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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

17. Halls of Science

Saull's home remained London Owenism. But that home kept shifting. The geographical base seemed always in a state of flux, and the peripatetic Association of All Classes of All Nations moved again in October 1837 to 69 Great Queen Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields. Here the stalwarts began to experience "a very material change for the better". London membership soared, a day school was established, and lectures became solidly attended. In the latest "commodious" premises, Saull was presumably picking up more listeners.¹ He was supporting the Association with small annual donations, and the AACAN was itself thriving in its countrywide branches, judging by the numbers of converts during the depression. The Birmingham Congress could count on one hundred thousand members by 1839.

Countrywide control was maintained by a hierarchical chain of command, a tight organizational structure which sat comfortably with Owen's paternalist attitudes. England, Scotland, and Ireland were divided into fourteen missionary districts, with an itinerant lecturer appointed to each. The bigger the district, the more it was subdivided into branches, anything up to ten, each with its own local lecturers. The lot reported to a District Board of Directors, who paid the local missionaries some £80 to £100 a year. The District Board itself reported up the chain to the Central Board, which superintended the whole and reported to Congress. At the height of the agitation, 1839–42, the *New Moral World* was circulating 40,000 copies a week at 2d a number.² Even the *Westminster Review* conceded that Owen's co-operative, labour-exchanging, anti-capitalist values seemed to be the creed of a great

1 *NMW* 4 (28 Oct. 1837), 5; (31 Dec. 1837): 84. Donations: 4 (6 Jan. 1838): 85; 5 (1 Dec. 1838): 96.

2 Robert Owen *ODNB*.

portion of the working classes and supported by surprising numbers of the professional and middle-classes.³

The flow of funds and need for giant halls of science in each district prompted the Great Queen Street caucus to found the London Co-operative Building Society in 1839, with Saull as a Trustee. It was to open access to funds, to ease borrowing for the huge capital outlay needed for these big venues. They should be “commodious buildings, containing lecture rooms capable of accommodating about one thousand persons each, with committee rooms, reading room, library, shop for the sale of publications, baths, and other conveniences.”⁴ It was stipulated that the halls were to provide platforms for lectures on “scientific, literary, theological, moral, social, political” topics. These lectures and open debates, by encouraging the usual challenging discussions—something that made the halls exciting and distinguished them from mechanics’ institutions—were designed to promote community goals.

The first project off the ground was a yet another new institution in London, for the central “A1” Branch—the branches being ranked numerically to avoid confusion. The building chosen on John Street (off Goodge Street, Tottenham Court Road) had a massive 2300 square foot lecture hall, and, with the gallery, it could accommodate up to 1300 people. A large organ was expressly built for the rostrum, so essential for the social festivals. Across the hall was a tea room where the monthly festivals could be held, and the rest of the building was transformed into a reading room, library, dressing apartments and kitchen, all with gas lighting and hot running water.⁵ This finally promised a long-term home. But the whole operation came at no small cost (£3,000), and Saull sank £200 into the building society to help it along.⁶ This was initially a loan, but on 25 December 1840 he donated it as a “Christmas Box”, requiring only interest to be paid yearly.⁷

3 Claeys 1987, 164; Garnet 1972, 157; NMW, 7 (20 Apr. 1839): 404.

4 NMW 6 (14 Sept. 1839): 752.

5 NMW 7 (28 Mar. 1840): 1205; Royle 1998, 104.

6 NMW 7 (23 May 1840): 1243.

7 NMW 9 (9 Jan. 1841): 24, 28. After 1846 the London Co-Operative Building Society started a drive to pay off the outstanding £1200 debts on the hall and it bought out Saull's £10 per annum annuity: *The Age*, 11 Nov. 1848, 252; *Reasoner* 10 (1 Jan. 1851): 252; *Leader* 2 (4 Jan. 1851): 19.

Robert Owen presided over the opening on 23 February 1840. At the new institution, four lectures were to be delivered weekly—two on the social system, two on science. “Scientific Classes” too were planned, on chemistry, geology, astronomy, and mathematics.⁸ Elementary instruction would include more sciences, physiology and electricity, as well as writing, grammar and composition. And the syllabus received a morbid bonus within weeks in 1840, by way of an impromptu clinical pathology demonstration. The emaciated Secretary of the A1 branch died of consumption, that great killer of middle-aged Victorian clerks who suffered from poor housing and sanitation.⁹ Among the Owenite corpus, even the corpse could benefit the community. The Secretary had willed his body for public dissection at John Street, hoping that the cause of his death would be elucidated as his lungs were opened, so that others might be guided to a healthier lifestyle. This was proof that they were serious about teaching the people how the human body worked, instruction rarely available elsewhere outside of the guarded medical portals. A hundred local socialists (including women) tested their ideological mettle by attending.¹⁰ This was one instance, perhaps, when even Saull’s geology seemed less pernicious to prim Christians, who thought this shocking exposure of the great unwashed to mortal flesh would only encourage materialism.¹¹

