Reign of the Beast

The Atheist World of W. D. Saull and his Museum of Evolution

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Cover illustration: A spoof of the "Devil's Chaplain", the Rev. Robert Taylor (left, on the podium). His patron, the atheist Richard Carlile, is seen on the right, landing a punch. The wine merchant W. D. Saull funded both men and grounded his evolutionary talks in their dissident sciences. Such pastiches reinforced the prejudices of pious readers, by depicting the moral rot caused by irreligion. The wall posters on the left advertize contraception manuals and licentious memoirs, and a lecture by "Miss Sharples", Carlile's common-law "wife". Taylor's character is being impugned by portraying the mayhem caused by his infidel oratory. Beyond the brawling and debauchery, thieves are shown in the audience (bottom right) and a dagger-wielding agitator (centre). In reality, Taylor's congregations were respectable and attentive.
Etching, in the author's possession, entitled "The Triumph of Free Discussion" (the motto of Carlile's Fleet Street shop selling subversive prints). The caption reads, "A Sketch taken in the Westminster Cock Pit on Wednesday the 24th. of September 1834. Subject A Lecture by the Revd R. Taylor, A.B.M.R.C.S. 'On the importance of Character'."
Cover design by Jeevanjot Kaur Nagpal

2. Introducing Saull

> There are too few such men as Mr. Saull; men of great respectability, who are not content with holding Free-thought views, but lose no opportunity of avowing them, and impressing their importance upon their fellow-citizens ... His life affords fine example of public usefulness among a class most needing it—the middle and commercial. Rising above the sordid associations a competitive system is calculated to develope, he had an hour to spare for the instruction of the people, a purse ready to assist their cause, and a voice prompt to defend it.
>
> Atheist agitator Robert Cooper in *The London Investigator* (1855).[1]

Respectability was a question of perspective. To the young firebrand Robert Cooper, the old lag Saull was wealthy and friendly, with a paternal attitude towards Cooper's atheistic *London Investigator*, which he helped distribute. Cooper never witnessed the younger Saull being dragged through the courts on blasphemy charges for supporting the Rev. Robert Taylor and his burlesque on Christianity. In the Reform Bill years—the early 1830s—respectability was far from a *Times* correspondent's mind as he damned Saull. Here, he was castigated as a rough trader, a "spirit-merchant in Aldersgate-street" who lectures to "mechanics at the Philadelphian-chapel" (a radical-blasphemous venue near Finsbury Square); "he assumes to be a great geologist" but "he is a very weak and conceited person,—a disciple of Mr. Owen".[2] That said it all. A mix of trade, blasphemy, and socialism spoke volumes to the *Times*' one and a half million buyers. Even then, Saull's appearing to onlookers as a mere "disciple" of infidels and co-operators was a pale shadow of the truth, as the Home Office knew from the tabs it was keeping on him.

1 *LI* 2 (June 1855): 46.
2 *Times*, 23 Jan. 1833, 2.

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Next to nothing is known of Saull's personal life. Here we can only offer a series of glimpses through the political mist. Missing are almost all of the personal details. We do not even know what he looked like (there was a bust, an indication not least of his wealth, but it has vanished[3]). Equally obscure are his Northampton origins, and his relatives in that town. We know that one nephew there was a publican, suggesting that younger family members were in the trade. They also had freethinking leanings, and this nephew, John Saull, landlord of the "Admiral Rodney" pub near Northampton, refused to be intimidated by threats from civic leaders—the Anglican squirearchy was powerful in the provinces—and let his hall out to visiting freethinkers.[4] Press reports show another relative still fighting for universal suffrage after Saull's death.[5] That is pretty much the only political baseline we have, but it does suggest a freethinking radical family milieu.

