’s evangelicalism caused problems for him with his tutor at St Edmund’s as well, leading to his leaving Oxford, though more amicably than had been the case with the expelled students. Incidentally, Greaves would have been familiar with the controversies over evangelicalism and may well have been introduced to Fletcher by Benson and would have known of Fletcher’s evangelical ministry as vicar of Madeley. Sources: Alum. Oxon.; JF  W. Wase, 7 Mar. 1780; Lichfield Episcopal Register, LRO B/A/1/23.</td>
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| Handley, Thomas (1766-c.1800) | Thomas was the son of Thomas and Elizabeth Handley of Madeley. Early in life he ‘lived according to the course of this world, following the multitude to do evil, particularly in reveling, and what are called pastimes, where he was accustomed to divert himself and his thoughtless companions, by playing on the fiddle’. He was converted under his mother’s influence and prayers during a time of sickness. He was a member of the Methodist society at Coalbrookdale. After his conversion and continuing into his adulthood, he frequently visited those who engaged in his former revelries to ‘entreat them to return to the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls.’ Sources: Samuel Taylor, ‘Short Account of the Conversion, Experience, and Happy Death of Thomas Handley’, WMM (1805), 505-506. | C, CF, S |

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1 He is not the Rev. Mr. Greaves who was a friend and supporter of the students and was put under oath to coerce his testimony in the trial as mentioned by Sir Richard Hill. This was probably Thomas Greaves of Yorkshire who matriculated from St Edmund Hall, Oxford on 22 December 1765. There is no clear evidence of a familial connection to Alexander Benjamin Greaves. See R. Hill, Pietas Oxoniensis, 5. Also see C.K. Firman, ‘A Footnote on Methodism in Oxford’, Church History, 29:2 (1960), 161-66.

2 Hill, Pietas Oxoniensis, 18.

3 J. MacDonald, Memoirs of Benson, 21-25.
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<tr>
<td>Harper, Mr</td>
<td>Harper was a parishioner mentioned in Fletcher’s correspondence. Sources: JF→ to T. York and D. Edmunds, Nov. 1777.</td>
<td>CF</td>
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<tr>
<td>Harper, Mrs</td>
<td>Identity unknown other than that Fletcher sent greetings to her via Thomas York. Sources: JF→ W. Wase, Nov. 1777; JF→ T. York, 15 Sept. 1780.</td>
<td>CF</td>
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<tr>
<td>Harris, Howell (1714-73)</td>
<td>Harris was the founder of Welsh Methodism. He was converted in 1735 and was brought into contact with the English revival between 1737-39. He preached in the open air, itinerated, and established religious societies. He remained a member of the Church of England throughout his life. Also, he was a friend of Lady Huntingdon’s and was influential in convincing Fletcher to serve as the first president of her college at Trevecca. Sources: DMBk; E. Morgan, The Life and Times of Howell Harris (Holywell, 1852); DEB.</td>
<td>A, R</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hatton, Miss</td>
<td>Miss Hatton was a correspondent of JF. Apparently the daughter of Samuel Hatton, she was a resident of Wem, Shropshire. She was possibly the niece of Thomas Hatton, Rector of Waters Upton (from 1764) whom Fletcher encouraged to take a Shropshire living in 1762 and with whom he shared an extra-parochial ministry in the parish of Wombridge. Thomas Hatton’s father was the Rev. Alexander Hatton, Third Master of Shrewsbury School, who also had a son named Samuel. Sources: Letters of JF→ Miss Hatton in FL, passim; Alum. Cantab; JF→ CW, 22 Aug. 1764; JF→ T. Hatton, 4 Aug. 1762, WMM (1829), 175.</td>
<td>CF</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hatton, Thomas (1736-1807)</td>
<td>Hatton was born in Shrewsbury, the son of the Shrewsbury clergyman, Rev. Alexander Hatton. He served a cure on the Isle of Wight for a short time after his ordination. Hatton was appointed to Waters Upton in 1764 where he served until his death in 1807. Fletcher mentions in two letters to CW that Hatton took a second parish, the parish of Studley, but records of this appointment could not be found, other than a subscription by ‘Rev. Mr. Hutton, vicar of Studley’ for J. Jordan, Welcombe Hills ... A Poem (London, 1777). He preached John Fletcher’s funeral sermon on 17 Aug. 1785. Sources: Parish Registers of Waters Upton, [digital CD book] (Cromer, 2005); Alum. Cantab; LMF; 1:211-212.</td>
<td>CF, R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazledine, William (1765-1849)</td>
<td>William was born in Coalbrookdale, Madeley, the son of Thomas and Elizabeth. He was influenced at a very early age by Fletcher’s teaching, which ‘laid the foundation of a strictly moral and religious character.’ He referred to Fletcher’s influence throughout his life. He did not join a society until 1798. He attended the six o’clock Sunday morning meeting at Coalbrookdale. Sources: WMM (1849), 206.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Hinksman, James (1735-?)</strong></td>
<td>Hinksman was born in the neighbouring Shropshire parish of Sutton Maddock but removed to Madeley, possibly at the time of his marriage to Ann Parker (b. 7 May 1738; dau. of Walter and Ann Parker) of Madeley (3 Feb. 1765). He was the son of John and Rebecca Hinksman. He served on the parish vestry, was a churchwarden from 1767-68, and was a person of some standing, for the parish attempted to assign apprentices to him. <strong>Sources:</strong> JF→J. Owen, 14 Feb. 1781; MARC: MAM Fl. 3/15/21.</td>
<td>C, CF</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Hinton, William (c. 1736-?)</strong></td>
<td>Hinton [Jr.] matriculated from Christ Church, Oxford, 1756, graduating B.A. 1760, M.A. 1764, and D.D. 1769. He was ordained deacon in 1760 and priest in 1765, though he seems to have resided in Madeley Wood, where his father was the local grocer, until he was appointed Rector of Kinnderley, Shropshire (Lichfield Diocese) which he served 1765-81 (not Kinnersley, Herefordshire as Forsaith has suggested, <em>UL</em>, 136). He held St Martin, Birmingham in plurality with Kinnderley 1779-81. Hinton kept his Madeley roots, even while away, as a partner in the Madeley Wood Furnace Company from September 1760. <strong>Sources:</strong> Alum. Oxon.; CCED; SRO: 1987/60/5; 1681/132/25. It is speculative, but possible that Rev. Hinton was the agitator who wrote two letters from Birmingham in opposition to JF. These letters are undated.</td>
<td>CF, R</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Hill, Noel, First Baron Berwick of Attingham (1745-89)</strong></td>
<td>Noel was one of Fletcher’s students during his early years in England. He was the son of Thomas and Susanna Maria Hill. Following his education under Fletcher, he studied at Cambridge, graduating (B.A.) in 1763. He served several years as MP for Shrewsbury and was made First Baron Berwick of Attingham in 1784. His brother, Samuel, had a less fortunate path, dying of dissipation in his twenties. <strong>Sources:</strong> Alum. Cantab.; Coulton, <em>Shropshire Squire</em>, idem, ‘Tutor to the Hills’.</td>
<td>A, CF</td>
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<td><strong>Hocart, James (1834-99)</strong></td>
<td>Hocart was born in Guernsey, and after becoming a Wesleyan minister, moved to France where he helped to establish the Methodist Church, later serving as the president of the French Conference on fifteen different occasions (see <em>Hill’s Arrangement</em>, 199). He wrote a manuscript on Fletcher’s family background (J. Hocart, ‘Details of the Life &amp; Family of John Fletcher’) which is at MARC. <strong>Sources:</strong> D. Bradley, ‘Death List of a Day’, <em>New York Times</em> (20 Feb. 1899), 7. Streiff discusses Fletcher’s education but makes no mention of this important account by Hocart, who had access to records apparently now lost. See Streiff, <em>Reluctant Saint</em>, 13-17.</td>
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Horne, Melvill[e] (c. 1761-1841)

Horne was a cousin of Nathaniel Gilbert. He met Fletcher when he was seventeen years old (i.e. c. 1777). He followed Fletcher at Madeley, though only as curate to the new vicar, Henry Burton. In the 1790s, Horne left Madeley as a missionary to Sierra Leone. He returned to England a few years later, serving first at Olney and then at Christ Church, Macclesfield. He remained on close terms with Mary Fletcher, under whose influence he had originally been appointed to Madeley. However, he separated from the Methodists in later life. He edited and published Fletcher’s *Rules* in 1788 and his *Letters*, along with some sermon fragments and theological treatises, as *Posthumous Pieces* in 1791. Sources: LMF; FL; *Rules*.