A couple of weeks later, Saull gave a series of three lectures on the rise of fossil life and the emergence of rational man, who was evidently not afraid to look inside his own body for explanations.¹² Saull was a mainstay of the Social Institution (or Literary and Scientific Institution, as it was also called). He was visibly front and centre, presiding yearly over the “Family Party and Ball” at the anniversary celebrations,¹³ but he also worked behind the scenes to sort out extensions of the lease.¹⁴ John Street became the focal point of London Owenism, not only for lectures and propaganda (anti-capitalist, anti-poor law, and anti-clerical),

8 NMW 7 (28 Mar. 1840): 1205; (23 May 1840): 1244.

9 G. Anderson 1976, 18.

10 NMW 7 (23 May 1840): 1344.

11 Nash 1995a, 161–62; R. Richardson 1989 on dissection and the taboos surrounding it.

12 NMW 7 (6 June 1840): 1290; (13 June 1840): 1310.

13 For example, NMW 10 (19 Feb. 1842): 272; (12 Mar. 1842): 296; 11 (27 Apr. 1843): 284.

14 *Reasoner* 5 (22 Nov. 1848): 411.

but also for the life-affirming rituals usually entrusted to Christian ministers. Marriages were solemnized here, replete with choir. Babies were ceremoniously named after heroes in the pantheon—a sort of socialist imitation of Catholic confirmation with its appropriation of saints. Owen, the ‘Social Father’, would induct them into the rational community at his Sunday meetings.¹⁵ Holyoake chose a euphonic “Mazzini Truelove” for his six-month old (after the Italian revolutionary and the Institution’s secretary Edward Truelove).¹⁶ Congresses would occasionally be held here, issuing “proclamations, manifestoes, and addresses to her Majesty”. (“If the Queen preserved them,” laughed Holyoake, “she must have left a fine collection.”¹⁷) And when others failed to find a home, the institution’s doors were always open: so the Chartists the day after the great Kennington Common meeting in 1848 “crowded into the John Street Institution” when every other venue was closed to them.¹⁸

During the depths of the economic depression, Owenite anti-capitalist alternatives were doing a booming business. Halls were now springing up all over the country. A thousand guests at Owen’s seventieth birthday celebrations in June 1841—with Saull officiating—heard the latest:

they had now Halls of Science in Manchester built at an expense of £7000, another in Liverpool which cost nearly as much; and they had halls in Halifax, in Huddersfield, and many other places, built at an expense of £30,000.¹⁹

These were all “Halls of Science”—referring both to the science of society, and to the physical sciences, those motors of ‘rational’ enquiry. At a deeper level the two were inextricably linked, for Saull’s scientism would ultimately have social relations explained by physiological principles.²⁰ These were the first Halls of Science so-called since Watson’s City Road “Mechanics’ Hall of Science” in 1834, now rebranded Owenite Branch 16

15 Yeo 1971, 101.

16 Truelove’s book shop next door sold works by “Owen, Fourier, Godwin, Voltaire, Paine, Volney, Mirabaud, Carlile, (not Carlisle) Southwell”, and of course “Holyoake”: *Reasoner* 7 (14 Nov. 1849): 305–07.

17 Holyoake 1906, 1: 129.

18 Holyoake 1905, 1:76; McCabe 1908, 1:134.

19 *NMW* 9 (12 June 1841): 374–77.

20 J. F. C. Harrison 1969, 78.

(Saul, with proprietorial fondness, was still lecturing here, on geology, astronomy, and the "Influence of Scientific Inquiry"²¹).

Some of the new Halls in industrial towns were monsters. Manchester's held 3000 people. The entire cost had been met by the savings of artisans, who ploughed their little profits into a Hall of Science Building Association. By 1840 the huge working-class support meant that it was relatively easy to raise the cash from £1 shares, paid in weekly instalments, from workers' wages.²² Manchester's hall was an immense building, "the finest and most spacious in the town".²³ As well as hosting public lectures, it held evening classes every night and a Sunday School to teach the sciences. It was proud, self-assertive, and successful in the contested Sabbath lecturing space. But their Sunday concerts were what stood out, rousing oratorios with a 100-piece band and chorus performing Handel and Haydn, interspersed with social hymns, and "trumpet parts" to give "one general thrill of rapture". Enthralled Mancunian crowds would then sit through Robert Buchanan's intermission lecture, which trashed Christ's miracles and made a rational world seem miraculous in its potential.²⁴ Uplifting classical music was often used in bourgeois establishments to 'refine' the masses, or, at least, keep them out of music halls.²⁵ This was true in some provincial mechanics' institutions patronized by the clergy and gentry.²⁶ But in the Halls of Science the "Grand Oratorios" functioned as recruiting drives, and to give the intermission blasphemy lecture an almost sacred aura.

These big, self-assertive branches would put a strain on Owen's patrician hold over the movement. They put an even bigger strain on the provincial mechanics' institutions, run by wealthy elites with social safety in mind, and the clergy in support. These kept labourers out of the boardroom, and politics and theology off the syllabus. By contrast they were boring, and the socialists criticized "the excessively individualistic and technological orientation" of the mechanics' institutions, which

21 *NMW* 4 (6 Jan. 1838): 85; 5 (26 Jan. 1839): 224; 6 (26 Oct. 1839): 848.