William Devonshire himself was a generation older than young insurgent Cooper. When Saull arrived in London we do not know. Nor is his education documented, but it must have been minimal. Many ultra-radicals and soap-box co-operators were autodidacts, and he, too, appears to have been self-taught. Indeed, in a speech on Robert Owen's sixty-ninth birthday, he claimed that this was "the best education" available, being honed for purpose.[6] Still, he remained sensitive on the subject. Anecdotal (and undoubtedly apocryphal) evidence had him merely a "carman to a spirit dealer" at thirty, that is, in 1813, "barely able to do more than decipher the various addresses on the barrels".[7] This is extremely doubtful, for his younger brother Thomas, his partner in the wine trade, was obviously quite literate, judging by the 1813 ledgers and letters at Guildhall Library.[8] Moreover, their business, Saull & Saddington, "Wine and Brandy Merchts. 19 Aldersgate St", was already established by 1810, when Saull was 27, according to the *Post Office Directory*. Yet there is no doubt that he was self-made. Indeed

3 Graves 1906, 5: 374–75.
4 *UR*, 3 Feb. 1847, 20.
5 *Daily News*, 21 May 1855, 3.
6 *NMW* 7 (20 June 1840): 1319–25.
7 *Preston Guardian*, 14 July 1855.
8 Saull family of Aldersgate Street, papers, 19th century (Acc 2002/057), Ms 33957, Guildhall Library.

obituarists put down his lifelong interest in working-class education to the "defects" in his own.[9]

This in some part explains his strong support for Owenite 'rational' schooling. Not that such an emphasis on youth training was as obvious as it seems today. That doyen of labouring self-sufficiency William Cobbett, by contrast, was opposed to mentally restraining children. Education ("Heddekashun" as he laughed it off in his yokel-mimicking way) could thus be dangerous, and he also liked to cite examples of uneducated boys who later achieved brilliance.[10] But Saull was soundly Owenite in his support for schooling beyond the clutches of clergy and gentry. He helped set up the "Rational School" in Owen's Institution of the Industrious Classes in Charlotte Street, London, in 1833. Chairing a patrons' meeting, he explained that

> you must not look to the gentry to commence a school on liberal principles, for if they did, the first thing they would do would be to put your children in livery, train them to be servants, to wait on them behind their carriages.

Having little schooling himself, "he would be always ready to assist [socialist training like this], as he was deeply interested in the education of youth; inasmuch, as he intends to leave his valuable museum for the purpose of education."[11] So, almost from the foundation of his museum, Saull was planning to bequeath it for Owenite educational purposes.

The cultural shaping of the young mind, as one believer put it, was like the geological sculpting of the landscape, and however questionable geology's role in the shaping of humanity, there was no doubt that, for socialists, geology was to be one of the fundamental axioms of this rational schooling.[12] That is how Saull saw it, as integral to a wider rational education—an education that had to be rigorous, comprehensive, and scientific to be effective.[13] Geology was taught in the first co-operative school, set up at Salford in 1832, a democratic institution eschewing Owen's patriarchal approach, where the teachers

9 *JBAA*, 1st ser. 12 (1856): 186–87.
10 *Cobbett's Political Register* 88 (30 May 1835): 537, citing the case of Dr Adam Clarke, whom we will meet later in connection with apes and devils.
11 *Crisis* 3 (28 Dec. 1833): 144; (4 Jan. 1834): 150–51.
12 *NMW* 6 (5 Oct. 1839): 789–91; 1 (11 July 1835): 289.
13 Rigour was emphasized by Owenites: *Crisis*, 3 (14 Sept. 1833): 9–10.

were working men and the students had a say in its running. The school had a mineralogical museum at the outset.[14] By 1840, geology was part of even elementary instruction at the Owenites' Institution in London, while rational day-school boys were set exams in the subject all over the country.[15]

Saull's Owenite philanthropy and geological acquisitions depended on his business booming. And it did. He already had a wine and brandy warehouse at 19 Aldersgate Street by 1810.[16] In 1831, he moved the company to larger premises at No 15, a corner site a stone's throw away. This complex, with its bow-fronted shop, warehousing, stabling, and apartments, would be his home for life. Its large size, affirmed by £200 per annum rent, meant it could accommodate both his wine storehouse and museum.[17] Probably it was no coincidence that he bought out James Sowerby's fossil museum—making it the nucleus of his own—at this moment. We can assume that the new depot was actually acquired to accommodate the collection. Given that his entire business was re-located evidently to house the huge museum, his commitment was palpable.

Judging by his frequent trips across the Channel (on occasion accompanying Robert Owen to Paris), he specialized in French wines. Because high tariffs meant that only the finer wines were imported, we can be sure that "W. D. Saull & Co." was catering to the 'easy classes'. Charles Ludington, in *The Politics of Wine*, actually calls wine *the* demarcator of classes: favoured by the court and Church, it symbolized political power and social distinctiveness. And wine tastes reflected

14 *Lancashire and Yorkshire Co-operator*, No. 10 (1832): 6, 47; Yeo 1971, 91.