Ireland, James (1724-1814)

Ireland was a Bristol sugar merchant and close friend of John Fletcher. He travelled to the Continent with Fletcher in 1770 and was known to frequently send gifts of wine, port, and even clothing to Fletcher during his incumbency at Madeley. He also attempted to get Wesley to ‘tamely recant’ his *Minutes* at the early stage of the Calvinist-Arminian Controversy. Sources: JF → JW, 24 June 1771; Letters to James Ireland in FL; DEB.

Jones, William (1764-1842)


Lees, [Roden] Serjeant

Lees was a society member at Madeley and mentioned in some of Fletcher’s correspondence. Sources: JF → J. Owen, 14 Feb. 1781.

Leir (alt. Lear), [Thomas] (c.1738-1812)

Leir matriculated to Wadham College Oxford in 1756 and was ordained a deacon and priest in May and June (respectively), 1760. Leir was the rector and Patron of Ditcheat, Somerset. He appears to have been the first guest preacher in Fletcher’s pulpit in August, 1762. Sources: Alum. Oxon.; CCEd; G. Sweetman, *A History of Wincanton, Somerset* (London, 1903).

Legge, William, Second Earl of Dartmouth (1731-1801)

William Legge, second Earl of Dartmouth, was ‘converted to “serious religion” through [the] Countess of Huntingdon around 1755.’ He was a particular advocate of evangelical educational initiatives for children. In addition to his support for the Fletchers after their marriage in 1781, he had taken an interest in Mary Bosanquet’s educational work at Cross Hall (near Leeds) from the late 1760s. Sources: See B.D. Bargar, ‘Lord Dartmouth’s Patronage, 1772-1775’, *William and Mary Quarterly* 15:2 (1958), 191-200; See E. Elmsall to Lord Dartmouth, 20 Mar. 1769 and also, John Newton to the Earl of Dartmouth, 11 Feb. 1765, H.M.C. *The Manuscripts of the Earl of Dartmouth* (London, 1887-90); DEB.
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<th>Person</th>
<th>Biographical Information and Sources</th>
<th>Codes</th>
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<tr>
<td>Leveson-Gower, Granville, First Marquess of Stafford (1721-1803)</td>
<td>Granville Leveson-Gower, first Marquess of Stafford was the largest landowner in Staffordshire and owned multiple advowsons in that county and Shropshire. Fletcher corresponded with him regarding establishing religious societies in the parish of Lilleshall, which was in his patronage. Sources: ODNB; JF→[Lord Gower], MARC: MAM Fl. 36/4/6.</td>
<td>A, CF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ley, William, (fl. 1750-80)</td>
<td>Ley was a Wesleyan itinerant stationed in Ireland in 1759. He went to Madeley to be tutored by Fletcher, arriving in November 1762. He continued as one of Wesley’s itinerants and sought ordination on at least one occasion, (with Fletcher’s assistance). He was ordained by 1768 and was appointed curate of Lakenheath, Suffolk. Sources: UL, Wesley, Works, 21:263; JF→CW, 22 Nov. 1762; JF→CW, 30 Nov. 1762; JF→CW, 5 Jan. 1763; JF→CW, 16 Sept. 1763; JF→CW, 26 Dec. 1763; JF→CW, 31 Jan. 1765; JF→CW, 8 Oct. 1765; JF→CW, 21 Sept. 1771; S. Rogal, A Biographical Dictionary of 18th Century Methodism (New York, 1997).</td>
<td>C, CF, S, W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lloyd, [Mr]</td>
<td>No information about Mr Lloyd is certain, other than that Fletcher sent him greetings in a letter to William Wase. Sources: JF→W. Wase, 18 Feb. 1777.</td>
<td>C, CF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longmore, Benjamin (1779-?)</td>
<td>Benjamin was born at Coalbrookdale, Madeley, the son of George and Sarah Longmore in 1779. His parents were converted under the preaching and care of John Fletcher, after which they became members of one of his societies. Even though he was raised in ‘religious principles, followed up by the instructions, the prayers, and the good example of his pious parents’, it was not until Dr Thomas Coke preached a sermon in Madeley in 1799 that he was converted. After this, he began to attend the nine o’clock meeting of Mrs Fletcher on Sunday mornings. Sources: Edward Sumner, ‘Memoir of Benjamin Longmore’, WMM (1828), 577-85.</td>
<td>C, CF, S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriott, William (1753-1815)</td>
<td>Marriott came to Madeley in the 1760s to study under Fletcher’s tutorship. In his adult years, Marriott became a London stockbroker of some wealth and for twenty years supported two schools for the education of 100 poor children. Sources: DMBI; 223.</td>
<td>C, O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthews, Widow [Mary] (1713-80)</td>
<td>Mary and her family were some of Fletcher’s earliest society members in Madeley. She lived at Madeley Wood and Fletcher’s first meeting there met in her house, eventually called in derision the ‘Rock Church’. Sources: JF→W. Wase, 15 Sept. 1780.</td>
<td>C, CF, S</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Maxfield, Thomas (?-d. 1784)
Maxfield was associated with John Wesley from 1741 and was ordained in the Church of England in 1763 by the Bishop of Derry. His involvement with the perfection controversy eventually led him to separate from Wesley, but he maintained a friendship with Fletcher and preached in Madeley in the summer, 1765 and again in autumn, 1766. Sources: JF→CW, 8 Aug. 1765; Mad. Mar. Reg.; DEB.

Onions (née Jones), [Ann]
Ann was the wife of Michael Onions who was one of Fletcher’s earliest converts. Sources: JF→M. Onions, Mar. 1781.

Onions, Michael (1739-?)
Michael was born in Dawley, Shropshire, in 1739, the son of Edward and Joan. He moved to Madeley, where he was a potter by trade, when a young adult. He was, in 1760, one of Fletcher’s earliest converts. Onions was on his way to Broseley to fetch a fiddler for a dance one evening when he came across Fletcher who was lost in the parish, trying to find his way to the church. Michael showed him the way and attended church the following Sunday. He was soon after converted and became one of Fletcher’s early society members and a lay leader in the 1770s. N.B. This is not the same Michael Onions of whom Mrs Fletcher wrote a biography for the WMM but probably a relative. Sources: P.B. Power, The ‘I Wills’ of Christ (London, 1862), 242-43; W.C. Conant, Narratives of Remarkable Conversions and Revival Incidents (New York, 1858), 267-37; JF→M. Onions, 8 July 1777; JF→J. Owen, 14 Feb. 1781; JF→M. Onions, Mar. 1781.

Onions, [Mrs]
Onions was the mother of Michael Onions, who was one of Fletcher’s earliest converts. Mrs Onions was apparently one of Fletcher’s society members as well.

Onions, [Miss] [Sister of Michael Onions]
No information is certain other than that she was the sister of Michael Onions, who was a society leader in Madeley. Fletcher sent her greetings in a letter to Michael on occasion. Sources: JF→M. Onions, 8 July 1777; JF→M. Onions, Mar. 1781.

Owen, Miss
Owen was a member of one of Fletcher’s societies and the sister of John Owen, schoolmaster of Madeley. Sources: JF→J. Owen, 14 Feb. 1781.