22 Yeo 1971, 92.

23 Faucher 1844, 25; A. Black 1955.

24 *NMW* 8 (5 Dec. 1840): 368; (18 Dec. 1840): 400; 9 (16 Jan. 1841): 40; 10 (4 Dec. 1841): 184.

25 H. Cunningham 1980, 61.

26 Tylecote 1957, 273; Inkster 1976, 281; J. F. C. Harrison 1961, 64, 70–71.

simply helped workbench hands “‘get on’ in their jobs as rational competitive atoms”, while shunning the screaming social, political, and moral questions of the day.²⁷ Socialist halls were not honing better machine operators, but morally and rationally rounded men and women for a new egalitarian Jerusalem.

Little has been written on the provincial differences among these Halls or the hostility they met. The flurry of building activity nationwide was documented just as cursorily by co-operation’s first home-grown historian, Holyoake:

A Hall of Science was erected in Rockingham Street, Sheffield, in 1839: a commodious and handsome building for the time. Mr. Joseph Smith had erected the first at Salford, less pretentious, but a pleasant structure, costing £850, and capable of holding six hundred persons. The Liverpool Hall, a building of mark for those days, cost £5,000...More than £22,000 was spent in one year in securing “Social Institutions” ...²⁸

Stiff opposition was encountered in many localities. In Bristol, rioters rammed the doors of the huge 4000-capacity Hall with a cart, and fifty or sixty burst in with sticks to ransack the place. Their attempts to burn it down only failed because the gas cocks were turned off.²⁹ At Manchester, an arsonist tried to destroy the unfinished building.³⁰ The city’s clergy and employers both decried this “hideous form of infidelity”. The pressure was fairly relentless from the first week of opening, when the local clergyman took the stewards to court for charging admission for Sabbath lectures, which, under an old anti-sedition act, was illegal for all but licensed places of religious worship.³¹

Sermon-inspired hatreds could produce quite dangerous situations in the provinces. The buildings were an “abomination”,³² ideologically not architecturally, and their entrances were placarded continually by irate Christians. In the more locked-down towns, attempts by Owenites to enter the halls could mean running the gauntlet. When that “grey-headed panderer to immorality” Robert Owen arrived in the Potteries,

²⁷ Yeo 1971, 90; Shapin and Barnes 1977.

²⁸ Holyoake 1906, 1: 187.

²⁹ *Weekly Chronicle*, 28 Feb. 1841, 7; size: *Nonconformist*, 27 July 1842, 516.

³⁰ *Patriot*, 20 Apr. 1840, 253; *Weekly Chronicle*, 26 Apr. 1840, 2.

³¹ *Patriot*, 13 July 1840, 493; Royle 1974, 66–67; Podmore 1907, 2: 522–24; A. Black 1955, 42–44.

³² *Argus*, 12 Jan. 1840, 2.

at the Burslem Hall of Science, “a miserable hovel” in the eyes of the *Staffordshire Gazette*, he faced an “infuriated, fanatical, and drunken mob,” fired up by the clergy and inflammatory handbills denouncing his “Poison”. Plied with free drink and egged on by the authorities, the mob attacked Owen’s coach and he was frog-marched away by the clergy-led crowd and held in a house for two hours. The mob caught the pacifist Alexander Campbell, “the most fatherly-minded of all the missionaries”,³³ a gentle man moving towards sacred socialism, beat him up, and then “bonnetted” him (covered him in clay), to the delight of the local conservative press.³⁴

These hate incidents reached a zenith after 1840. The high church Tory Bishop of Exeter in the Lords lambasted Owen’s views, not least on the “blessed state”, marriage—which he declared “not fit for your Lordships, or any decent person to hear”—but also Owen’s blasphemous denial of immortality and revelation. As heinous in the Bishop’s eyes was the Owenite “doctrine of the irresponsibility of man”, which undercut Christianity to the core. If humans were products of circumstance, and therefore blameless, whence the heavenly rewards and hellish punishments? And with those disappearing threats and promises went the earthly power of the Church. Worse, it would let the thieves off in this life. He had heard of a social missionary in Liverpool arguing that a reprobate convicted of manslaughter “ought not to be punished, because—he could not help doing what he did!” Saull had said as much himself. He used his native Northampton experience to drive the point home. His homily related the story of a local boy, uneducated, running wild because his starving mother was widowed. The youngster, thus lacking in education and guidance, started stealing food and ended up being transported. Where was the guilt when “gross neglect” was to blame? But Saull failed to persuade the locals that the wretch was “more sinned against than sinning”.³⁵ Similar mitigating claims based on a belief that circumstance shaped character outraged the Bishop. It struck “at the foundation of all law, human and divine”.

33 Holyoake 1906, 1: 211, 236; J. F. C. Harrison 1969, 128.

34 Buchanan 1840a, 142–6; *Weekly Chronicle*, 5 July 1840, 2.

35 *NMW* 4 (23 June 1838): 278–80.

