



The Rev'd MR. WILLIAM JAY, Aged 19.

*R. & S. Smith*

*Goldsar sculp*

# William Jay: Evangelical Preacher

Stephen Waddell

In the novel, *Miss Mackenzie* (1865), Anthony Trollope (1815-82) parodies the city of Bath with the thinly disguised pseudonym of 'Littlebath'. As the story opens, the heroine, Margaret Mackenzie, is in London caring for her dying brother for fifteen years. Soon after his death, she inherits his substantial fortune. She is now a wealthy, 34-year-old spinster. With no close connections in London she decides indulge and move to prominent 'Littlebath'. She rents a home in the Paragon where 'the assembly rooms were quite close'.<sup>1</sup> Upon her arrival, she discovers she must make an immediate choice of with whom to align her allegiance; either the evangelicals who follow the clergyman Mr. Stumfold or those who don't. There was no middle ground. Trollope writes:

Mr. Stumfold at Littlebath had very special views, and was specially known for them. His friends said he was evangelical, and his enemies said that he was Low Church ... and he was always fighting the devil by opposing the pursuits which are the life and mainstay of such places as Littlebath. His chief enemies were card-playing and dancing as regarded the weaker sex, and hunting and horseracing-to which might be added everything under the name of sport-as regarded the stronger. Sunday comforts were also enemies which he hated with a vigorous hatred, unless three full services a day, with sundry intermediate religious readings and exercitations of the spirit, may be called Sunday comforts.<sup>2</sup>

It would be a mistake to assume that the clergyman was dark and dire. In fact, he was quite jovial and attractive. Upon her arrival, Mackenzie's neighbour asks the spinster, 'Have you known Mr. Stumfold long? Perhaps you have come here to be near him; a great many ladies do.'<sup>3</sup> From Trollope's parody, the question must be asked: What happened to the city of Bath that it became known not only for its pleasures but also as a bastion of Evangelicalism that opposed them? There are many reasons for the overall transformation of the city.<sup>4</sup> But the single greatest reason for the rise of Evangelicalism must be that Bath was the home to William Jay [fig. 1], the Evangelical attraction in a city full of attractions.

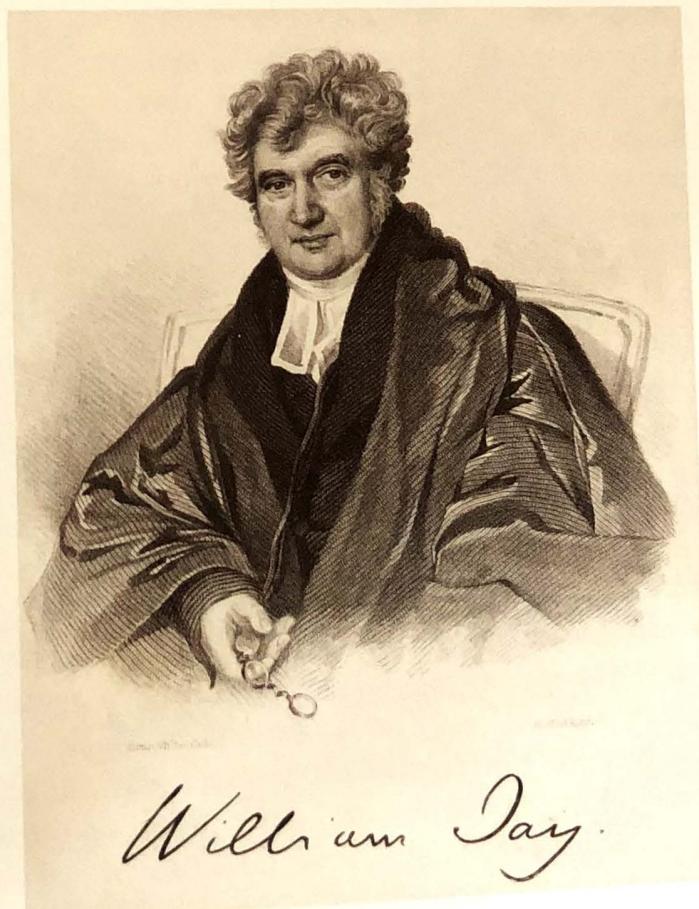


fig 1: The Revd. William Jay, c.1800  
Bath in Time - Bath Central Library Collection

## The Early Life of William Jay

The rise to fame of the Argyle Chapel pastor might be viewed as either most fortunate or providential. Jay was born in Tisbury, Wiltshire to William Jay and Sarah Mead. His father was apprenticed unusually late in life to a mason at age twenty-one.<sup>5</sup> Shortly after his apprenticeship the elder Jay leased a cottage, land and quarry from Lord Arundel in 1765.<sup>6</sup> The *Autobiography* revealed the property was situated almost an equal distance from Wardour Castle, Pithouse, and Fonthill.<sup>7</sup> The younger William grew up helping his father as a mason on William Beckford's (1760-1844) estate at Fonthill. The editors of the *Autobiography*, in a footnote, incorrectly assumed that Jay had worked on Beckford's Fonthill Abbey, also known as Beckford's Folly. Construction on the Abbey didn't begin until 1796, five years after Jay was minister at Argyle Chapel. However, Beckford came into his majority in 1781 and hired a builder in Tisbury, Josiah Lane, to construct a romantic grotto on his estate in 1784 and no doubt

Lane would have hired the Jay family for the masonry work with their quarry the closest to the estate. The young Jay would have likely remained a stone mason had it not been for the Evangelical revival sweeping through England.