15 *NMW* 7 (30 May 1840): 1262–63; 11 (17 Sept. 1842): 99; (17 Dec. 1842): 203. See also *NMW* 4 (6 Jan. 1838): 82; 12 (22 July 1843): 32; Student in Realities [nd], Part 1: 254–55 on education beginning with the history of the earth; *Union* 1 (1 Dec 1842) 361–72.

16 "Saull and Saddington" traded until 1822, after which the company became "W. D. Saull & Co." and included at some point Thomas Saull and John Castle. The Castle partnership was dissolved in 1835, leaving the two Saull brothers: *London Gazette* 17857 (1 Oct. 1822): 1606; 19240 (13 Feb. 1835): 268.

17 House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, 19 pt. 1, 1840, Coms. of Inquiry into Charities in England and Wales: Thirty-second Report, Part VI. (City of London; General Charities, Essex), 20. He bought the property from a bankrupt leather cutter: *Perry's Bankrupt and Insolvent Gazette* 6 (1 Jan. 1831). Saull also owned a counting house with large wine cellarage in Burton Crescent, close to the house he let to Robert Owen: *MC*, 3 Oct. 1848, 1.

changing social mores. The port-swilling inebriety of the late Georgian age of aggressive masculinity was giving way to sherry sipping and more mannered ideals in the 1820s.[18] But even if Saull was now plying the pious, he was still doing a roaring trade. He seems to have been an astute manager, but tariffs also explain why business was booming. Wine duties were halved in 1825, after which French wine sales doubled or tripled. Then, in 1831, the tariffs were levelled, bringing French wines down on a par with the Portuguese and making them still more attractive. Foreign spirits were holding their own, despite swingeing government duties after the Napoleonic wars (a protectionist tax to favour British farmers and home-grown corn-spirit consumption).[19] By 1832, London, the sprawling, "monstrous smoke-hole" of a city, crammed with one and a half million residents, was consuming 10,000 gallons of spirits annually, and seven million gallons of wine.[20] Then a duty reduction in 1846 led to a fifty per cent rise in consumption over the following years.[21] All of this helps explain Saull's soaring profits. And the firm remained a success while Saull lived, but it crumbled into bankruptcy quickly after his death,[22] suggesting that he was the driving force. As a result, from the 1820s to the 1840s, he was comfortable enough to sink untold thousands into infidel chapels, Owenite halls, and court costs for prosecuted activists. He could shell out yearly subscriptions to numerous learned societies and think nothing of competing with the great institutions by bidding £40 (£3,500 in today's money) for a fossil.

Aldersgate Street was a well-known thoroughfare. It was home to the City of London Institution, with its newly inaugurated theatre in 1828.[23] This catered particularly to the sons of wealthy professionals. Up the street was the General Dispensary, an out-patient medical facility for the

18 Ludington 2013.

19 G. R. Porter 1843, 57–64; B. Harrison 1994, 65, on the massive rise in wine and sprit consumption in the 1820s and 1830s.

20 *Cosmopolite*, 19 May 1832, in HO 64/18, f. 657; W. A. Smith 1892, 89; *Lady's Magazine and Museum* 3 (Dec. 1833): 350.

21 G. R. Porter 1851, 559. Not only were Saull's relatives in the pub trade, but he himself can be located in the wider victualling business; he acted, for example, as an executor for London publicans: *County Herald and Weekly Advertiser*, 20 June 1835, 1.

22 It went bankrupt a year after his death: *The Law Journal Reports*, 1856, 53.

23 Denman 1828.

poor, to which Saull subscribed.[24] But its distinguishing landmark after 1829 was the General Post Office, London's new "pride and wonder" with its fifty-foot-ceilinged great hall supported by six Ionic columns. It gave the museum its instantly identifiable location, "a minute's walk from the General Post Office".[25]