Owen, [Mr]
Owen was John Owen’s brother-in-law and mentioned in Fletcher’s correspondence. Sources: JF→J. Owen, 14 Feb. 1781.
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<th>Person</th>
<th>Biographical Information and Sources</th>
<th>Codes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Owen, John (1741-?)</td>
<td>Owen was a school master at Madeley and was himself taught under Fletcher’s tutorship as a young man. He lived for a time in a cottage which shared land with Fletcher’s Madeley Wood meeting house. According to Henry Moore, he eventually became well known in England and India. <strong>Sources:</strong> JF→W. Wase, 15 Sept. 1780; JF→J. Owen, 14 Feb. 1781; JF→M. Onions, Mar. 1781; Moore, <em>Life of Mrs Fletcher</em>, 2:289; Madeley Wood Meeting House Indenture, MARC: MAM Fl. 30 (9).</td>
<td>C, CF, S, R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owen, Sally</td>
<td>Owen was the niece of John Owen, schoolmaster at Madeley. Fletcher greeted her in a letter to her uncle, John Owen, in 1781. <strong>Sources:</strong> JF→J. Owen, 14 Feb. 1781.</td>
<td>C, CF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palmer, [Robert] (1717-80)</td>
<td>Robert was the son of Robert and Abigail Palmer of Madeley. He married Sarah Fox in 1739. Robert was responsible for the construction of Fletcher’s first school/meeting house at Madeley Wood in 1777. Fletcher communicated with him via William Wase while he was on the Continent. Palmer also worked on various projects in the parish church, as recorded by the churchwardens in their accounts. <strong>Sources:</strong> JF→W. Wase, 18 Feb. 1777; JF→W. Wase, 15 Sept. 1780; JF→W. Wase, 18 Feb. 1777.</td>
<td>C, CF, S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palmer, [Mrs Robert]</td>
<td>Mrs Palmer was the wife of Robert Palmer, who was responsible for the construction of Fletcher’s school house/meeting house at Madeley Wood in 1777. <strong>Sources:</strong> JF→W. Wase, 15 Sept. 1780; JF→J. Owen, 14 Feb. 1781.</td>
<td>C, CF, S</td>
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</table>
Perks, George (1752-1833)

George was born in the parish of Stockton in Shropshire. He was first a wheelwright and then a cabinet-maker by trade. He attended the Church of England services faithfully, ‘but experiencing nothing of that death unto sin & new birth unto righteousness which that church speaks of being always an high-way-side & stony ground hearer I never picked up the good seed of the Gospel in any place where I was, nor can I remember any religious impression made upon my mind till I came to Madeley.’ He married Elizabeth Claverly of Wolverhampton in 1779, and they removed to Madeley in March of 1781. Being struck by one of Fletcher’s sermons one Sunday in the church, Perks went to speak to Fletcher in person at the vicarage. He wrote that Fletcher, ‘received me as with open arms, & rejoiced that I was come on such an account soon after this I began to meet in class with him & Mrs Fletcher in what has ever since been called Mrs Fletcher’s Sunday morning nine O’clock meeting the first members of which was, Mr & Mrs Fletcher, Nathaniel Gilbert, George Shinton, Francis Stodd, & George Perks. We first met in Mr Fletcher’s kitchen & when our numbers increased we met in the upper room in his house’. Perks even then was not yet converted, but he attended both church and chapel sermons. His conversion, as he related it, began under a sermon of Fletcher’s in the church with the words ‘He pardone th and absolveth all them that truly repent’ and was soon thereafter convinced of the truth of Fletcher’s sermon when hearing one of Wesley’s preachers in one of Fletcher’s societies on the words, ‘Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.’ His son William was born in 1781 and his daughter Marianne in 1783.


Pool[e], Thomas?

This may have been Thomas Pool, son of Thomas and Mary Poole. If so, he was christened in Madeley in 1744 and married to Winifred York in Madeley in 1769. He was a collier by trade. In any case, a T. Poole opened his home to a religious society meeting in Madeley sometime prior to 1779. Sources: JF→M. Onions, 18 May 1779; JF→J. Owen, 14 Feb. 1781.
Prytherch, Stephen (1720-86)

Rev. Stephen Prytherch (1720-86), was the incumbent of Much Wenlock, Shropshire (1752-86), where one of the archdiocesan visitations was held. He had various connections in Madeley, both with Fletcher’s predecessor by marriage, with Abraham Darby, III, and Daniel Hemus, vicar of Broseley, who also was at odds occasionally with Fletcher. Prytherch was a pluralist, resident in Wenlock, but little is known of his churchmanship. He was reputed a ‘well-accomplished man, [who] reads distinctly, sings admirably, and so is an agreeable companion, as well as a good scholar’. It was probably Prytherch to whom Fletcher wrote a letter later published as A Defence of Experimental Religion. (See Chapter 4). Sources: S. Garbet, The History of Wem (Wem, 1818), 206. See W.P.W. Phillimore (ed.) Shropshire Parish Registers: Diocese of Lichfield, vol. 2 (1901); W.G.D. Fletcher, ‘Institutions of Shropshire Incumbents’, TSAS, Fourth Series, 5:1-2 (1915); Alum.Oxon.; SRO: 2089/6/3/1; TSAS (1883), 374.

Purton, William (1721-74)

Purton was a Madeley gentleman farmer who was adversarial toward Fletcher throughout his life. He died when he fell from his horse intoxicated in 1774. His son and his family resided at the end of the century at Madeley and were affiliated with both the church and the societies in Madeley. Purton was buried in Madeley, 16 May 1774. Purton’s son, William Jr., was on friendlier terms with Fletcher and served on the vestry towards the end of Fletcher’s incumbency. His wife, Elizabeth (née Ford) later attended Mrs Fletcher’s and Miss Tooth’s religious meetings in the vicarage barn. Sources: SRO: 2280/6/4; Mad. Bur. Reg., SRO: P180/A/4/1; CW on 4 July 1774. Skinner, Nonconformity, 72; SRO: 2280/6/95; MJMT.

Randall, John (1810-1910)

Randall was a china painter by trade. He was born in Broseley but lived much of his life in Madeley, where he died a centenarian in 1910; his memorial is in St Michaels Church, Madeley. He wrote several local historical works in the latter part of the nineteenth century, including a History of Madeley (Shrewsbury, 1880). Sources: IRS (3rd); HofM.

Rankin, Thomas (1738-1810)