The Revival began as early as 1740 through the influence of George Whitefield, and the Wesley brothers, John and Charles. All three were staunch Anglicans and sought to renew the spirit of the church by promoting the Evangelical criteria of conversion, (an experience of change or as described by the Evangelicals a 'new birth'), Biblicalism (the view that the Bible was the absolute and infallible source of all religious authority), crucicentrism (an emphasis on the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross in order to have a right relationship to God), and activism (the desire to see the world transformed through the Evangelical witness).<sup>8</sup> Both the Wesleys and Whitefield had considerable influence in the south west of England; Whitefield through his tireless outdoor preaching and the Wesley brothers through the organisation of their religious

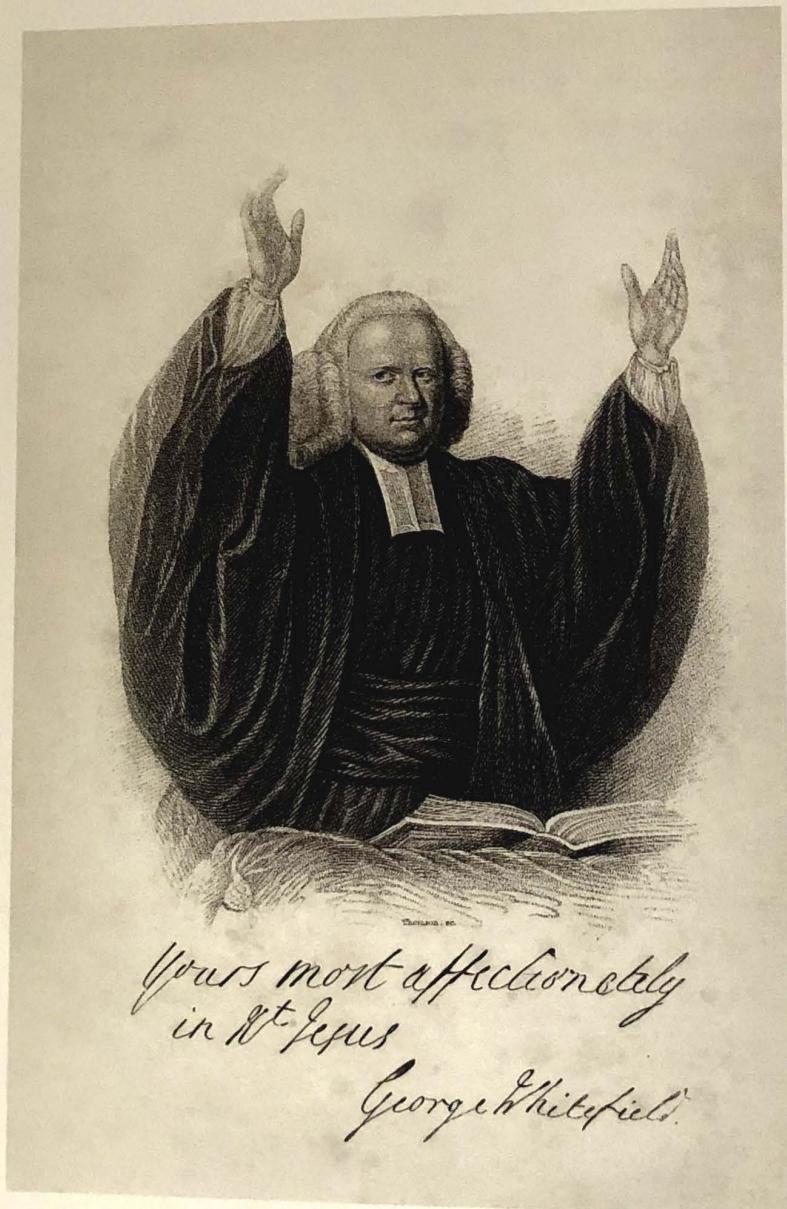


fig 2: The Reverend George Whitefield  
Bath in Time - Bath Central Library Collection