Saull's house lay in one of the two parishes of Aldersgate ward, themselves marked by two ancient churches. The vicar of Saull's parish, St Botolph Without Aldersgate, clearly had issues with his recalcitrant parishioner, for he gave him Bishop Watson's *Apology for the Bible* (which had been written in reply to Tom Paine) in the hope that he would see the light. His Reverence must have been deflated to hear Watson slated as "deficient in reasoning" in Saull's privately-printed response. And the Bible itself Saull found wanting in the face of the latest "Astronomy, Geology, Geography, Ancient History".[26] Saull was never a profound thinker; he had none of the scurrilous Richard Carlile's deistical acumen (see Chapter 3), or the Rev. Robert Taylor's theatrical flourish (Chapter 4), nor the atheist compositor William Chilton's zoological stamina (Chapter 18), and certainly not the aggressive philosophical gall of the "Jew Book"-hater Charles Southwell (Chapter 18). Rather, Saull was an active, hurried business man with a freethinking passion and a long purse, ready for any infidel-Owenite eventuality. But he did share the others' Enlightenment belief in the omnipotence of science, and faith that science, rightly understood, could solve human problems. He naively echoed Richard Carlile's call in *Address to Men of Science* (1821) for the scientific clerisy to come clean about the anti-Christian implications of geology and astronomy. He demanded, in effect, that

24 Aldersgate's was the founding dispensary and a blueprint for others (Loudon 1981, 323). Dispensaries were financed by voluntary contributions and unique in that the doctors (including George Birkbeck, whom Saull would come to know well) would visit the poor at home. In 1845, the General Dispensary treated over ten thousand patients, including almost two thousand at home (*Daily News*, 30 Apr. 1846, 1). Saull attended yearly functions (e.g. *Times*, 12 May 1841, 2; *Daily News*, 30 Apr. 1846; *MC*, 11 May 1846, 1; 19 Oct. 1848, 7) and left the dispensary a bequest in his will. Ward meetings sometimes took place in the Dispensary theatre, so Saull might equally be found here on civic business (*Morning Post*, 22 Dec. 1832; *Examiner*, 29 Mar. 1845). Saull also subscribed to the Sanatorium founded in New Road for the middle classes: *MC*, 26 Mar. 1840; and he supported individual distressed medical men: *NMW* 12 (6 Jan. 1844): 224.

25 *Reasoner* 1 (6 Aug. 1846): 159; *NS*, 31 Oct. 1846, 3; Cruchley 1831, 43–44.

26 Saull 1828a.

they abandon their social base and act as fifth-columnists—impossible for the gentlemen of science because the Christian thread was woven so tightly into the social fabric that to unpick it would cause the whole cloth to shred. Saull demanded that materialist science lay its imperial claim to the realm of theology, believing, like all radical Enlightenment activists, that this would have profound social benefits. It was all neatly encapsulated in a book dedication to Saull by the Hackney Baptist and Bunyan expert George Offor, who saw Saull's work

> to draw mankind from the mad pursuit of phantoms, calculated only to injure or destroy human happiness, and to fix the mind upon realities most deeply interesting and valuable—to trace nature in her progressive developments from chaos towards perfection; these are researches calculated to check our baser, and elevate our nobler passions ...[27]

If infidelity marked Saull out in the parish, so did his politics, with the press pegging him as an extreme "Radical of the ward".[28] The London vestries had themselves become increasingly radical. Because they had many more skilled artisans on the electoral rolls, who allied themselves with the lower middle classes in their shared mistrust of "central authority", they were democratic hotbeds.[29] But Saull went further, and could even cause a public furore, most notably during a local Aldersgate election when he twitted the monarch over the fate of Charles I.[30] Being a republican, he also questioned the use of City of London funds for the King's domestic servants.[31] He would address wardmotes (meetings of merchants and citizens, chaired by the ward's alderman), urging municipal reform and support for the City's reform MPs.[32] And as a merchant, and thus an elector of delegates to the Common Council (which governed the City, with the Mayor and aldermen), he backed radicals who would push for "triennial Parliaments, universal suffrage, and vote by ballot".[33] Lobbying the Mayor with such ultra-radical demands prompted still more outraged letters to the *Times*, proving

27 Offor 1846, dedication, iii–iv.
28 *Baldwin's London Weekly Journal*, 24 Dec. 1836, 4.
29 Green 2010, 82–93. The exclusion of the vestries from the gagging Seditious Meetings Act of 1795 meant that radical expression could flourish here.
30 *MC*, 25 Dec. 1834; *Times*, 25 Dec. 1834, 2.
31 *Baldwin's London Weekly Journal*, 24 Dec. 1836, 4.
32 *MC*, 31 Dec. 1834; *TS*, 31 Dec. 1834, 2.
33 *TS*, 23 Dec. 1834, 8; 22 Dec. 1835, 8; *MC*, 23 Dec. 1834.