This made the Owenites not only immoral, but “an illegal society” and the Halls of Science had to be shut down.³⁶

Though the Bishop failed to get Owen prosecuted, the clergy and manufacturers became pro-active. Some factory bosses threatened to sack socialists.³⁷ Attempts were made to “depopulate” the Halls, as the Church set up rival “Parochial Libraries” under “the patronage of the Clergy—carefully ... supplied with books, suited to open both natural and revealed truth”. They were to instil “holy principles and habits” in order to “consecrate” science—to make it point to a higher truth and thus halt the spread of infidel contagion. An apocalyptic image in the *Church Magazine* hinted at the blood and terror in store, with the execrable Halls “sapping the very foundations of society, and threatening the evils of an ‘Age of Science,’ not inferior to those which in the last century attended a boasted ‘Age of Reason.’”³⁸ Angry letters venting frustration filled the Tory papers: “Why are those dens of blasphemy—Social halls of Science (Science!!!) permitted to exist in every quarter of the metropolis ... sending out their missionaries to brutalise—to demonise our countrymen ... Sir, this should be stopped at once.”³⁹ With over 30,000 attending Sabbath lectures in the Halls of Science nationwide, the clergy were called upon to do more to “suppress this monstrous heresy”.⁴⁰

In this hysterical climate, the more outrageous the anecdote, the more drooling the Tory press. One of the more querulous socialist proprietors of Manchester Zoological Society, a Dr Hulley, was reported by the *Argus* to have mooted “the animals *receiving the sacrament*” on the Sabbath. A local joke became a national scandal. Such “disgustingly profane ribaldry” had its parallel only in the acts “of the fiends who flourished in the ‘reign of terror’”.⁴¹ When a sermon-drilled populace feared it would have its throats cut by socialists, amicable dialogue was all but impossible. Even mechanics’ institutions were suffering the backlash. As Lord Brougham heard in 1839: “the clergy are now openly

36 *Mirror of Parliament* 1 (1840): 312–31; *Atlas*, 25 Jan. 1840, 51.

37 A. Black 1955, 42–44; Buchanan 1840a, 139; *NMW* 8 (4 July 1840): 4.

38 *Church Magazine* 6 (Feb. 1844): 54–56.

39 *The Age*, 4 Sept. 1842, 5. *NMW* 8 (15 Aug. 1840): 105, on *The Age*’s “ravings” about socialism’s success in the manufacturing districts and “the church” being “the sacred source and unsullied sanctuary of Conservatism”.

40 *British Magazine* 20 (July 1841): 65–66; *Union* 1 (1 Dec. 1842): 368.

41 *Argus*, 29 Nov. 1840, 700. On attempts to hush the socialist Hulley up in the society: *Manchester Times and Gazette*, 12 Dec. 1840.

hostile to Mech. Inst^s., as the seed beds of infidelity, & are founding Societies for the diffusion of Religious & Useful Knowledge under the patronage of the Bishops".⁴² Teachers complained that children would learn their Bible-tract disseminating techniques in Sunday School; then they would be lured over to John Street with its promise of exciting science and use these techniques to distribute infidel propaganda. The religious teachers' solution in 1840 was to set up a rival "Senior Scholars' Institute" for advanced science and sacred studies in Red Lion Square. It was an overt effort to hold on to their Sunday School graduates.⁴³

Ironically, where the clergy and squirearchy did stop the Owenites building, the local socialists sometimes resorted to buying old chapels instead. In Glasgow they managed to acquire a large parish church, and, in Birmingham, socialists bought the Lawrence Street Chapel and rebranded it the Hall of Science. In a more clerically-deregulated London, the socialists and Metropolitan Churches Committee actually vied for building sites. With radical vestries opposing the clergy, and the socialists able to stump up the huge sums quickly, they would often win the bid to build on church-designated plots.⁴⁴ Sometimes provincial efforts to thwart the clerical-blocking badly backfired. In Huddersfield, they put the Hall building funds under a spinner's name, because he was not known to be a socialist, but the spinner thought the £130 better than his meagre wage and promptly absconded to America with it.⁴⁵

Saull toured the new Halls in July 1840. From lecturing the socialists in Leeds—where nearly four hundred heard his two-hour exposition on geology—he migrated over to the Huddersfield and Manchester Halls of Science. By now, a tacit acceptance of progressive 'evolution' was beginning to pervade the socialist halls. In 1840, it received a further boost from the import of French St Simonian ideas on the "New Genesis", with its reworking of Bible verses to include monstrous fossil beasts and "hideous hippopotami" born and raised by the "God of

42 T. Coates to H. Brougham, 27 Sept. 1839, Brougham Correspondence 95, University College London.

43 *Evangelical Repository* 1 (Oct. 1840): 209–10.

44 *Patriot*, 4 Nov. 1841, 742; A. Black 1955, 43; Simon 1960. 239–40.

45 *Courier*, 22 June 1840, 3; *Patriot*, 29 June 1840, 450. On this Hall: A. Brooke, "Huddersfield Hall of Science."