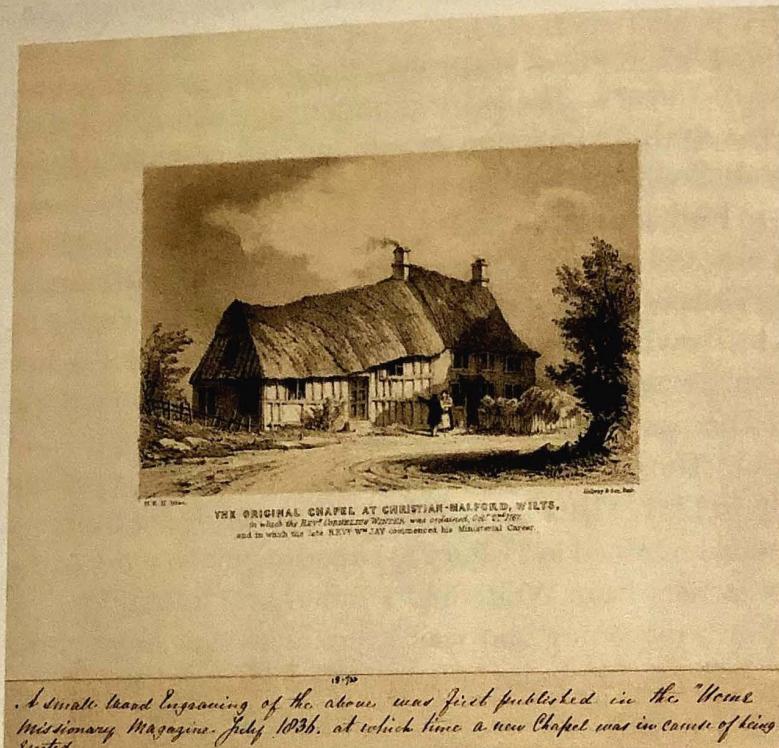
societies. Both were considered Methodist. Yet each promoted a different conflicting theological mind-set. Whitefield advocated Calvinism and the Wesleys advocated Armenianism. But it was Whitefield's ecumenical spirit that leapt the boundaries of Anglicanism into Nonconformity [fig. 2]. The Evangelicalism of Whitefield ignited the Revival fire in later-eighteenth-century Dissent. Preachers associated with Whitefield's connection began a strong itinerant ministry in Gloucestershire, Somerset, and Wiltshire.

As a young child, Jay had been deeply interested in spiritual things. He caught the eye of the pastor of the Presbyterian chapel in Tisbury. The lad was attentive in church but also quite restless and unsatisfied. Jay was under conviction of sin and felt what he called 'deficiencies in regard to duty' and 'dissatisfied with the state of my heart towards God'. It was at this time his minister placed a letter in his hands announcing the formation of a Calvinistic Methodist chapel in Tisbury. The chapel was a plant by Thomas Turner and his wife Joanna, of Trowbridge. Both were disciples of Whitefield. Thomas Turner was originally a native of Tisbury whose business removed him to Trowbridge and found modest success. Prior to her marriage Joanna (1732-84) and her cousin, Jonathan Clark (1745-1809), planted The Tabernacle in Trowbridge in 1771.<sup>9</sup> Joanna married Thomas Turner at age 38 and together the couple were led through prayer to plant a new work in Thomas' native Tisbury. They purchased a private dwelling and had it licensed for worship in 1781.<sup>10</sup> Thomas returned to Trowbridge to continue in his business affairs while Joanna his wife remained in Tisbury to superintend the work of the chapel, enlisting the aid of itinerant preachers from Whitefield's Tabernacle in London. Jay attended the first service held on a Saturday evening and was struck with 'the singing, the extemporaneousness of the address, and the apparent affection and earnestness of the speaker'.<sup>11</sup> He said it was like 'rain upon the mown grass, or cold water to a thirsty soul'. He attended the early service the following morning. The congregation met at seven a.m. so as not to interfere with the services of the Establishment. Joanna Turner who was opening the chapel met him at the door. From that point the two struck up a cordial friendship. She would meet him as he was returning home from work at Fonthill and the two of them would talk about the things of God. Turner enjoyed watching Jay's growth and recorded in her diary the zeal of the young man who, after hearing a sermon on family worship, confronted his father that he should be having devotions with his family. Through tears Jay's father confessed his inability to perform the function, so the son led the family in worship.<sup>12</sup> Jay was only thirteen years of age at the time.

One of the preachers itinerating at the new chapel was Cornelius Winter (1742-1807). He was the protégé of George Whitefield, even accompanying the evangelists on his final trip to America. Winter had opened a Dissenting academy in Marlborough to train young men for ministry. On his first supply to Tisbury he noticed the attentiveness of a young man who always attended the services in his white-leather mason's apron. While not knowing the identity of the boy it left an impression which led Winter to consider asking the boy to attend his academy. A year later he returned to Tisbury to preach again. When Joanna Turner met him, she said she wanted to introduce a young man for consideration to attend his school. When Jay was presented to him, he realised it was the same boy he had been considering and was moved to tears. Presenting the young Jay to Winter was most likely Joanna Turner's final service for God. She died of breast cancer at the end of 1784. Jay began his career as an Evangelical preacher under the guidance of Winter.

Jay entered the academy at Marlborough in the spring of 1785. Winter's school, as acknowledged by the editors of Jay's autobiography, was untypical of the academies of the day. The school was small and never had more than twelve students at a time. Winter's philosophy of education was based more on mentoring young men than lectures. The emphasis

was on practical preparation for the ministry. Priority was given to providing opportunities to gain experience in preaching. But Jay still had instruction. He was required to learn Greek, Hebrew and Latin. Winter placed a high value on learning. He had his students even reading and reciting their lessons on horseback. But Winter also sent his students throughout Wiltshire to preach the Gospel in the villages. Jay estimated that by the age of eighteen he had already preached nearly 1,000 sermons. It was a time when itinerant preaching was not welcomed, particularly that of Dissenting preachers. But Jay met with little opposition when he preached in the villages. It also became apparent that Jay had a natural ability that others did not readily possess. He was known for