that Saull was actually far from inconspicuous.[34] Like many ultras and infidels, he saw both sides of the dock. When he was indicted for funding the Rev. Robert Taylor's blasphemous pulpit in 1828 (Chapter 4), it was the Court of Common Council in the City that he petitioned against the charge.[35]

Saull escaped prosecution, and such was the febrile political atmosphere in the Reform Bill years that the episode did not harm his City prospects. Many City aldermen were themselves reformers. As a wealthy merchant he was acceptable as an auditor of the City accounts only four years later, in 1832, a position he held through the decade.[36] With such visible bona fides, he was the obvious choice to audit, collect subscriptions, and act as banker to many of the radical and Owenite ventures. A City role was a guarantor of trustworthiness. Merchants were men "possessing public confidence", as important for committees collecting for Chartist widows as for the Guildhall.[37] Such credentials were even essential, given the horror stories of treasurers absconding with co-operators' savings or strike funds.[38] Wealth also allowed him to extend his financial dealings to deeds and promissory notes—Holyoake actually said he dealt in "bills and wine", reversing the priorities.[39] He even owned the deeds to Robert Owen's houses. Thus Saull became one of wealthiest Owenite backers, and he accepted whole-heartedly the socialist ideology: despite his huge business interests, he understood the need for individual regeneration, a non-capitalist labour exchange system, perhaps eventually the commonalty of property (see Chapter 6). He even went beyond Owen to demand a radical levelling via universal suffrage.

34 *Times*, 23 Jan. 1833, 2; *TS*, 17 Jan. 1833, 3.
35 *Trades Free Press*, 19 Jan. 1828, 206; *Times*, 18 Jan. 1828, 2.
36 *Courier*, 26 June 1832, 3; *Atlas*, 1 July 1832, 421; *TS*, 28 June 1834, 3; *Royal Kalendar*, 1838, 297.
37 *NS*, 27 Oct. 1849.
38 Chase 1988, 152; Chase 2000, 142; Goodway 1982, 47, 192; Rule 1986, 298, 319; G. Anderson 1976, 39.
39 Holyoake 1892, 2: 69. This is possibly an insider joke. 'Bills' were also the contemporary term for indictments, such as those handed to Carlile and Taylor, and on receiving one they would "immediately set about getting Bail", 'Bail' in this instance meaning the person who puts up the surety, and that was often Saull: e.g. HO 64/11, f. 200.

Actually, Saull's grand-sounding title, 'merchant', has to be treated cautiously, given that he was an uneducated self-made trader risen from humble origins. Although 'working class' and 'not of the working class' were the standard categorizations of the day, for example on committees at the London Mechanics' Institution, there was some fluidity, as individuals slipped effortlessly between categories,[40] and there was often mutual sympathy, especially before the Reform Bill. Before 1832, Gareth Stedman Jones reminds us, the class division was not "between employer and employed", but "between the represented and the unrepresented".[41] A tradesman was not as distinct as he might seem. Nor was Saull's position unique in combining commerce and radicalism. The wealthy George Rogers—a St Giles' tobacco and snuff manufacturer—did so too. He was another City parish reformer and radical benefactor, who joined Saull in the political unions; the two, for example, could be found co-operating to rescue the ailing radical paper, the *True Sun*,[42] or to pay off fines for indicted campaigners. As a result, Rogers was another slated by the Tory press as a politically suspect "low tradesman".[43] It was a time when these marginal mercantile men in a Church-and-Crown dominated society were flexing their muscles, as Steven Shapin has shown: they were changing the "boundaries of participation in science", deploying self-help phrenologies and anatomies to further their civic grip,[44] and now geology was equally being pressed into service.

Rogers became a Chartist, a physical-force one at that, and was a London delegate to the Chartist Convention. But Saull was never one for storming the citadel, nor was he a tub-thumper like Henry Hetherington, or quick with the repartee like Holyoake. Quite the reverse, Saull's were

40 Flexner 2014, 14, chap. 6.

41 G. S. Jones 1983, 106.

42 *TS*, 16 Oct. 1832, 1; 25 Oct. 1832, 1; HO 64/18, f. 702. Prothero 1979, 276, 311. George Rogers sat with Saull on the Metropolitan Political Union and National Political Union (NPU), and they worked on the condemned insurrectionary John Frost's defence fund (*CPG*, 21 Dec. 1839, 2). Rogers became the radical Thomas Wakley's election agent, running his 1835 parliamentary campaign in the new Finsbury constituency (Sprigge 1897, 239–52; Weinstein 2011, 50).