Progress".⁴⁶ As a metaphoric expropriation of palaeontology it might have struck a chord with the Francophile Saull. But his leaner geology still came unfashionably backed by astronomical causes. Using a globe, Saull explained what he tellingly called the "pregnant history" of the strata-embedded life, looking to the cyclical climatic changes as "the causes of the great varieties of fossil remains". It was driven by the poles swinging towards the equator, "and vice versa; and this not once, but many times." He drew both anti-Malthusian and Owenite morals. The first from the fact that the "pabulum of life is constantly on the increase, and, as a consequence, animated and organised beings [become] more numerous and prolific"—in short, nature provides an ever-increasing abundance of food allowing an ever-increasing number of mouths. And he drew the final Owenite conclusion for an age collapsing into violence

that gradual progression is the universal law of nature. It is found equally developed in planets, vegetables, and animals. True philosophy will apply it to society; and, avoiding all violent and reckless changes on the one hand, avoid with equal care a stand-still policy on the other.

The Leeds socialists knew that "Mr. Saull holds some peculiar notions upon the subject, which we believe are not yet acquiesced in by some of his brothers in the science".⁴⁷ That was something of an understatement. However hot the topic for branch socialists, it still burned the fingers of the *Penny Satirist*. Smith remained on Saull's tail, blinded by incomprehension, still claiming that Saull's ancestor was an ass, not a monkey. Saull's "witchcraft" was a devil's brew of "delusion and vain imagination" stirred with "infidel bigotry", said the *Penny Satirist*, and so much superstition in its own right.⁴⁸ Nor was his museum of more worth. Forget the poor biblical "enthusiast, who adores the relic of some pious saint", the curator's fanaticism "is, in many respects, less reasonable, less honourable". The acquisitiveness and "worship" of such fossil relics in their shrines was only another case of "idolatry".⁴⁹

Saull, it seems, had fostered Smith's growing belief that science itself was soulless when it was not pedantic. The literary world was

46 NMW 8 (26 Dec. 1840): 40. It was introduced by gentlemanly communist Goodwyn Barnaby.

47 NMW 8 (18 July 1840): 37; On Leeds: Morrell 1985.

48 PS, 4 July 1840; 1 Oct. 1842.

49 J. E. Smith 1873 [1848], 1: 310.

becoming contemptuous of these “dull and prosy” men of science. See the “geologist collecting petrified dung, and insects, and shells, to prove that which cannot be proved ... Poor simpleton!” and then looking “as full of scientific pride as a ginger-beer glass when the puff is running over.”⁵⁰ Gone was the revolutionary day when “matter—the dross of existence” could be found “seated on the throne of God himself”, and when man had lost his self-respect. Nor could he regain his standing, so long as he imagined himself the son of “a shaved, and untailed, and cultivated monkey, as Mr. Saull” would have him.⁵¹

Saull’s guest lectures of 1840 were among the last he was to deliver on geology. Not that he was put off by the critics. But with younger activists rising to the challenge of life’s origin, he could move on to a complementary area, the final stage of the evolutionary drama: mankind’s rise from savagery.

Relatives

The countrywide Halls of Science were among the few places that could host Saull’s sort of infidel performance outside of London. This is what rankled the Anglican clergy: their loss of town control. The Halls provided venues for undesirables who might otherwise be kept from holding meetings by being denied rooms. Take “the bigoted town of Northampton”, as the *New Moral World* called it, at least before the “banner of Socialism” was unfurled.⁵² Saull was a native: he had been baptized at nearby Byfield, and he still owned a property there.⁵³ His relatives lived on the outskirts, so he was often in the region. The cabinets of other fossil collectors contained Northampton specimens donated by Saull, an *Ammonites elegans* from Bugbrook, close by the town, or a fish from King’s Cliff (in the northern corner of Northamptonshire), suggesting that he was also buying or prospecting in the county.⁵⁴

In August 1840, Saull had moved on from Manchester to lecture the socialists in Northampton on “the Present and Future prospects

50 *PS*, 1 Oct. 1842.

51 *Family Herald* 2 (26 Oct. 1844): 394.

52 *NMW* 5 (13 Apr. 1839): 395.

53 William Devonshire Saull, Will, Public Record Office, National Archives. *NMW* 4 (23 June 1838): 278–80.

54 Delair 1985.

of Society" and the French peasantry.⁵⁵ Presumably he visited his kin in nearby villages. These local parishes were tightly controlled by the clergy. John Saull (one of his two nephews there) owned a pub, the "Admiral Rodney" on the High Street of Long Buckby, north-west of Northampton. The village was, in Holyoake's (not-unbiased) eyes, "an intellectual desert, where priests rule and freedom is dead". The previous landlord had been warned by the vicar of Buckby that he risked his licence if he leased his "club room" for freethought lectures. The minister, the Rev. Richard Gardner, a member of the Church Missionary Society,⁵⁶ was happy to send the Word to heathen Africa but evidently not to let in infidel missionaries from darkest London. The new landlord John Saull now offered Holyoake the same backroom to speak, despite the same threat. It led to clerical anger, but whether John Saull's subsequent bankruptcy was due to his pub being blacklisted is not known.⁵⁷

These threats against landlords, and the barring of venues, explains why the Northampton Chartists looked "with more than common delight upon that feature of our times ... we mean the erection of Trades' Halls and Halls of Science":

we must ... have our Halls of Science, wherein to discuss our grievances, and to advocate our political rights. It is well known ... that all the public buildings are monopolized by the privileged classes; and the very sacred edifices of the priests are too holy, to have their doors unfolded for free enquiry. This being the state of things ... it becomes the Working Classes immediately to commence business for themselves in politics, and especially to become their own priests, and to erect for themselves temples, dedicated to truth and free enquiry.⁵⁸

Nor were the mechanics' institutions themselves happy about the Halls, for they saw their own clientele draining away. A report on the institutes'

⁵⁵ NMW 8 (22 Aug. 1840): 124.