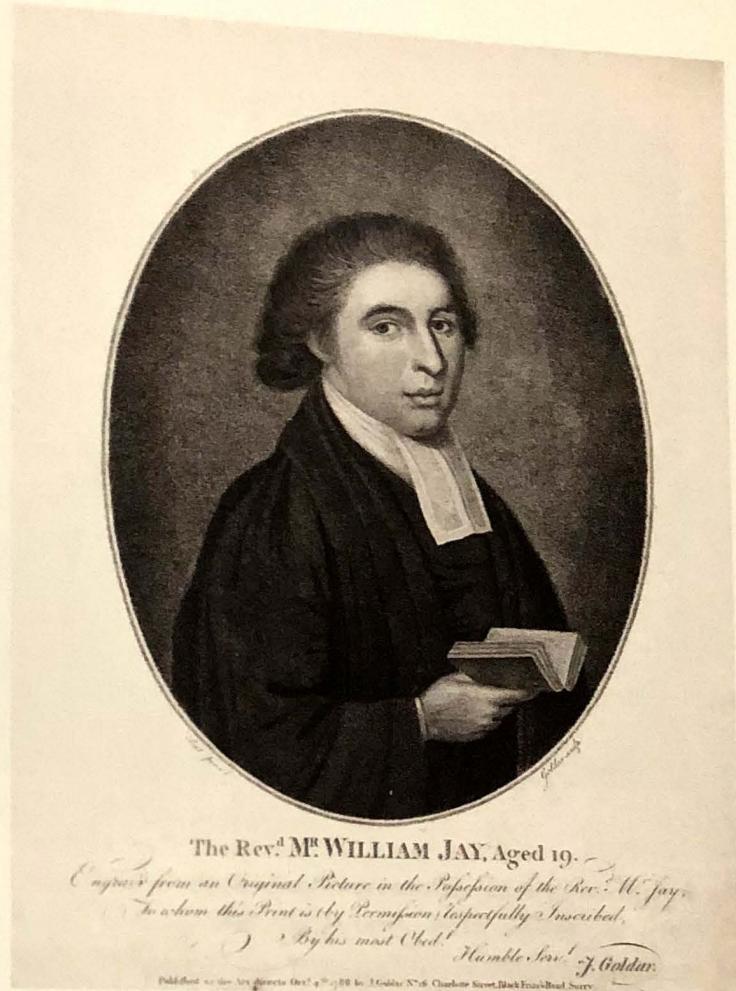


**fig 3: Original Chapel at Christian Malford, Wilts where William Jay commenced his Ministerial career**  
Bath in Time - Bath Central Library Collection

his directness and style. On appearing in Melksham to supply the pulpit, a London gentleman informed him that beardless boys should not be preaching. Jay replied 'Sir, had my master supposed you wanted a beard, he would have sent you a goat.'<sup>13</sup> The young man remained under the tutelage of Winter for two years which Jay considered the most influential of his life. Jay developed a passion for preaching that would shape his identity for the rest of his life.

Winter had arranged for Jay to be the continued supply for the chapel at Christian-Malford [fig. 3]. Winter had planted a work there prior to coming to Marlborough. It was while Jay was here that Winter recommended the nineteen-year-old to fill Rowland Hill's pulpit in Surrey Chapel, London for eight weeks. Jay was such a success that, after his first sermon, people followed him to the house he was residing and would not disperse until he addressed the crowd from the windows. His preaching was so sensational it drew other Evangelicals of note. The Baptist, J.C. Ryland of Bristol (1723-92) and the Anglicans John Newton (1725-1807), of Amazing Grace fame, and Richard Cecil (1748-1810) from the Eclectic Society and perhaps most importantly Rev. Thomas Tuppen (1742-90) from the fledgling Independent chapel in Bath, all came to hear the young preacher during his eight week engagement. Rowland Hill immediately contracted him to fill his pulpit for eight weeks in late Summer for the next 40 years. Jay would have continuous access to a London pulpit for the remainder of his life.

Jay returned from the metropolis to complete a brief settlement in Christian-Malford. Through Winter's connections, the young man [fig. 4] had made the acquaintance of Lady Maxwell in Bristol. She recruited him to supply Hope Chapel in Hotwells, Clifton. Lady Maxwell was a devout Wesleyan Arminian. But in deference to the deceased Chapel patronesses, Lady Hope and Lady Glenorchy, she agreed to provide Calvinistic Methodist pastors in the pulpit. Jay supplied the chapel for 12 months with an offer to remain the chapel's full time pastor. This would have been quite a coup for the young pastor. In the last few decades of the century, the Hotwells [fig. 5] had become the most fashionable spa in England, even surpassing Bath in its exclusiveness. At the time, Jay had a good stipend, a place to build his reputation, and a fashionable audience with whom to preach. But Jay chose to leave Hope Chapel for the Argyle Chapel in Bath [fig. 6]. There appear to be two reasons for this. The first is when Jay preached to the good people at Argyle Chapel, he felt himself 'at home' and in the place he was designed to be. Secondly, and most importantly, Hope Chapel had a 'sub-governess' who kept trying to dictate doctrinal points to Jay.<sup>14</sup> Jay's son noted he could not tolerate 'female ecclesiastical rule, whether supreme or subordinate.'<sup>15</sup> Jay's obedience to his principles turned out to be providential. Within eight short years the Hotwells ceased to be the fashionable resort of the elites. Its famous hotels became deserted and abandoned.