Rankin was born in Scotland where he was converted under the preaching of George Whitefield, and his faith was revived later under the preaching of Wesley, who invited him to London. Rankin had experience with both American and British Methodism, having travelled as a preacher to the colonies in 1773 and returning to England in 1778, where he recommenced his ministry in London. He was ordained with Henry Moore by Wesley on 25 Feb. 1789 (presumably as deacon) and two days later (presumably as priest). N.B., there is some discrepancy in secondary materials regarding the dating of these ordinations. Sources: Wesley, Works, 24:273-74; K.B. Garlick ‘Thomas Rankin’, PWHS 38:1 (May 1971), 30-31; also DEB.
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<th>Person</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hester Ann Roe, Rogers [née Roe] (1756-94)</td>
<td>Hester Ann Roe was born into an Anglican family in Macclesfield, raised in the Church of England, and converted in the Church under the ministry of the evangelical David Simpson. In 1784 she married the Wesleyan Methodist itinerant James Rogers. She and her husband visited and ministered in the societies in Dublin where John and Mary Fletcher had ministered the previous year. <strong>Sources:</strong> H.A. Rogers \rightarrow JF, 14 Dec. 1784, in H.A. Rogers, <em>An Account of the Experience of Mrs. H. A. Rogers</em> (Baltimore, 1814).</td>
<td>A, W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capt. Scott, [Captain] Jonathan (1735-1807)</td>
<td>Capt. Scott was converted under the preaching of William Romaine in Lady Huntingdon’s chapel at Oathall where Fletcher preached in 1766. When he visited Madeley in 1767, he preached upon Fletcher’s horseblock to a large congregation. (The horseblock remains today in the same location in the Madeley vicarage yard). Scott was Calvinistic in his theology. <strong>Sources:</strong> JF \rightarrow GW, 3 July 1767; DEB; W.B. Conant, <em>Narratives of Remarkable Conversions and Revival Incidents</em> (New York, 1958), 333-34, 355; D. MacFadyen, ‘Apostolic Labours of Captain Jonathan Scott’, <em>Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society</em> 3 (1907-1908), 48-66.</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walter Sellon (1715-92)</td>
<td>Sellon was ordained in September 1759 and appointed as curate of Breendon-on-the-Hill, Leics. He thereafter was successively the incumbent of Smisby Derbyshire, Breendon-on-the-Hill, Leics., and later, the Yorkshire parish of Ledsham where he served until his death. Sellon sided with Fletcher and Wesley in the Calvinist-Arminian Controversy, despite his close ties with Lady Huntingdon’s family. For a time in 1748, he was the Classics Master at Kingswood. <strong>Sources:</strong> CCEd; DEB; WDS, 100; LJF, 123.</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss Simpson</td>
<td>Simpson was mentioned in Fletcher’s correspondence. <strong>Sources:</strong> JF \rightarrow T. York and D. Edmunds, Nov. 1777; JF \rightarrow W. Wase, Nov. 1777.</td>
<td>CF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barnabas Spruce (?-?)</td>
<td>Spruce had an alehouse in Madeley and was known for his fine ales. <strong>Sources:</strong> HofM, 292.</td>
<td>A, CF</td>
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<td>Person</td>
<td>Biographical Information and Sources</td>
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<tr>
<td>Slaughter, James (1708-81)</td>
<td>Slaughter was ordained a priest in the Catholic Church at Douay College on 23 Dec. 1741. He died in Longford, Shropshire. He was a relative of Thomas Slaughter of Madeley, who was troublesome to Fletcher on several occasions. Sources: J. Gillow, <em>Biographical Dictionary of the English Catholics</em>, vol. 5 (London, [c.1885]), 510.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stillingfleet, Edward (c. 1732-95)</td>
<td>Stillingfleet was the vicar of West Bromwich, Staffordshire from 1757-82. Lord Dartmouth’s country seat was in his parish. He was an evangelical, and Fletcher considered him a ‘fellow-helper’ in the region. His cousin was James Stillingfleet. Sources: See JF→CH, 3 Jan. 1768; DEB.</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stretton, Mrs [Mary][née Mumford]</td>
<td>It is uncertain when Stretton was born. The Strettons of the seventeenth century were Catholics. Fletcher performed the wedding ceremony of her marriage to Samuel Stretton in 1769. Fletcher greeted them both in a letter to John Owen in 1781. Sources: JF→J. Owen, 14 Feb. 1781.</td>
<td>C, CF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stretton, Samuel</td>
<td>It is uncertain when Stretton was born, but he may have been the Samuel Strutton born in Madeley in 1733. He was a shoemaker by trade. The Strettons of the seventeenth century were Catholics, but Samuel attended the parish church and was one of two witnesses Fletcher called upon to testify in his charge against Thomas Slaughter Jr. His wife was Mary Stretton [née Mumford] whom he married in 1769. Fletcher greeted them both in a letter to John Owen in 1781. Sources: JF→J. Owen, 14 Feb. 1781.</td>
<td>C, CF</td>
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<tr>
<td>Talbot, William (1717-74)</td>
<td>Talbot was vicar of Kineton, Warks. (1740-1768), and afterwards, incumbent of St Giles, Reading until his death in 1774. Sources: Alum. Oxon.; UL.</td>
<td>A, R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tranter, John? (1760-?)</td>
<td>This was probably John Tranter of Madeley, son of James Tranter (b. 1726) and Mary Baugh (married 11 Feb. 1750). If so, then he was the John Tranter christened in Madeley, 15 June 1760 and married to Maria Talbot by John Fletcher on 21 March 1785. In any case, a J. Tranter opened his home to a religious society meeting in Madeley sometime prior to 1779. He was also a local preacher in the Madeley Societies. Sources: JF→M. Onions, 18 May 1779; Samuel W[alter], ‘Account of Mary Dorrel’, <em>WMM</em> (1805), 463-68; JF→J. Owen, 14 Feb. 1781.</td>
<td>C, CF, L, S</td>
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<tr>
<td>Person</td>
<td>Biographical Information and Sources</td>
<td>Codes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wales, Mary (c.1723-92)</td>
<td>Mary Wales was born in Shropshire and lived at Coalpit Bank, Wellington. As a young person she had engaged in devotional reading, notably, Baxter’s <em>Call to the Unconverted</em>. She also had heard gospel sermons preaching the new birth but was yet unconverted. When Fletcher came to Madeley, Mary went to hear him and was eventually converted under his preaching. Her husband, a collier, died in a coal pit leaving her a widowed mother of four children. She continued in her faith throughout her life, attending regularly the Sunday services at Madeley church, nearly five miles from her home. <strong>Sources</strong>: A. Suter, ‘Account of Mary Wales of Coalpit-bank, Near Wellington, Shropshire’, <em>AM</em> (1793), 528-32.</td>
<td>C, CF, S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wase, [Jane]née Cranage (1739-79)</td>
<td>Jane was the wife of William Wase, one of Fletcher’s society lay leaders. She was also the daughter of George and Elizabeth Cranage, in whose Coalbrookdale home one of Fletcher’s societies met. She died in 1779, and Fletcher wrote to her husband to console him after her death. <strong>Sources</strong>: JF→W. Ley, 9 May [1765]; JF→W. Wase, 11 Feb. 1779; JF→M. Onions, 18 May 1779.</td>
<td>C, CF, S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wase, William (1743-?)</td>
<td>Wase was born in Hodnet (b. 7 Aug. 1743), but living in Broseley as a grocer. He married Jane Cranage (b. 6 Apr. 1739) of Madeley (Coalbrookdale), 30 Nov. 1765, dau. of George and Elizabeth Cranage, in whose home the Coalbrookdale Society met. Wase assisted Fletcher with his meetings, both in Broseley and Madeley, particularly during the time Fletcher was away from his parish recovering from illness, thus leaving his societies in the hands of the then curate A. B. Greaves and lay leaders in the societies. <strong>Sources</strong>: JF→W. Wase, 18 Feb. 1777; JF→W. Wase, Nov. 1777; JF→M. Onions, 18 May 1779; JF→W. Wase, 7 Mar. 1780; 15 Sept. 1780; JF→J. Owen, 14 Feb. 1781.</td>
<td>C, CF, S, L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>York, [Mrs]</td>
<td>Mrs York was the wife of Thomas York of Shifnal, who led the society there. <strong>Sources</strong>: JF→T. York and D. Edmunds, Nov. 1777; JF→T. York, 15 Sept. 1780.</td>
<td>CF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>York, John</td>
<td>There were numerous John Yorks in Shropshire at this time, and it is impossible to tell which one this was. He was a Madeley parishioner whom Fletcher greeted in several letters, possibly a relative of Thomas York of Sheriff Hales. He was a Madeley churchwarden in 1764-65. <strong>Sources</strong>: Madeley Churchwarden Accounts, SRO: 2280/6/4; JF→W. Wase, 7 Mar. 1780; JF→W. Wase, 15 Sept. 1780.</td>
<td>CF, S</td>
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<td>Biographical Information and Sources</td>
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<tr>
<td>York, Thomas</td>
<td>York was a gentleman from Sheriff Hales whom Fletcher cooperated with to set up a religious society there. York was also involved in helping Fletcher manage his societies in Madeley and in managing some of the process of building Fletcher’s school/meeting house at Madeley Wood. <em>Sources:</em> JF→T. York and D. Edmunds, Nov. 1777; JF→W. Wase, Nov. 1777; JF→T. York, 15 Sept. 1778; JF→W. Wase, 7 Mar. 1780.</td>
<td>CF, S</td>
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## Appendix 5
### Table of Visiting Preachers in Madeley 1760-1785