⁵⁶ *Church Missionary Record* 13 (July 1842): 173.

⁵⁷ UR, 3 Feb. 1847, 20; *Reasoner* 2 (17 Feb. 1847): 69–70; (3 Mar. 1847): 106–07; (17 Mar. 1847): 134; (21 Apr. 1847): 219. Bankruptcy: *The Jurist*, 13 Pt 2 (1849): 198; *Patriot*, 24 May 1849, 336. Both of Saull's nephews were sympathetic to radical freethought. One (unnamed) turned up at a Utilitarian Society meeting in the City Road Hall of Science, which Holyoake and W. D. Saull addressed (UR, 6 Oct. 1847, 89). William Saull (the other nephew) was Chairman of the Working Men's Association in Long Buckby (CGV, 3 Nov. 1838, 3).

⁵⁸ CGV, 27 Mar. 1841, 4.

decline and takeover by clerks was commissioned in 1839. Its author told Henry Brougham that the mechanics' institutions'

omission of politics & religion (the two things which men think most useful objects of speculation) keeps away all the sober, industrious & reflecting of the handicraftsmen, who resort to Socialism & go through severe moral discipline & privations to become members of the Community of Socialists.⁵⁹

The report itself was equally damning. It blamed the "systematic exclusion" of politics and theology "in almost every shape" for driving men to the socialist Halls.⁶⁰ By 1841, this failure seemed to be threatening the existence of the institutes themselves. The socialists "zealously diffuse their opinions far and wide; they have erected halls, and established places of meeting in which they discourse to thousands; they invite persons of adverse opinions to listen to and freely discuss the expositions of their principles":

they have lectures on the sciences [it referenced the calibre of the John Street science lecturers], they have music, and in some cases other classes, and they add to these the occasional attraction of tea-parties, accompanied by dancing. The number of members of Socialist Institutions in London is much smaller than that of members of Mechanics' Institutions, but the attendance at their lectures, discussions, and festive meetings, is much greater ...

The reason was that the Halls encouraged free-for-all debates on religion and politics; they were lively, vocal, entertaining, and liberating. The exclusion of debate and the "right of free inquiry" left the mechanics' institutions, "if not distasteful, at least uninteresting".⁶¹ Participation was a large part of the Halls' success.

But, even here, there is an irony. In 1840, just as the report was going to press, the John Street Institution, under Owen's tight control, *abolished* the free-for-alls after Sunday lectures. It seemed to be encouraging "conceited and ambitious persons to offer opposition for mere display", flamboyant individualism, against the socialist ethos. From now on,

59 T. Coates to H. Brougham, 27 Sept. 1839, Brougham Correspondence 95, University College London.

60 Coates 1841, 24.

61 Coates 1841, 29–30; Shapin and Barnes 1977.

pertinent questions had to be delivered in writing. Time was set apart to answer them “and proper arrangements made for the maintenance of the strictest order”.⁶² Many balked at Owen’s undemocratic chaperoning, and other Halls, notably Manchester with its worker control, remained much freer.⁶³ The same went for other London venues, where boisterous cross questioning was allowed to continue.

But the best lures for interested artisans were the theatrical debates staged between socialist missionaries (slammed as the “missionaries of Satan”⁶⁴) and ministers of the cloth. Saull chaired a typical thrust-and-parry session in 1842, this time at his old Carlilean stamping ground, the Rotunda—now re-branded the South London Hall of Science (and enrolled as Branch 53). The place was as lively as ever: one advert showed where its priorities lay:

BRANCH 53 of the Rational Society, SOUTH LONDON HALL of SCIENCE.
BLACKFRIARS ROAD.—

On Sunday Evening Mr A. CAMPBELL will LECTURE on “The Distress in the Manufacturing Districts and the only apparent Remedy,” commencing at Half-past Seven.

On Monday Mr. MANSFIELD will conclude his course of LECTURES on GEOLOGY; to be followed on the two succeeding Mondays by Mr. BUCHANAN in “An Inquiry into the Creation and Fall of Man and the Deluge, with reference to Geology and Astronomy”.

On Tuesday a SOCIAL FESTIVAL. Single Tickets 1s, double 1s 6d.⁶⁵

Here Saull was right at home, and, in September 1842, he chaired a two-day debate on the “Disadvantages of Christianity”, between a local lecturer and Independent minister.⁶⁶ Such set pieces were the big draws and acted as recruiting spectacles for the cause—this was socialism showing its Rotundanist teeth.