**fig 4: Revd. Mr William Jay aged 19, October 4th 1788**  
Bath in Time - Bath Central Library Collection

By the mid-eighteenth century, Bath had become a leisure city to indulge the senses. Every form of entertainment and vice was offered in Bath. Balls were regularly held at the assembly rooms in which visitors hoped to catch glimpses of those above their social station. When not at a ball, visitors might enjoy the theatre with performances by the famous actor Sarah Siddons. Or they might take in a concert to hear Handel or Paganini. Even as late as 1830, it was reported, 'the concerts were unrivalled, the theatre second only to London'.<sup>16</sup> Yet there

## Eighteenth-Century Bath

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fig 5: Approach to the Hotwell House, Bristol, 1792  
*Bath in Time - Bath Central Library Collection*

was also a seedy underside to Bath. Vices such as gambling, pornography, and prostitution were readily available. The Rev. John Skinner (1772-1839), a Somerset rector of nearby Camerton, commented 'I was a little astonished, as I walked through Bath, to observe the streets so crowded with prostitutes, some of them apparently not above 14 or 15 years of age.'<sup>17</sup> Charles Wesley (1707-88) called Bath Satan's 'head-quarters'. He ordered a Wesleyan society member to leave the city quoting the scripture text, 'Depart, I pray you, from the tents of wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, lest you be consumed with their sins.'<sup>18</sup> Eighteenth-century Bath was the place to be seen. The total number of visitors distinguished enough to be listed in the *Bath Journal* rose from 510 in 1746 to 5,341 in 1801.<sup>19</sup> Historian R.S. Neale estimated that by 1800 there were some 40,000 visitors a year with an average weekly attendance of 8,000 over the season. The purpose of Bath was to offer pleasure to a British society beginning to be consumed with the concept of leisure. The city of Bath was its major supplier.

Not only were visitors increasing but the resident population grew. The resident population of Bath was around 6,000 in the middle of the century and nearly 34,000 by the century's end.<sup>20</sup> From that point its population rate increased an additional 20,000 by 1851.<sup>21</sup> The dramatic population change in the middle decades of the eighteenth century was not due to an increase of the elites but to an influx of genteel retirees mostly made up of spinsters, widows, clergy, admirals, generals and lesser pensioned officers. Bath became an attractive place which to retire not only due to the glamorous activities of the social elite, but also to a lower cost of living. Bath had lower municipal, water, and poor rates than London.<sup>22</sup> Magazine articles touted

Bath as not only a beautiful city for retirement but also providing the opportunity to be surrounded by the right sort of people.<sup>23</sup> It was the perfect place for Trollope's spinster, Miss Mackenzie to settle. Bath was the tenth largest city in England in the first half of the nineteenth century. Up till Jay's death in 1853, Bath was considered one of the greater cities of Britain.

The complaint against religious Bath was not necessarily its lack of activity, but its lack of sincerity in religion. The complaints came mainly from Evangelicals. George Whitefield (1714-70) [fig. 2] was welcomed into the city in 1737 and even allowed to preach at the Abbey Church on five different occasions. But two years later he found the pulpits closed to him.<sup>24</sup> The resistance to Evangelicalism seemed to stem from a fear of upsetting the present state of affairs in Bath. Whitefield wrote, 'Many adversaries must be expected in so polite a place as Bath.'<sup>25</sup> When John Wesley (1703-91) [fig. 7] began preaching in Bath, he was confronted by Beau Nash (1674-1761) demanding to know what authority he had to be preaching in the city. Nash was concerned that Wesley's 'preaching frightens people out of their wits'.<sup>26</sup> Though the churches were filled to capacity it was obvious that the combined sittings of the four churches and two proprietary chapels (some 3,000) were hardly enough to meet the needs of the city's resident population (some 6,000 in 1750) plus the annual visitors to the city (some 2,500 in 1760). The best attended church, St James, did not have sermons but only read prayers till the early nineteenth century.<sup>27</sup> Wesley was disturbed by the complete lack of seriousness of the Christians that lived there. He was prompted to ask in his journal, 'Hath God left himself without witness?'<sup>28</sup> Both the Wesley brothers and Whitefield used the same word in describing Bath in their journals: 'Sodom'. Jay arrived in Bath at a time ripe for Evangelical influence. And unlike Hotwells, Bath maintained its popularity to both the upper and middle classes well into the nineteenth century. Whitefield prayed in 1739 that God would send Bath 'some faithful labourer'.<sup>29</sup> His prayer would be answered 50 years later in William Jay.

When Jay arrived at the Argyle Chapel, there were only three other evangelical causes in Bath. The Baptist had been the first to establish a cause in Bath as early as 1718 that would eventually evolve into the Somerset Street Chapel. But near the time of Jay's arrival there was a public dispute between the Pastor John Paul Porter and the previous pastor's son, Thomas Parson. Many of the church members left the Baptist Chapel transferring to Argyle Chapel shortly after Jay's arrival.