43 *The Age*, 28 Aug. 1842, 4.

44 Shapin 1983; Desmond 1989, ch. 4, on the sons-of-trade trained in London's back street medical schools adopting subversive approaches to science.

described as long-winded, "rigmarole" speeches, at least by opponents.[45] Perhaps that befitted the stolid, affable bank-manager of rational causes; certainly, it seemed proper for the dependable chairperson of radical committees. Always his cash dispersals showed his deep sympathy for the oppressed. This was illustrated by his first name-check in the newspapers: a guinea donated in 1825 to the cause of the Spanish and Italian refugees, who had fled persecution after failed rebellions and were exiled in poverty in Islington and Somers Town.[46] And nowhere was this sympathy more evident than in his role in the campaign to repatriate the transported Tolpuddle Martyrs.

While Saull's trading associations might have been detrimental in the eyes of elite geologists, there is no telling whether his fossil obsession, bizarre to some, was damaging to his business. It was, evidently, for another City merchant in the liquor trade, the Bishopsgate distiller James Bowerbank, whose collection, despite its emphasis on fossil fruits and seeds, rivalled Saull's own. It was said that Bowerbank's Highgate museum was amassed at a time when such a pursuit "was rather an opprobrium than a merit in a young commercial man".[47] On the other hand, a large museum could advance a merchant's reputation in learned society. Saull's wealth bought him rare fossils and, with them, access to geological high culture, including entrée to the geologist Charles Lyell's *soirées*.[48] Although uneducated, Saull was soon putting F.G.S (Fellow of the Geological Society), F.A.S (Fellow of the Astronomical Society), and F.S.A (Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries) after his name, while bandying around the Linnean binomials of ancient saurians and discussing runic inscriptions with the best of them.

It helped that Saull was clubbable, affable, and, as an Owenite, punctiliously moral (as he saw it), all of which gave the lie to the religious adage that materialists were evil people. So pervasive was this defamation that atheists constantly found it necessary to protest the

45 *Morning Post*, 17 Apr. 1838. Still, he could seem quite "affected", especially when eulogising Robert Owen: *Weekly Tribune*, 18 May 1850, 6.

46 *Courier*, 9 Feb. 1825, 1; *New Times*, 9 Feb. 1825, 1. J. White 2007, 140–41 on the refugees. But theirs was a *cause célèbre*, as likely to attract genteel ladies (Morgan 1862, 2: 147–48; Litchfield 1915, 1: 196) as sympathisers of the Carbonari revolutionaries.

47 Reeve 1863–64, 2: 133.

48 Morrell 2005, 137.

calumny. The *Christian Times* saw only "vice, and ignorance, and crime" accompany the "progress and power of infidel opinions". According to the *Patriot*, socialism was a malignant depravity and, for the *Christian Beacon*, its advocates were shiftless and profligate. This was a common perception in polite society, that socialists were "filthy fellows in their hearts".[49] The socialists' geology could be tarred as well. No one abhorred the materialists more than the Cromarty stone-mason-turned-editor of the evangelical *Witness* and influential author on Scottish fossil life, Hugh Miller, seemingly because of their disrespect for the cloth. No name calling was too foul; they were an "infestation", "vermin", a "slime"—castigations so severe that Miller's first biographer muted the barbs by calling them "half comic, half savage".[50] A later commentator wondered whether Miller had actually known anything of radical teachings.[51] Neither took Miller's hatred seriously enough. Nor was Miller alone in seeing an evolutionary geology pervert the "intelligent mechanics" of life. It was the rot that turned the infected into materialists, eating through their moral mooring and belief in salvation, and rendering them "turbulent subjects and bad men".[52] It was scarcely less hysterical at the other end of the social scale: the Regius Professor of Modern History in the University of Oxford, the Rev. Edward Nares, declared in his 1834 defence of Revelation, *Man, as Known to Us Theologically and Geologically*, that a bias against the Six Days of Creation was just another "vicious inclination" which pushes the "mind towards infidelity".[53] Had it not been an Owenite imperative, a holier-than-thou attitude would have been prudent anyway for Saull, given such mania. It greased the social wheels in hail-fellow, well-met geological society. As for Saull's suspect politics, the fossils themselves provided some deflection and diversion. With Tories marvelling at the beauty of his sea lilies and the rarity of his tree ferns, these artefacts could be seen mediating an otherwise deep