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month/Year</th>
<th>Preacher</th>
<th>Affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 1762</td>
<td>Thomas Leir</td>
<td>Anglican Clergyman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 1763</td>
<td>John Riland</td>
<td>Anglican Clergyman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 1763</td>
<td>Jacob Mould</td>
<td>Anglican Clergyman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 1764</td>
<td>Walter Sellon</td>
<td>Anglican Clergyman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1764-1766</td>
<td>Alexander Mather</td>
<td>Wesleyan Itinerant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 1764</td>
<td>Mr Davenport</td>
<td>Anglican Clergyman (Pulpit Exchange)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 1764</td>
<td>John Wesley</td>
<td>Anglican Clergyman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 1764</td>
<td>Howell Harris</td>
<td>Anglican Clergyman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 1765</td>
<td>Joseph Guildford</td>
<td>Methodist Itinerant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May-Sept. 1765</td>
<td>Thomas Maxfield</td>
<td>Anglican Clergyman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 1765</td>
<td>James Brown</td>
<td>Anglican Clergyman (Curate of Madeley)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 1765</td>
<td>Thomas Hatton</td>
<td>Anglican Clergyman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr./May 1766</td>
<td>James Brown</td>
<td>Anglican Clergyman (Curate of Madeley)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr./May 1766</td>
<td>Thomas Hatton</td>
<td>Anglican Clergyman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 1766</td>
<td>Thomas Biddulph</td>
<td>Anglican Clergyman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept./Oct. 1766</td>
<td>Cradock Glascott</td>
<td>Anglican Clergyman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept./Oct. 1766</td>
<td>John Riland</td>
<td>Anglican Clergyman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct./Nov. 1766</td>
<td>Thomas Maxfield</td>
<td>Anglican Clergyman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 1767</td>
<td>Capt. Jonathan Scott</td>
<td>Calvinistic Methodist Lay Preacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar. 1767</td>
<td>Henry Venn</td>
<td>Anglican Clergyman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 1767</td>
<td>John Riland</td>
<td>Anglican Clergyman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May/June 1767</td>
<td>Capt. Jonathan Scott</td>
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<td>Sept. 1767</td>
<td>Thomas Hatton</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr. 1768</td>
<td>Cradock Glascott</td>
<td>Anglican Clergyman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1768</td>
<td>John Wesley</td>
<td>Anglican Clergyman</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nov. 1768</td>
<td>Cradock Glascott</td>
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<td>Apr. 1769</td>
<td>[Nicholas] Mosley Cheek</td>
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<td>July 1769</td>
<td>Cradock Glascott</td>
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<td>Jan.-June 1770</td>
<td>Thomas Davies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dec. 1770</td>
<td>J. Jones</td>
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<td>Aug. 1771</td>
<td>John Wesley</td>
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<td>May 1773</td>
<td>Jeremiah Brettel</td>
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<td>1773-1774</td>
<td>John Oliver</td>
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<td>1774-1775</td>
<td>William Collins</td>
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<td>June 1776</td>
<td>John Owen</td>
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<td>July 1776-June 1781</td>
<td>Alexander B. Greaves</td>
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<td>1777-1778</td>
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<td>Affiliation</td>
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<td>1778-1779</td>
<td>Robert Costerdine</td>
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<td>Mar. 1779</td>
<td>John Wesley</td>
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<td>Thomas Hatton</td>
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<td>Aug.-Oct. 1781</td>
<td>Cornelius Bayley</td>
<td>Anglican Clergyman (Curate of Madeley)</td>
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<td>Oct.-Dec. 1781</td>
<td>John Crosse</td>
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<td>John Wesley</td>
<td>Anglican Clergyman</td>
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<td>Oct. 1782</td>
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<td>Cornelius Bayley</td>
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<td>Aug. 1783</td>
<td>Henry Venn</td>
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<td>Aug.-Oct. 1783</td>
<td>Nathaniel Gilbert</td>
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<td>c. Dec. 1784</td>
<td>Charles Simeon</td>
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<td>Thomas Hatton</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date Unknown</td>
<td>Samuel Bradburn</td>
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Table of Visiting Preachers in Madeley, 1760-1785. N.B. Only those Wesleyan preachers mentioned in Fletcher’s correspondence or other writings appear in this list. For a full listing of Wesleyan itinerants serving Madeley, see *Hill’s Arrangement*. 
## Appendix 6

### Fletcher’s Works with Various Collected Editions Noted

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<tr>
<th>Title</th>
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<td>(London) (A)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>(London) (B)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Spiritual Letters by Several Eminent Christians. Chester: Read and Huxley, 1767, 232 pages.</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>vol. 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>A Second Check to Antinomianism; Occasioned by a Late Narrative in Three Letters to the Hon and Rev Author. By the Vindicator of the Rev Mr Wesley’s Minutes. Bristol: W. Pine, 1772, x+109 pages.</td>
<td>vol. 2</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>vol. 1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>vol. 1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>vol. 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Third Check to Antinomianism. In a Letter to the Author of Pietas Oxoniensis. By the Vindicator of the Rev Mr Wesley’s Minutes.</td>
<td>vol. 3</td>
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<td>vol. 1</td>
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<td></td>
<td>vol. 1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>vol. 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Appeal to Matter of Fact and Common Sense or A rational demonstration of man’s corrupt and lost estate. To which is added an Address to such as enquire what must we do to be saved? Bristol: W. Pine, 1772, 210+72+8 pages.</td>
<td>vol. 2</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>vol. 1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>vol. 3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>vol. 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Appeal to Matter of Fact and Common Sense or A Rational Demonstration of Man’s Corrupt and Lost Estate. To Which is Added an Address to Such as Enquire What Must We Do to Be Saved? Second Edition, Revised and Enlarged. Bristol: W. Pine, 1773, 219+69+8 pages.</td>
<td>vol. 2</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>vol. 3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>vol. 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Logica Genevensis or, a Fourth Check to Antinomianism. Bristol: W. Pine, 1772, 237 pages.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>vol. 1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>vol. 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Penitent Thief; or, A Narrative of Two Women...Who Visited in Prison a Highwayman (J. Wilkes) ... With a Letter to a Condemned Misdemeanor; and a Penitential Office. London: R. Hawes, 1773, 36 pages.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>A Dreadful Phenomenon, Described and Improved...And the Substance of a Sermon Preached the Next Day. Shrewsbury: J. Eddowes, 1773, 104 pages.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Logica Genevensis Continued; or, The First Part of the Fifth Check to Antinomianism. London: R. Hawes, 1773, iv+48 pages.</td>
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<td>Logica Genevensis Continued; or, The Second Part of the Fifth Check to Antinomianism. London: R. Hawes, 1774, 44 pages.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The First Part of an Equal Check to Pharisaism and Antinomianism. Shrewsbury: J. Eddowes, 1774, x+264 pages.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zelotes and Honestus Reconciled; or, An Equal Check to Pharisaism and Antinomianism – Continued. Being the First Part of the Scripture Scales ... By a Lover of the Whole Truth as It is in Jesus. Shrewsbury: J. Eddowes, 1774, xx+175 pages.</td>
<td>vol. 4</td>
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<td></td>
<td>vol. 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Works 1806-1810, 10 Vols (London) (A)</td>
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<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>The Fictitious and the Genuine Creed; Being ‘A Creed for Arminians’, Composed by Richard Hill, Esq; to Which is Opposed a Creed for Those Who Believe That Christ Tasted Death for Every Man. London: R. Hawes, 1775, 52 pages.</td>
<td>vol. 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zealotes and Honestus reconciled; or, An Equal Check to Pharisaism and Antinomianism – Continued. Being the Second Part of the Scripture Scales. Shrewsbury: J. Eddowes, 1775, xii+223 pages.</td>
<td>vol. 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Vindication of the Rev Mr Wesley’s ‘Calm Address to our American Colonies’, in Some Letters to Mr Caleb Evans. By John Fletcher, Vicar of Madeley, Salop. London: The Foundry, 1776, 70 pages.</td>
<td>vol. 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Bible and the Sword; or, The Appointment of the General Fast Vindicated; in an Address to the Common People, Concerning the Propriety of Repressing Obstudant Licentiousness with the Sword, and of Fasting When the Sword is Drawn for that Purpose. London: R. Hawes, 1776, 22 pages.</td>
<td>vol. 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Answer to the Rev Mr Toplady’s Vindication of the Decrees, &amp;c. By the Author of the Checks. London: n.p., 1776, v+128 pages.</td>
<td>vol. 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Reply to the Principal Arguments by Which the Calvinists and the Fatalists Support the Doctrine of Absolute Necessity; Being Remarks on the Rev Mr Toplady’s ‘Scheme of Christian and Philosophical Necessity’. London: R. Hawes, 1777, 80 pages.</td>
<td>vol. 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bible Arminianism and Bible Calvinism: A Two-fold Essay, Part the First, Displaying the Doctrines of Partial Grace, Part the Second, Those of Impartial Justice. London: R. Hawes, 1777, 84 pages.</td>
<td>vol. 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Reconciliation; or, An Easy Method to Unite the Professing People of God... (Containing: Bible Arminianism and Bible Calvinism, a Twofold Essay). London: R. Hawes, 1777, 84+187 pages.</td>
<td>vol. 5</td>
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<td>La Louange, Poème Moral et Sacré, tiré du Psalme CXLVII. Nyon : Nathey and Lapierre, 1781, viii+196 pages.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Works 1806-1810, 10 Vols (London) (A)</td>
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<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>Three National Grievances: The Increase of Taxes: The Hardship of Unequal Taxation: And the Continual Rise of the Poor's Rates; with the Causes and Remedies of These Evils: Humbly Submitted to the Consideration of the Legislature: in a Letter to The Right Honourable Lord John Cavendish ... Chancellor of the Exchequer, and One of the Lords of the Treasury. London: n.p., 1783, 34 pages.</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<td>Essai sur la Paix de 1783, Dédé à l'Archevêque de Paris, par un Pasteur Anglican. London: R. Hindmarsh; Dublin: J. Charrurier, 1784, 70 pages.</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<td>La Grace et la Nature, Poème, Seconde Edition, plus complète. London: T. Longman, 1785, 442+1 pages.</td>
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<td>Bunyan, A Race for Eternal Life: Being an Extract from the Heavenly Footman. By the Rev Mr Fletcher. London. R. Hawes, 1777, 16 pages.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Christian Experience of Mrs S******, as Dictated by Herself. London: R. Hawes, 1785, 12 pages.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prophecies of the remarkable events now taking place in Europe. In a letter to the late Rev Mr John Wesley dated London, November 29, 1755. Bath: n.p., 1793, xii+20 pages.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Test of a New Creature; or, Heads of Examinations for Adult Christians. New York: n.p., 1876, 8 pages.</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<td>A Letter to the Rev Mr Prothero, in Defense of Experimental Religion. [1761]</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Nature and Rules of a Religious Society; Submitted to the Consideration of the Serious Inhabitants of the Parish of Madeley. [With a prefacey epistle, by M. Home]. Madeley: Edmunds, 1788, 16 pages.</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td>A Dialogue Between a Minister and One of His Parishioners, on Man's Depravity and Danger in His Natural State. [1766]., 40 pages.</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td>Six Letters on the Spiritual Manifestation of the Son of God. Leeds: n.p., 1791, 55 pages.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Portrait of St. Paul; or, The True Model for Christians and Pastors. (translated from French to English by J. Gilpin) edn. Enlarged with 'The Character of Mr Fletcher' by J. Gilpin. Shrewsbury: J. Eddowes, 1790, 707 pages.</td>
<td>vol. 8</td>
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<tr>
<td>A Rational Vindication of the Catholic Faith; Being the First Part of a Vindication of Christ's Divinity; Inscribed to the Rev. Dr. Priestley, ed. and enlarged by J. Benson. London: n.p., 1788, 223 pages.</td>
<td>vol. 9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Socinianism Unscriptural; or, The Prophets and Apostles Vindicated from the Charge of Holding the Doctrine of Christ's Mere Humanity; Being the Second Part of a Vindication of His Divinity; enlarged and ed. by J. Benson. Birmingham: n.p., 1791, 239 pages.</td>
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### Editions of Fletcher’s Works