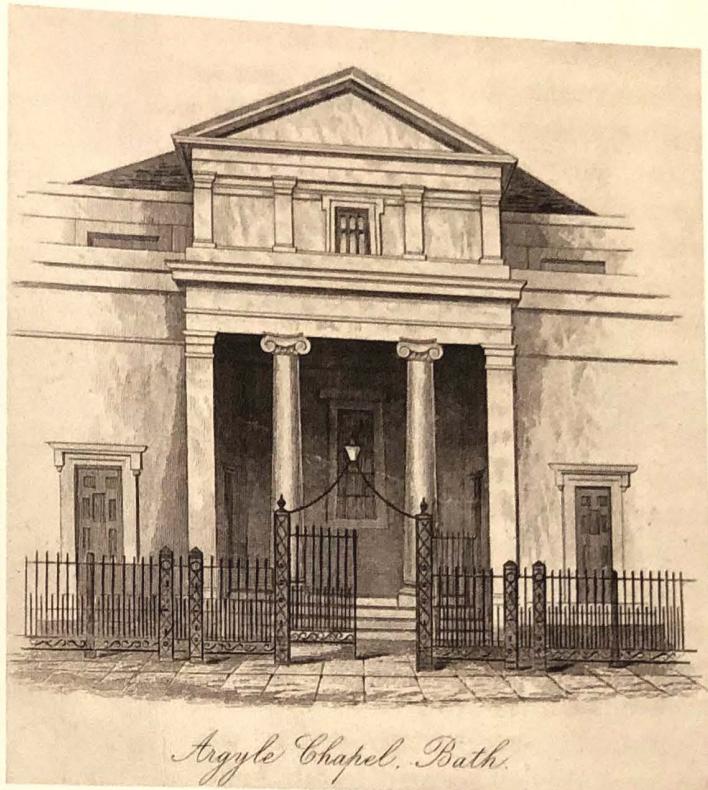
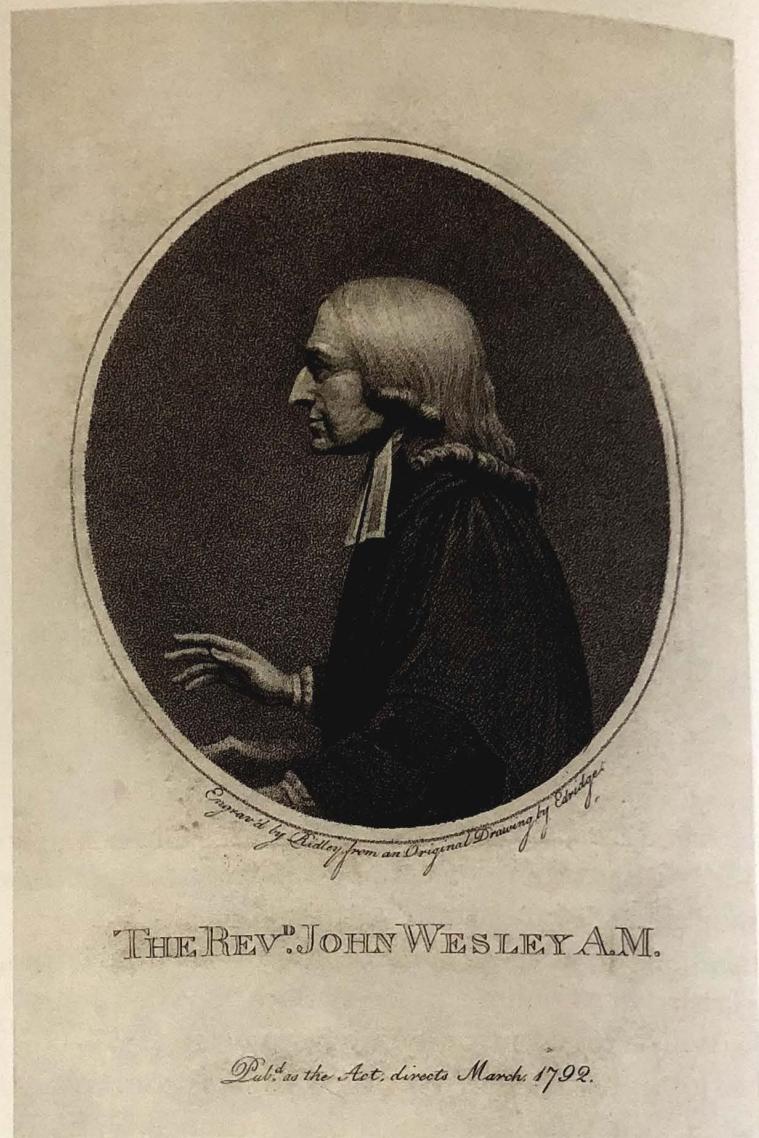


fig 6: Argyle Chapel, Bath Exterior, 1841  
Bath in Time - Bath Central Library Collection

According to his journals, John Wesley made 100 visits to Bath over a span of fifty-one years.<sup>30</sup> While he had great success in attracting large crowds to his preaching, he made little progress in attracting people to the local Methodist society. Charles Wesley, on his visit in 1741, remarked, 'Satan took it ill to be attacked in his head-quarters ... he raged horribly in his children.'<sup>31</sup> The first Methodist society met in a room on Avon Street, the poorest community in Bath. In 1755 the membership was no more than thirty-five.<sup>32</sup> Two years later a class list showed there were only seventeen members with all but three residing on Avon Street.<sup>33</sup> By autumn 1769 there were only eleven or twelve.<sup>34</sup> Wesley seemed to attribute the decrease to the opening of the Countess of Huntingdon's chapel in the Vineyards. He lamented in 1765 he had only the poor to hear him preach at Avon Street 'there being a service at the same time in Lady H's chapel.'<sup>35</sup>