49 *London Magazine* 1 (1840): 105–11; *Patriot*, 28 Feb. 1839, 132; *Christian Beacon*, 2 (1840): 146–47; *Christian Times*, 30 Aug. 1851, 548. That materialism made them "bad men" was a common refrain: *Republican* 9 (9 Apr. 1824): 461.

50 Bayne 1871, 1: 271–72, 324, 328–29. Not that atheists could not respond in kind: Charles Southwell caned Miller and his *Witness* for their cant and fanaticism and defended the moral integrity of atheism: *Investigator* (1843): 185–86.

51 Mackenzie 1905, 185–86. All this despite Miller's own desire for social equality, a point made by early biographers, and explored by Lunan 2005.

52 H. Miller 1849, ix.

53 Nares 1834, 7.

political and religious divide.[54] They were the common rocky ground to facilitate discussion rather than dissension.

The republican banker was himself banking on his fossils. By the end they were worth some £2,000. This was a massive increase in intellectual capital: the dealer, in buying, collecting, and displaying, was indulging in a status-raising exercise. It enabled the parvenu to prise open intellectual doors. Trading in scientific commodities could be profitable in more ways than one. Unlike gold, hidden away as a hedge against inflation, fossil assets, like fine art, were kept visible and flouted to display one's affluence and learning. "Mr. Saull does not place his 'candle under a bushel,' nor, like a miser, lock up his stores", lauded Thackeray's *National Standard*. And perhaps we have to think in terms of fine art to understand why Thackeray's thrusting young blades would describe the museum merchandise doing "great credit to the taste, learning, and liberality, of its possessor". Liberality because it was opened to the downtrodden, learning because of its scientific pretension. But "taste"? Given the usual association of "taste" with class and character, we sense here an alternative aesthetic appreciation, for the museum's goal, "to elevate the moral character" and attack entitlement, which made Mr. Saull one of "the benefactors of humanity".[55]

Saull made his fossil assets do work. They were didactic and often dramatic. Given the prevalence of infidel lectures on the "Antiquity and Duration of the World" to debunk biblical chronology,[56] his geological stockroom could capitalize in a visual way. But more, the rocks were said to talk direct, without religious intercession or obfuscation. They were thought to give an unmediated contact with 'reality' to testify directly against sacred texts. Saull's co-operative comrade William Lovett wrote that "In throwing open the stony records of geological science, the attentive student may read for himself without the aid of translators or commentators a true illustrated history of the various animal and vegetable tribes".[57] It was a common infidel belief, that Nature's Works

54 *Morning Post*, 31 Dec. 1841.
55 *National Standard* 3 (18 Jan. 1834): 44–45. On Thackeray and the palaeontologists, see Dawson 2016, 155–61.
56 *NMW* 1 (12 Sept. 1835): 364–66, for a typical case.
57 Lovett 1920, 2: 385–86, 417. Like Saull, Lovett was enamoured of geology. He himself wrote a geology book, but failed to get it published. Stack 1999 for a study of Lovett.

were truer than God's Word. As another Saull comrade, the former insurrectionary and land reformer George Petrie, put it in his influential poem "Equality" (1832), whose verses were pinned up on the walls in Saull's museum:

> Through boundless space new scenes of beauty rise,
> And Nature stands unveiled before his eyes;
> Her laws immutable he understands,
> Unmarr'd by vile translator's filthy hands.[58]

Nature was not bare rocks and fossils but pointed to something far more social: in infidel radical eyes, its truth and beauty exposed society's cruel deviance and suggested a remedy.[59]

The museum's seemingly unmediated contact with reality was enabled by Pestalozzian educational notions so enamoured of socialists.[60] This encouraged a direct understanding gleaned through contact with hand or eye, making fossils and models eminently suitable. While Dissenters argued that God talked in the Bible over the bishops' heads straight to them, radicals went further to see Nature talking over the heads of Dissenters and contacting the powerless directly.