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Works 1806-1810, 10 Vols (London) (A)</th>
<th>Works 1825 Edn 7 Vols (London) (B)</th>
<th>1836 Edn 4 Vols (New York) (C)</th>
<th>1859-60 Edn 9 Vols (London) (D)</th>
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<tr>
<td><em>Posthumous Pieces of the Late Rev. John William de la Flechere</em>; Edited by M. Horne. Madeley: J. Edmunds, 1791, 435 pages.</td>
<td>vol. 7</td>
<td>vol. 6.7^1</td>
<td>vol. 4</td>
<td>vol. 9</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>The Furious Bacher Humbled. A True and Remarkable Story:</em> London: A. Paris, [1795?], 8 pages.</td>
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<td><em>The New Birth: A Discourse Written in French.</em> Translated into English by H. Moore. Bristol: Lancaster and Edwards, 1794, 39 pages.</td>
<td>vol. 7</td>
<td>vol. 5</td>
<td>vol. 4</td>
<td>vol. 8</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Remarks on Sev. Subjects: Evang. Mysticism; Christian Philosophers; Nat. Aversion of Human Mind to Do Good; On the Trinity; On the Crucifixion; Conversion of Mr. Fletcher.</em></td>
<td>vol. 9</td>
<td>vol. 6</td>
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<td>Fragments.</td>
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<td>General Observations.</td>
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<td>vol. 4</td>
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<td>Nine Sermons.</td>
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<td>Thirty Outlines of Sermons.</td>
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<td><em>Essay on the Birth Of the Spirit (now lost).</em></td>
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<td><em>A New Spiritual Christmas-box To Alarm the Unconverted, Convince the Sincere, and Comfort the Truly Serious Chiefly Intended for Journeymen, Apprentices, and Other Servants.</em> [London?]: n.p., [c. 1755], 7+advert.</td>
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^1 *Posthumous Pieces* was the first attempt to publish a majority of Fletcher’s letters in a single volume. This edition of Fletcher’s *Works* printed additional letters not included in *Posthumous Pieces*, primarily addressed to William Perronet.
## Appendix 7
### Fletcher’s Letters

This table of letters owes much to the listing in the back matter of *RS*. However, it has been updated to include letters unknown at the time of publication of *RS* and also correct the dating or recipients of several letters (see e.g. those from Abiah Darby to JF which she transcribed in MJAD and the letter JF→Mme. de la Fléchère (his mother), 12 Sept. 1767). Also, the table here places all known letters both to and from Fletcher in chronological order (beginning with those letters that are undated). New to this table is the inclusion of several letters which are no longer extant but which are known to have been written by evidence from other sources. The third-to-last and second-to-last columns represent cross references to *FL* (with page numbers) and *UL*, the standard editions of Fletcher’s correspondence. *UL* is organized chronologically, so page numbers have not been given for these. The last column is a cross reference to indicate whether the indicated letter is to be found in Streiff’s list or not in *RS*. N.B. This table is comprehensive so far as including all of Fletcher’s known correspondence. However, it is not comprehensive in documenting where each letter is published; rather the most readily available source has been listed.

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<th>Sender</th>
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<th>Date</th>
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<th>Published</th>
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<tr>
<td>C. Carthy</td>
<td></td>
<td>[JF]</td>
<td>n.d.</td>
<td>MARC: MAM Fl. 2/1</td>
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<td>JF</td>
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<td>Unidentified</td>
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<td></td>
<td>AM (1793),45-52</td>
<td>FL</td>
<td>100-103</td>
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<tr>
<td>JF</td>
<td></td>
<td>The Hon. Mrs ----</td>
<td>n.d.</td>
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<td>AM (1794), 543-44</td>
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<tr>
<td>JF</td>
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<td>Mr ----</td>
<td>n.d.</td>
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<td>FL</td>
<td>210-11</td>
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<tr>
<td>JF</td>
<td></td>
<td>Miss ----</td>
<td>n.d.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>FL</td>
<td>183-85</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>JF</td>
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<td>Mrs King</td>
<td>n.d.</td>
<td>Wesley’s Chapel, London</td>
<td></td>
<td>PWHS 25:115</td>
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<td>JF</td>
<td>[Madeley]</td>
<td>Lord Gower</td>
<td>n.d.</td>
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† This letter is dated 30 Oct. 1765 in FL. However, a letter to D. Edmunds (30 Apr. 1766) indicates that the letter to the Madeley Parishioners was enclosed in this one to D. Edmunds on the same date. For other errors in FL, see Forsaith’s ‘Introduction’, in UL.
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† i.e. John Fletcher’s mother, Suzanne Crinzoz de la Fléchère (née de Colombier), on whom see Streiff, ‘Jean Guillaume de la Fléchère’, 21-22, 22-34.
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J. Fletcher, The Reconciliation: or, An Easy Method to Unite the Professing People of God (London: R. Hawes, 1777), ii-iv.
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<td>Thomas Coke</td>
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<td>6 Jan. 1784</td>
<td>MARC: PLP 28/5/16; orig. at Duke University; Facsimile copy with Coke's Plan for Meth Miss Soc at Bridwell, 'Other British Manuscripts and Documents'</td>
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<td>Nov. 1784</td>
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<td>29 Mar. 1785</td>
<td>Wesley's Chapel, London</td>
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<td>IWS, 556-57</td>
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<td>Mary Fitzgerald</td>
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Bibliography

1 Manuscript Sources

Manuscript sources cited in this thesis have been referenced with titles and an indication of under which bibliographical heading the source can be found. The main sub-collections used are listed below (with, when available, their archive catalogue references) under their respective locations. The SRO is in the process of re-cataloguing the Madeley Parish Records Collection; to avoid the confusion of using two reference systems, only the current (old) references are used throughout the thesis, with the exception of the parish registers which use the new reference system.