The Countess of Huntingdon [fig. 8] had George Whitefield open her Chapel in the Vineyards in 1765. It appears the Countess tried to micro-manage her chapel and several members of the Vineyard seceded in 1783 to form what would become an Independent Chapel. The first full time pastor of this independent chapel was a convert of Whitefield, the Rev. Thomas Tuppen of Portsea, who accepted the pastorate in 1785. The congregation increased under his leadership and relocated from the premises of the old Roman Catholic chapel on St. James' Parade to a new Chapel being erected on Argyle Street in Bathwick just across the Pulteney Bridge. Tuppen became terminally ill and was unable to preach. Tuppen remembered Jay at Surrey Chapel and recommended the young man to fill the pulpit during his absence. Jay did such an excellent job that he was asked to open the Chapel in October of 1789. Tuppen died soon afterwards and Jay was unanimously asked to be the Pastor of the new Chapel.

Prior to being ordained, Jay courted Anne Davies, the daughter of Edward Davies, an evangelical clergyman in London. Davies had been in Wales and was well connected to the Calvinistic Methodist revival. Again, Jay met the family on his first visit to London when he preached at Rowland Hill's chapel. Edward Davies received a special dispensation to become



**fig 7: The Reverend John Wesley A.M. 1792**  
Bath in Time - Bath Central Library Collection

the curate of St. Catherine's Church in Batheaston in 1790. Upon that news the couple became engaged. They were married on January 6, 1791 by Rowland Hill. They purchased a home at Percy Place, exactly one mile from the Argyle Chapel and the Davies' home in Batheaston. The couple maintained a residence at this address all their lives.

Jay was ordained Pastor of Argyle Chapel three weeks later on January 30 1791, and would continue as pastor until shortly before his death for a period of sixty-two years. The key factor that made relationship between the chapel and Jay so successful was the commitment of both to Evangelicalism. At his ordination at Argyle, he defined their mission, 'The glorious Gospel of the blessed God our Saviour is the great object of our attention as minister and people; this only am I allowed to preach, this only are you allowed to hear.'<sup>36</sup> Early in Argyle's ministry, people visit the chapel. 'Consider the situation in which you stand,' wrote Wilberforce, 'there was not another minister in Bath, whom any of *the poor wretched upper classes* are likely to hear, who preaches the Gospel.' *The Bath and Cheltenham Gazette* confirmed the 'Establishment presented few attractions' to those of its Evangelical members prior to Jay's arrival.<sup>37</sup> Argyle Chapel was in a perfect site between the shops in Bath and the new elite homes growing in Bathwick along Great Pulteney Street. The location of the Chapel offered a steady stream of 'sinners' crossing the Pulteney Bridge into town to whom Jay could preach and influence.

And the upper classes did come. The masses flocked to the Argyle Chapel not only on Sabbath Day services but also on the week night services. The guests included the upper strata of society. Sir Richard Hill (1732-1808), Lady Duncan (1748-1832), the wife of Admiral Lord Duncan, the Earl of Gainsborough (1781-1866), Sir William Knighton (1776-1836), physician to George IV all worshipped at the chapel.<sup>38</sup> He attracted visitors both far and near. Henry Johns (1803-59), chaplain of the United States Senate, reflected fondly on having the opportunity to hear Jay in his chapel.<sup>39</sup> Not unusual was the case of the successful clothier, William Henry Tucker (1814-77), who as a young man walked from Trowbridge to Bath, a distance of 10 miles, to hear the celebrated preacher.<sup>40</sup> Some visitors attended the chapel on a regular basis. The abolitionists, William Wilberforce (1759-1833) and Evangelical philanthropist, Hannah More (1745-1833) [fig. 9], attended



fig 8: Countess of Huntingdon, by Benjamin West. Pen and brown ink and (graphite?) on laid paper  
National Gallery of Art, Washington, John Davis Hatch Collection

the chapel on their frequent visits to Bath.<sup>41</sup> When his own congregation became dissatisfied with his preaching, Thomas Haweis (1734-1820), a founder of the London Missionary Society, left the Countess of Huntingdon's Chapel to worship at the Argyle Chapel until his death. The Anglican clergy came as well. Bishop

Walter Shirley (1797-1847) and Charles Simeon all came to hear Jay on their visits to Bath. Richard Cecil even rented a chapel pew for his daughter during the season she visited Bath. Other celebrities attended. The celebrated actor Charles Young (1777-1856) frequented the chapel.<sup>42</sup> Richard Sheridan (1755-1816) called Jay the most natural orator he had ever heard.<sup>43</sup> Jay had not only established Evangelicalism in Bath. He had made it fashionable to be seen in his chapel.