> [G]eology is my subject ... and the book which is open to me, is not shut against the meanest of my readers ... Nature will ever display to those who pursue the path of her progress, not her secrets and mysteries, for she has none, but the powers of her action, and the method of her labours. These require not a variety of languages to understand or explain them, nor the imposing diligence of imposing schools and high-gifted seats of learning to comprehend them.[61]

For Saull, the truth of Nature was incontrovertible, and his display was designed to prove it. The stones do not lie: this was a leitmotiv of Owenite lectures through the 1830s and 1840s. All geology talks were therefore declared to be "free from assumptions and conjectures", as the rocks would in themselves expose religious obfuscations and "time-hallowed prejudices."[62] Direct instruction from the stones without priestly

58 *PMG*, 22 Sept. 1832; Petrie n.d. [1841], 5; on its publication: *PMG*, 11 Aug. 1832.
59 Murphy 1994, 113.
60 *NMW* 1 (1 Aug. 1835): 515; Greaves 1827; Silber 1965, 283; Armytage 1961, on the Pestalozzianism of William Maclure, Charles Lane, and J. P. Greaves.
61 *Republican* 14 (10 Nov. 1826): 561–65 (p. 562).
62 *NMW* 10 (13 Nov. 1841): 160.

intercession was what Owenites were offering, the fundamentalist belief in truth from immediate contact. Visiting Saull's museum, one lyricist penned a few verses for the Owenite house organ, the *New Moral World*, in 1840:

> Ye that would drink at learning's purest springs,
> Forget your books awhile, and study things;--
> See nature's volumes round you fair outspread,
> Cull'd from her library, too little read;—
> Each line from human pen may err or cheat,
> In her's alone, there cannot be deceit.[63]

Saull, like so many activists, ran the reform gamut. He was an infidel, co-operator, union sympathizer, campaigner against taxes on the pauper press, against church rates and tithes, an Anti-Corn-Law Leaguer to lower bread prices, parliamentary suffrage reformer, Aldersgate ward radical, republican, and so much more. He was often contemporaneously active in each sphere. His swift move from one campaign to another left them appearing as a blur, proving what Prothero says, that these were interlaced movements and cannot be artificially compartmentalized.[64] And he was financially committed to all of them.

Yet Saull figures only as an infrequent footnote in histories of artisan radicalism and Owenite socialism. We need to flesh out this skeleton, bring the bones back to life, and reorientate the story around his pride and joy, the Aldersgate Street museum. Resuscitating Saull requires us to be sensitive to his specific context, to appreciate how all the aspects of his cultic milieu, Carlilean materialism, 'Utopian' socialism, and rejection of Christianity, came together to produce an Owenite 'evolutionist' with a transformative museum that heralded the social Millennium. Agitators like Saull are often dismissed as of little consequence, and historians dealing with them are said to be walking on the wild side, as if what matters are only wealthy, expensive, official accounts of science. Such blasphemous, radical, and co-operative views, it is said, were heard by few, promulgated by fewer still, and, being advocated for political ends, were marginal to "real" science. This study suggests that, rather than a few promulgators, the critical factor might be how few are actually

63 *NMW* 8 (12 Sept. 1840): 175.
64 Prothero 1979, 4, 255–62.

known, because of the vagaries of historical preservation, rather than how few actually existed. W. D. Saull's case shows how these shadowy radical individuals, ignored in the histories of gentlemanly theoretical science, can be actively resuscitated and their lost worlds reconstituted.

What follows is a narrative and thus chronological approach to Saull's street-level science and its enabling and changing social context. It is the story of Saull's trajectory—in geological terms, from a world of eternal flux to one of origins and progress; in contextual terms, from a blasphemous theatrical astro-theology to a self-sustaining astro-geology. These transitions were nurtured by Saull's move from a culture of Malthusian liberal economics to a faith in social regeneration, progress, and socialist perfectibility. Those were the political shifts which edged him into tackling the ultimate question: how had humans originated on the Earth?

Our entry point is the Carlilean underworld of the 1820s. It is intended to show the dissident geologies and astronomies Saull first had to negotiate. Many of these, it turns out, were developed to grapple with, or circumvent, the problem of 'Creation'. That might have been expected, given that 'blasphemers' were chafing at the restraints of a law-backed Christian culture, and desperate to undermine the miraculous props of priestly power. Saull's unique solution unfolded as he negotiated the shifting underground movements at this time of political unrest.