1.1 Arthur Skevington Wood Archive, Cliff College

Papers related to John Fletcher

A/1/1 Proposal for a Union Among Gospel Ministers, 19 April 1764
A/1/2(a) JF, Sermon, Rom. 7:24
A/1/2(b) JF, Sermon, Luke 15:6-7
A/1/2(c) JF, Sermon, Matt. 5:20
A/1/2(d) JF, Sermon, 2 Sam. 12:7
A/1/2(e) JF, Sermon, Rom. 2:4-5
A/1/2(f) JF, Sermon, 1 Cor. 3:2
A/1/4 JF, Catechism
A/1/5 JF, Small Volume of Theorems
A/1/6 JF, Extracts from Bishop Latimer’s Sermons
A/1/7 JF, Commonplace Book, 1752-54
A/1/8 JF, Sermon Notebook, 1764
A/1/9 JF and MF, Commonplace Book
A/1/11(a) JF, Preaching Case/Commonplace Book
A/1/11(b) JF, Commonplace Book
A/1/16 Anon. Select Hymns. Dublin, 1778.
A/1/21 Fletcher Commonplace Book (Extracts from Burn’s Laws)
A/1/24-25 Proposal for a Society of Ministers of the Gospel in the Church of England

1.2 British Library

Add. MS 21018, J. Plymley, et al. Ecclesiastical Notes and Descriptive Accounts of Parishes within the Archdeaconry of Salop.
Add. MS 43739, Tindall Correspondence and Papers, vol. 3:9.

1.3 Cheshunt Foundation, Westminster College, Cambridge
A1/13.11 JF→CH, 28 May 1777
A3/3.25 JF→Students of Trevecca, c. Nov. 1770
E4/7:1 JF→CH, 7 Mar. 1771
Fl 1457 JF→CH, 10 Feb. 1769
Fl 1464 JF→CH 12 Apr. 1769

1.4 Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina
Frank Baker Collection
   JF→CW, 26 May 1771
Joseph Benson Collection
   JF→JB, 12 July 1775

1.5 GCAH
John and Mary Fletcher Papers
   JF→JW, 27 Oct. 1760
   JF→Rev. Prothero, 25 July 1761 (Catalogued as ‘John Fletcher’s Mini-Manuscript)
   JF→CW, 19 Dec. 1782

1.6 HRO
Hereford Diocesan Records
   AL 19/20-23 Episcopal Registers
   HD 2/16/259 Papist Returns for Broseley Parish (1767)
   HD 2/16/263 Papist Returns for Little Wenlock Parish (1767)
   HD 2/16/265 Papist Returns for Madeley Parish (1767)
   HD 5/4 Bishop’s Call Books 1701-1779
   HD 5/8 Bishop Visitation Books 16th–19th Centuries
   HD 5/14/1-217 Madeley Visitation Presentments to the Bishop of Hereford

1.7 Ironbridge Gorge Museum Library and Archives
Labouchere Collection
   MJAB (Copy), (Original at Library of the Society of Friends, Friends House, Euston Road, London)

1.8 LJRO
Lichfield Diocesan Records
   B/A/1/21 Papers related to Rowland Chambre

1.9 MARC
Fletcher–Tooth Collection (Reference MAM Fl.)
MAM Fl. 2/5A/18 Sarah Crosby → MF, 27 Mar. 1787
MAM Fl. 2/7/1-4 Abiah Darby → JF, 22 June 1784
MAM Fl. 2/7/3 Abiah Darby → MF, n.d. [c.1785-96]
MAM Fl. 3/8 Hindmarsh → JF, 1 Sept. 1783
MAM Fl. 3/15 Richard Hill → JF, 6 Dec. 1784
MAM Fl. 3/15/3 J. Henshaw → JF, 24 Sept. 1762
MAM Fl. 3/15/45 Description of the Foundation of Trevecca (College)
MAM Fl. 4/1/2; 4/1/4; 4/1/13; 4/1/14; 4/1/15 JF → MF, c.1783–1786.
MAM Fl. 6/10/14 [T. Slaughter] → JF, [1762]
MAM Fl. 6/10/15 [T.] Slaughter, Sr. → JF, 21 Sept. 1762
MAM Fl. 6/10/16 JF → [Thomas] Slaughter, Sr., c. Sept. 1762
MAM Fl. 7/1/11 Charity Tilbury → JF, 16 Aug. 1766
MAM Fl. 7/1/12 Charity Tilbury → JF, 18 June 1768
MAM Fl. 7/1/13 Charity Tilbury → JF, 3 Nov. 1768
MAM Fl. 7/6/1 John Valton → MF, 30 Mar. 1784
MAM Fl. 7/8/16-18 Richard Williams → MT, n.d. [c.1797]
MAM Fl. 13/1/24 Draft Letter MF → Mr Story
MAM Fl. 13/1/57 MF → JW, 1771
MAM Fl. 14/2 (B) Journal of Mary Tooth (MJMT)
MAM Fl. 17 JF → Thomas Slaughter, May 1762
MAM Fl. 17/19/1-2 Charge Against Thomas Slaughter, Jr., 11 May 1762
MAM Fl. 17/19/3 JF → [Lord Cavendish], [23 Nov. 1783]
MAM Fl. 17/19/8 Receipt Fragment, 28 July 1775
MAM Fl. 17/20/1 JF → Country Men & Neighbours of Madeley Regarding Food Rioting and the Laws of England, n.d.
MAM Fl. 17/20/3 JF, A Form of Prayer for Sunday School, n.d.
MAM Fl. 17/24/3 JF, First Plan for a Sunday School
MAM Fl. 18 JF → JF, 25 May 1781; JF → A.B. Greaves, 31 May 1781
MAM Fl. 18/1/1 JF → J. Priestley, n.d. (Fragment Manuscript Treatise Addressed to Dr. J. Priestley)
MAM Fl. 18/2/1-2 JF, Plan for the Relief of the Industrious Poor [1782]
MAM Fl. 18/3/1 JF, Three National Grievances
MAM Fl. 18/11/1 JF, Answer to Popish Quibbles
MAM Fl. 18/14/1 Letters Exchanged Between Rev. Bridel and JF
MAM Fl. 18/16 Fletcher, Packet of Hymns
MAM Fl. 18/18/1 JF→Rev. Lewis, 3 Feb. 1762
MAM Fl. 19/2/6 Memorandum of Agreement, 9 June 1777 (Re: JF’s Meeting House at Madeley Wood)
MAM Fl. 19/5/2 Anon. Eulogies on JF
MAM Fl. 20 JF→Abiah Darby, Nov. 1764
MAM Fl. 20/2 JF, Sermon, Acts 5:42
MAM Fl. 20/3 ‘Doctrine of Salvation by Faith Alone as it is Preached in Madeley Church’ (later used in Fletcher’s Equal Check)
MAM Fl. 20/7 JF, Sermon, Heb. 13:1
MAM Fl. 20/14/1 JF [transcribed by], ‘Hymn to John Fletcher’
MAM Fl. 20/14/2 JF, Sermon, Matt. 25:40-46; JF, Sermon, Acts 5:42
MAM Fl. 20/14/4 JF, Sermon, John 19:30
MAM Fl. 20/14/7 JF, Sermon, John 3:18
MAM Fl. 20/16 JF, ‘Cantique Pour une Personne appelée à confirmer Le Vœu du Baptême et participe à la Sainte Cène’.
MAM Fl. 25 Pocketbooks of MT
MAM Fl. 31 JF→Rev. Prothero, 3 Feb. 1762; JF→Abiah Darby, Nov. 1764
MAM Fl. 31/1 JF→J. de La Fléchère, 7 Mar. 1752, (Copy); JF→CW, 22 Mar. 1759 (Copy; Orig. at Fl. Vol. 1:81)
MAM Fl. 33/3/6 MT, Account of George Perks
MAM Fl. 33/5 Unidentified Autobiography (in hand of MT)
MAM Fl. 36/1 JF→CW, 26 Dec. 1763; JF→CW, 15 Sept. 1776; JF→JW, 17 Feb. 1766; JF→GW, 3 July 1767; JF→GW, 28 May 1768; JF→JW, 13 Feb. 1772; JF→JW, 17 Oct. 1773; JF→CW, 20 Feb. 1774; JF→Mr Hare, et al., 12 Nov. 1776; JF→V. Perronet, 8 Feb. 1779
MAM Fl. 36/2 JF→MB, 7 Mar 1778; JF→W. Perronet, 20 Feb. 1781; JF→W. Perronet, 14 Jan. 1781; JF→MB, 1 May 1781
MAM Fl. 36/2/1 JF→Madeley Parishioners, 13 Jan. 1777
MAM Fl. 36/2/6 JF→Bp. Beauclerk, 22 Mar 1777
MAM Fl. 36/2/8 JF→Bp. Beauclerk, 22 Mar 1777 (Testimonial for A.B. Greaves)
MAM Fl. 36/3 JF→JI, Sept. 1781; JF→MF, 6 Sept. 1781; JF→MF, 10 Sept. 1781; JF→MF, 11/12 Sept. 1781; JF→MF, 22 Sept. 1781; JF→MF, 21 Oct. 1783
MAM Fl. 36/4/6 JF→[Lord Gower], n.d.
MAM Fl. 36/4/7 [M. Fletcher], Duty of Attending the Sacrament
MAM Fl. 36/5 JF→CW, 19 July 1762; JF to CW, 9 Feb. 1760
MAM Fl. 37/1/7 MF→JB, n.d.
MAM Fl. 37/1/9 MF→JB, n.d.
MAM Fl. 37/1/11 MF→Unidentified Recipient, [c.1806]
MAM Fl. 37/4/17-20 MF, Letters to J.A. Reeve
MAM Fl. 38/1/17 Account paid by Revd. Mr Fletcher to Robt Palmer (For JF’s Meeting House at Madeley Wood)