Tory histrionics over such blasphemous goings-on had only increased through the decade. Outside the socialist venue would be a placard

62 NMW 7 (23 May 1840): 1243.

63 The lectures, festivals, and refreshments in the northern halls were cheaper too: Yeo 1971, 88, 94–95.

64 NMW 5 (25 May 1839): 490; A. J. Booth 1869, 199.

65 NMW 11 (6 Aug. 1842): 42.

66 NMW 11 (10 Sept. 1842): 90.

advertising the latest lecture. "The bible no revelation" was one, causing upright citizens to gasp, especially when they saw that the lecturer was "a person calling herself Mrs. Martin." More irate letters to the *Standard* (the city's top-selling evening rag, with half-a-million sales):

Who this female blasphemer may be, is a matter of no moment; but it is lamentable that English women, if such they are, can be found capable of so disgracing their sex and their country, and if it is necessary to impose a legal restraint upon the sale of arsenic and other deleterious drugs, it is surely the duty of the magistrates in whose district this nuisance is situated, to endeavour to prevent the diffusion of a moral poison ...⁶⁷

The incisive, witty Emma Martin turned out to be the biggest draw of all. A mother of three, once a "zealous" Baptist of fierce Calvinistic persuasion, she had recently converted just as zealously to Owenism. The economic exploitation, social degradation, and debased state of women in Christian society convinced her that freethinking socialism was a more moral way forward.⁶⁸ That is not how others saw it. She had deserted her husband and deserted her Saviour. Appalled at women being "seduced" by socialism, *Fraser's Magazine* pictured the "coteries of courtesans" suffering the "horrible abominations" of Owen's trial-and-error marriage system. Only "under the Cross" would women find true salvation.⁶⁹ But Martin knew her Bible backwards and became a star attraction, not least in exposing the patriarchal iniquities of the Church. Just as Saull's monkey-man made milksop socialists queasy, so did Martin's extreme feminist freethought. And with her social realignment came a contingent scientific shift. Like Saull and others, she would soon be arguing that the history of life resembles the history of the individual, a natural growth, with mankind "but an improvement upon the lower animals" and a "new product of Nature's increasing power".⁷⁰

No disputant so celebrated had appeared since Richard Carlile, it was said.⁷¹ So it was fitting that Mrs Martin saw the old lion off. Carlile, fifty-two, his asthma made worse by London's belching chimneys with

⁶⁷ *Standard*, 20 Dec. 1842.

⁶⁸ B. Taylor 1983, 130ff; Frow and Frow 1989, 86–87.

⁶⁹ *Fraser's Magazine* 21 (Jan–June 1840): 689–90. For a study of the "fallen" woman, literally "seduced", but as applicable to the metaphorical "seduction" by Owenism causing an equal loss of 'character', see A. Anderson 1993.

⁷⁰ J. A. Secord 2000, 314–16; E. Martin [1844].

⁷¹ *NS*, 22 Nov. 1851.

their pall of black soot, died on 10 February 1843.⁷² Defying prejudice to the end, he wanted his corpse to go to his own hero, the surgeon William Lawrence, to benefit mankind. But Lawrence, cowed since a court had declared his *Lectures on Man* blasphemous, never took on the task. Instead, the body went to St Thomas's Hospital, where the dissector pointed out Carlile's uncivilized sloping face but big heart, while the accompanying oration commended Carlile's action in donating his body to science. But Carlile's notoriety only exacerbated what many saw as a desecration, anatomical dissection. As it was, dissecting rooms were associated with executed felons, grave robbery, and posthumous punishment of poor-house victims. Carlile added blasphemous atheism to the list. But better dismemberment than rotting in hallowed ground, had been his view.⁷³ The grave was a sanctuary of silent repose till Judgement Day for many Christians, and while putting Carlile on the slab with the murderers might have been fitting, it did not lessen the Christian opposition. Even the anodyne oration at St Thomas's over the "miserable 'atheist'" elicited "abhorrence and disgust".⁷⁴ When the body was finally released for a Kensal Green burial, one radical generation paid tribute to the other. No one was better suited to deliver the eulogy at the City Road Hall of Science than Emma Martin herself.⁷⁵

Mrs Martin points up another advantage of the Halls over Mechanics' Institutions: their family orientation and female friendliness. Women were not to be veiled and shuffled off into the gallery. Against the chauvinist claim that educated women would lead to better domestic economy and a more comfortable working man's home, feminists, male and female, wanted women's intellectual liberation proper. But as Barbara Taylor in *Eve and the New Jerusalem* admits, rearranging the "social

72 *Examiner*, Feb. 1843, 88; burial: *NMW* 11 (25 Feb. 1843): 284; Wiener 1983, 259–60; Holyoake 1849a, 27. The autopsy revealed a cerebral haemorrhage causing paralysis during an asthma attack: *London Medical Gazette* n.s. 1 (24 Feb. 1843): 781–85.

73 *Lion*, 3 (20 Mar. 1829): 353–59. Many freethinkers left their bodies to anatomy schools to set an unChristian example when corpses were so desperately needed. R. Richardson 1989.

74 *Medical Times* 7 (25 Mar. 1843): 419. Because some were looking for pathological symptoms to explain Carlile's aberrant atheism, it is no coincidence that the report published in the conservative *Medical Gazette* began by racially profiling Carlile's skull, which was put on the degraded level of an American Indian (*London Medical Gazette* n.s. 1 [24 Feb. 1843]: 782).