Fletcher Certificates (Folio)

(1) 6 Mar. 1757 Certificate of Ordination as Deacon
(2) 13 Mar. 1757 Certificate of Ordination as Priest
(3) 14 Mar. 1757 Declaration of Conformity to the Liturgy of the Church of England for Licensing as Curate of Madeley
(4) 14 Mar. 1757 License to Preach
(5) 4 Oct. 1760 Presentment to the Vicarage by Edward Kynaston
(6) 7 Oct. 1760/17 October 1760 Mandate for Induction to Vicarage of Madeley
(7) 7 Oct. 1760 Certificate of Subscription to the 39 Articles
(8) 7 Oct. 1760 Declaration of Conformity to the Liturgy of the Church of England for Admission and Institution to the Vicarage and Parish Church of Madeley
(9) 7 Oct. 1760 Certificate of Institution by Bishop James Hereford
(10) 26 Oct. 1760/61 December 1760 Testimonial Certificate of John Fletcher’s Conformity to the Book of Common Prayer
(11) 7 Dec. 1767 Presentation Certificate of John William Fletcher as domestic Chaplain to David Stuart, Earl of Buchan. Witnessed and signed by George Whitefield and Cradock Glascott
(12) Part of the Office of the Ordering of Priests
(13) List of Bible Verses in Greek
(14) John Fletcher Covenant

John and Mary Fletcher Library (Books Owned by John and Mary Fletcher; Reference MAW Fl.)

Papers of Joseph Benson (Reference PLP/7/–)

PLP 7/9/1 JB→MF, 22 Dec. 1790
PLP 7/10/3 JB→MF, 12 June 1804

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DDCW 5/107 CW→S.W., 15 Mar. 1760
DDCW 7/60 CW→Mark Davis, 10 Dec. 1772 [Copy at MAW 657B, Lamplough Collection.]
DDWES 2/36 JF→CW, 9 Sept. 1763
DDWES 2/39 JF→JW/CW, 30 May 1773
DDWES 2/41 JF→Vincent Perronet, 10 Feb. 1781
Fl. Vol. 1 & 2 John Fletcher Volumes

Fl. Vol. 1:1 JW→CW, 20 Sept. 1762
Fl. Vol. 1:2 JF→CW, 26 Dec. 1758
Fl. Vol. 1:3 JF→CW, 19 July 1759
Fl. Vol. 1:4 JF→CW, 4 Sept. 1759
Fl. Vol. 1:10 JF→CW, 10 Mar. 1761
Fl. Vol. 1:12 JF→CW, 7 Nov. 1760
Fl. Vol. 1:13 JF→CW, 27 Apr. 1761
Fl. Vol. 1:14 JF→CW, 19 Aug. 1761
Fl. Vol. 1:15 JF→CW, 5 Jan. 1763
Fl. Vol. 1:16 JF→CW, 16 May 1762
Fl. Vol. 1:17 JF→CW, 8 June 1762
Fl. Vol. 1:18 JF→CW, 4 Sept. 1762
Fl. Vol. 1:19 JF→JW, 22 Nov. 1762
Fl. Vol. 1:21 JF→CW, 30 Nov. 1762
Fl. Vol. 1:24 JF→CW, 31 Jan. 1765
Fl. Vol. 1:25 JF→CW, 12 Apr. 1765
Fl. Vol. 1:26 JF→CW, 29 Apr. 1765
Fl. Vol. 1:27 JF→CW, 10 May 1765
Fl. Vol. 1:29 JF→CW, 8 Aug. 1765
Fl. Vol. 1:31 JF→CW, 8 Oct. 1765
Fl. Vol. 1:32 JF→Daniel Edmunds, 30 Apr. 1766; JF→Parishioners of Madeley, 1 May 1766
Fl. Vol. 1:34 JF→CW, Sept. 1770
Fl. Vol. 1:36 JF→JW, 24 June 1771
Fl. Vol. 1:38 JF→CW, 21 June 1763
Fl. Vol. 1:44 JF→CW, 31 May 1772
Fl. Vol. 1:46 JF→CW, 16 Jan. 1773
Fl. Vol. 1:49 JF→CW, 4 July 1774
MAR 223 A. 19 (a) Letter from JF to MF, 12 Feb. 1779

1.10 SRO
Thomas Hill Papers

112/12/Box 22, pp. 411-13 Letterbook of Thomas Hill

Madeley Wood Co. Papers (Reference 1681)

1681/132/24 Madeley Wood Co. Agreement, 5 Sept. 1760

Darby Family Papers (Reference 1987)

1987/64/5 Account of Madeley by Samuel Walter, curate of Madeley. 1805

Labouchere Collection (Reference Lab)

Lab/Abi/4/24 Box 2, Material regarding Abiah Darby, 1716-1794, second wife of Abraham Darby II. Photocopy of a Letter Headed Sunniside; To Esteemed Friend, John Fletcher; Regarding Sunday Schools. 22 June 1784.

Madeley Parish Records (Reference P180 or 2280)

P180/A/2/1 Madeley Baptism Register
P180/A/3/2-4 Madeley Marriage Register
P180/A/4/1 Madeley Burial Register
2280/2/10-11 Madeley Glebe Book (and Madeley Surplice Fees)
2280/2/42 ‘A True Account of the Original of the pretended Modus of the Court Demense as it Now Prevails in the parish of Madeley August 1726’
2280/2/43 1829. Copy List of Presentations to the Vicarage of Madeley, 18 Apr. 1829
2280/3/3-4 Glebe: Case Papers. Copy Bill of Complaint of Jeremiah Taylor, Vicar of Madeley
2280/3/5-6 Glebe: Case Papers
2280/3/8-10 Papers of Jeremiah Taylor, Vicar of Madeley, Regarding Glebe
2280/3/14 Rowland Chambre to JF, 21 Jan. 1775
2280/3/15 Rowland Chambre to JF, 19 Apr. 1775
2280/5/5-8 Madeley Pew Book
2280/6/1-4 Madeley Churchwardens’ Accounts and Overseers’ Accounts
2280/6/60-64 Account of Pews in Madeley Parish Church
2280/6/95 Vestry Minutes/Madeley Poor Relief Book; Includes the transcript of a letter from Bp. Butler to Archdeacon Plymley, 28 Mar. 1797
2280/11/1 Coalbrookdale Sunday School Subscriptions, 9 Feb. 1785
2280/16/4-85 Sermon notes of the Rev. John Fletcher
2280/16/86-89 Books owned by John Fletcher
2280/16/185 B.B. ‘Wesleyan Methodism in Coalbrookdale to 1836’ (Unpublished Ms.)

Other Manuscript Collections

92/66 Untitled Court Return, [c. Sept. 1760/Apr. 1761]
112/5/1–112/16/33 Attingham Collection, Papers of Thomas Hill
112/12/22 Letterbook of Thomas Hill
690/13 M.E.R. Jackson, ‘Notes on History of Madeley’
5492/1-2 Journals of Thomas Brocas
BB/F/2/2/1 Papers Relating to Alehouse Licenses, 1654-1785
Q/6/3/2 Papist Deeds

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