75 *NMW* 11 (18 Mar. 1843): 308; *CPG*, 8 Apr. 1843, 3.

relations of the New World" within the cramped sphere of tacit Victorian expectations was "obviously going to run into practical limitations". Nevertheless, women had greater opportunities in the branches.⁷⁶ They were to be welcomed at lectures, and as lecturers, and, at the festival, to the high table. This was a real worry for the clergy. When Owen visited Leeds Hall of Science, posters went up "affectionately warning young women who wish to maintain a good reputation, to keep away from socialist meetings".⁷⁷ The increasing egalitarian ethos, and co-operative Lamarckian demand that women be educated alongside men, meant a hospitable environment in the Halls.⁷⁸ As the ubiquitous chair of meetings, Saull would open sessions with the greeting: "Social friends of both sexes," rather unnecessarily rubbing in the point.⁷⁹

Saull also actively encouraged women to hear his museum talks on our fossil past and co-educational future.⁸⁰ Primarily the offer was aimed at the spouses and girl friends of the fustian-jacketed mechanics, but they came, high as well as low—even the genteel readers of the *Lady's Magazine*. Quite what the *Lady's* reporter made of his speech over the fossils is not known. Cryptically, he or she politely quoted the old proverb "Many men of many minds", meaning there were all manner of "views of the cause of the wonderful changes which have taken place and are still going on upon the surface of this earth", Saull's odd view among them.⁸¹

In the late 1830s and early 1840s, his free museum was well promoted in the artisan press, from the *Penny Mechanic* to *Cleave's Penny Gazette of Variety and Amusement*, and name checked in geology books.⁸² But it was even more widely trailed in the dailies. It figured in all the syndicated listings of free Christmas and Easter recreations in the 1840s, for families who were visiting London for the festivities.⁸³ The *Courier* at Easter 1841

76 B. Taylor 1983, 234–37.

77 *Leeds Weekly Chronicle*, 22 Dec. 1839, 3.

78 Yeo 1971, 96–97; W. Thompson 1826b.

79 *NMW* 13 (11 Jan. 1845): 229–31.

80 *MM* 19 (25 May 1833): 117–18.

81 *Lady's Magazine and Museum* 3 (Nov. 1833): 297.

82 G. F. Richardson 1842, 80, 368, 386, esp. 402; Mantell 1844, 1: 135; 2: 780, 838–39, 902–903. *PM* 2 (20 Jan. 1838): 200 passim; *CPG*, 15 Apr. 1843; *Literary World* 3 (1840): 166.

83 For example, *Standard*, 25 Dec. 1838; 25 Dec. 1840; *Morning Post*, 18 Apr. 1840; 26 Dec. 1843; *Courier*, 18 Apr. 1840, 4; *Morning Post*, 14 Apr. 1843; *Argus*, 15 Apr. 1843,

made it the top geology museum in London for the huge number of fossils and “the excellence of their arrangement”.⁸⁴ And the *Morning Post* that Christmas saw it as “quite unique, both for objects of rarity and beauty”.⁸⁵ For a fuller account of the contents, there were the London visitors’ handbooks. Booth’s *Stranger’s Intellectual Guide to London for 1839-40* had it vying “with any private Museum of a similar nature in the kingdom”. In Aldersgate Street you could see beautiful ferns from the coal measures, valuable pear-shaped sea lilies, ammonites, the biggest collection of bones of the “stupendous” *Iguanodon*, and remains of gigantic American mastodons. Every Thursday tourists would get a walk-through on geology. They were told how coal contributed to our comfort, how knowledge of the rocks helped the agriculturalist understand soil and the surveyor plan house foundations. So that

even in a pecuniary point of view, Geology may be advantageous to the mere speculator; but its study raises us above mere mercenary considerations, in showing us that no animated being came into existence until preparation had been made for its reception [the reporter had clearly listened to Saull]; thus proving the great laws, founded on the purest benevolence, which regulate the universe.⁸⁶

The “purest benevolence” was Booth’s euphemism for Saull’s quasi-teleological idea of the ‘pabulum’ preceding new life. This was the cue for Saull’s imagining of the strata—from oldest to youngest—housing ancient sea lilies or coal age ferns, creatures from the golden age of reptiles, then the elephants and rhinos that once roamed Britain. And so to the shocking origins of human savages and their gradual civilization. There was no fall from grace here, no Edenic idyll, but a steady rise over aeons as the earth’s elliptical shifts made conditions suitable, leaving ‘Nature’ to do the rest. Geology was presented as an optimistic philosophy of ascension, deliberately juxtaposed to Genesis’s fall of man and “theology of degradation”.⁸⁷

Nature’s productive powers might have made “Satirist” Smith’s eyes swivel, but materialist assumptions like Saull’s remained *de rigueur*

6; *The Era*, 16 Apr. 1843.

84 *Courier*, 12 Apr. 1841, 3; 27 Dec. 1841, 1.

85 *Morning Post*, 31 Dec. 1841.

86 A. Booth 1839, 15, 121–22.

87 Kenny 2007, 370.

among the extremists. Sectarian splits in the Owenite community would now throw up even more overt atheists, paving the way for the fullest discussion in Britain yet of life's material progress. For Shepherd Smith things were about to get far worse.