Jay became nationally known for his preaching. The Argyle Chapel became flooded with visitors to hear the young preacher. The chapel had to be enlarged to accommodate the listeners. [fig. 10]<sup>44</sup> Even as late as 1851, the Argyle Chapel had the greatest attendance of any Chapel or Church in Bath on census Sunday. At 1,400 listeners it was filled to capacity. His sermons were well received in print. He published his first collection of sermons in 1804 and went on to publish an additional eleven volumes. In 1810, he was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from Princeton University for his publication, *Short Discourses to be Read in Families*.

fig 9: Hannah More (1745-1833), by Henry William Pickersgill, Oil on canvas  
National Portrait Gallery, London

His services were engaged all over the nation. He was asked to preach numerous ordinations, chapel openings and collection sermons. He made preaching tours of Ireland and Scotland. He was the first Congregationalist to preach at the Baptist Missionary Society and at the Wesleyan Missionary Society. He is the only person to have to have preached on five occasions at the annual meeting of the London Missionary Society. On the last occasion, people arrived several hours early to make sure they had a seat and 'thousands' were turned away for lack of space.<sup>45</sup> Jay as a preacher was a national sensation.

The members of the Argyle Chapel are also not to be overlooked. The chapel roll listed the movers and shakers among Bath business men. Early in the chapel's history were men such as the Ironmonger, Samuel Whitchurch (1755-1817) who initiated the Bath Sunday School Union and was secretary of the Bath Penitentiary. Whitchurch and his partner were part of the elite few who were able to issue tokens during the small currency crisis of the first decade of the century. Thomas Parsons (1744-1813) left Somerset Street Baptist Chapel to join the Argyle Chapel. Parsons was a founding member of the Bath and West Society and an outspoken pacifist.

The Independent Chapel in this city, of which the Rev. W. Jay has been for so many years the much-respected minister, was re-opened on Sunday, after being very considerably enlarged, and greatly improved. Indeed the improvements are such, as to leave not a recognizable feature of the former edifice. It is now a handsome, capacious, and most commodious structure; and the ability with which the alterations have been planned and executed by Mr. Goodridge, the architect, richly deserves that praise which is universally paid to it.—We are much gratified to observe that not less than 400 sittings are provided for the poor; and we rejoice to find that the collections on Sunday towards defraying the large expense of the alterations, &c. amounted to 128*l.* *Decr: 7 - 1821*

fig 10: Argyle Chapel reopens after being improved and enlarged, December 7th 1821  
Bath in Time - Bath Central Library Collection

In its later years, the chapel could boast the membership of iron founder, Henry Stothert, architect H.E. Goodridge (1797-1864), and the bookseller Charles Godwin (who was also friends with William Wordsworth). The middle class membership of Argyle matched the prestige of their pastor.

The influence of the Argyle Chapel and its pastor was staggering. Together they led the way as Evangelical activity broke out en masse at the turn of the century. The Chapel began the first Dissenting Sunday School for Children in 1802 and jointly formed the Bath Sunday School Union in 1812 with the Methodists. Bath Adult Schools were opened to teach adults how to read the Bible in 1814.<sup>46</sup> Within the city, the Bath Tract Society was formed in 1827.<sup>47</sup> Together with Thomas Haweis of the Vineyard, Jay founded the auxiliary of the London Missionary Society in 1816 (later the Bath Missionary Society). Also, Jay was instrumental in the formation of the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1812 giving the church a wider scope for outreach beyond the city. Together with Somerset Street Baptist Chapel, the Argyle Chapel planted a dissenting interest in Widcombe and in Combe Down. Jay was also a founder of the Wiltshire and East Somerset Congregational Union having a wider effect of Evangelicalism in surrounding communities.<sup>48</sup> Even Jay marvelled at the transformation of Bath over forty years. As long as Evangelical conversion remained the focus, the church and pastor stayed in perfect harmony. 'The cause here,' Jay proudly proclaimed on his fortieth anniversary, 'having been a

candlestick holding out the light to others.<sup>49</sup> At the time of Jay's death, Argyle Chapel could boast no less than five evangelical organisations operating on the chapel premises. Both Jay and his congregation believed together they would accomplish great things for God in the spirit of Evangelicalism.

The effect of all this activity was apparent in its criticism and assimilation. The Rev. Richard Warner (1763-1853) of St. James' Church attacked Evangelical ministers 'for their want of humility and charity' in that they thought they alone were correct in their interpretation of scripture and that only the converted are saved.<sup>50</sup> But the adage of 'if you can't beat them, join them', came into play. In 1828 the Church Missionary Society invited the highly Evangelical clergyman, Edward Bickersteth (1786-1850), to speak at its Bath meeting.<sup>51</sup> A letter to the editor of the Bath and Cheltenham Gazette, signed 'A member of the Church of England', complained that unlike the Dissenting Chapels there were no churches that offered services on weekday evenings.<sup>52</sup> More Evangelical clergymen were appointed to Bath Anglican pulpits. By 1840, an open letter to the mayor complained, 'the clergy of this town for a long time past, but particularly more recently, by their preaching and exhortations, to endeavour to suppress the various amusements of this place; and indeed so comprehensive have been their denunciations, that scarcely an entertainment of public character of which the inhabitants were won't to partake, has escaped; concerts, balls, races, theatrical exhibitions, and even horticultural shows, have each of them in turn been the subjects of clerical vengeance and pulpit anathematisation. The clergy of this city, of nearly all denominations, but particularly

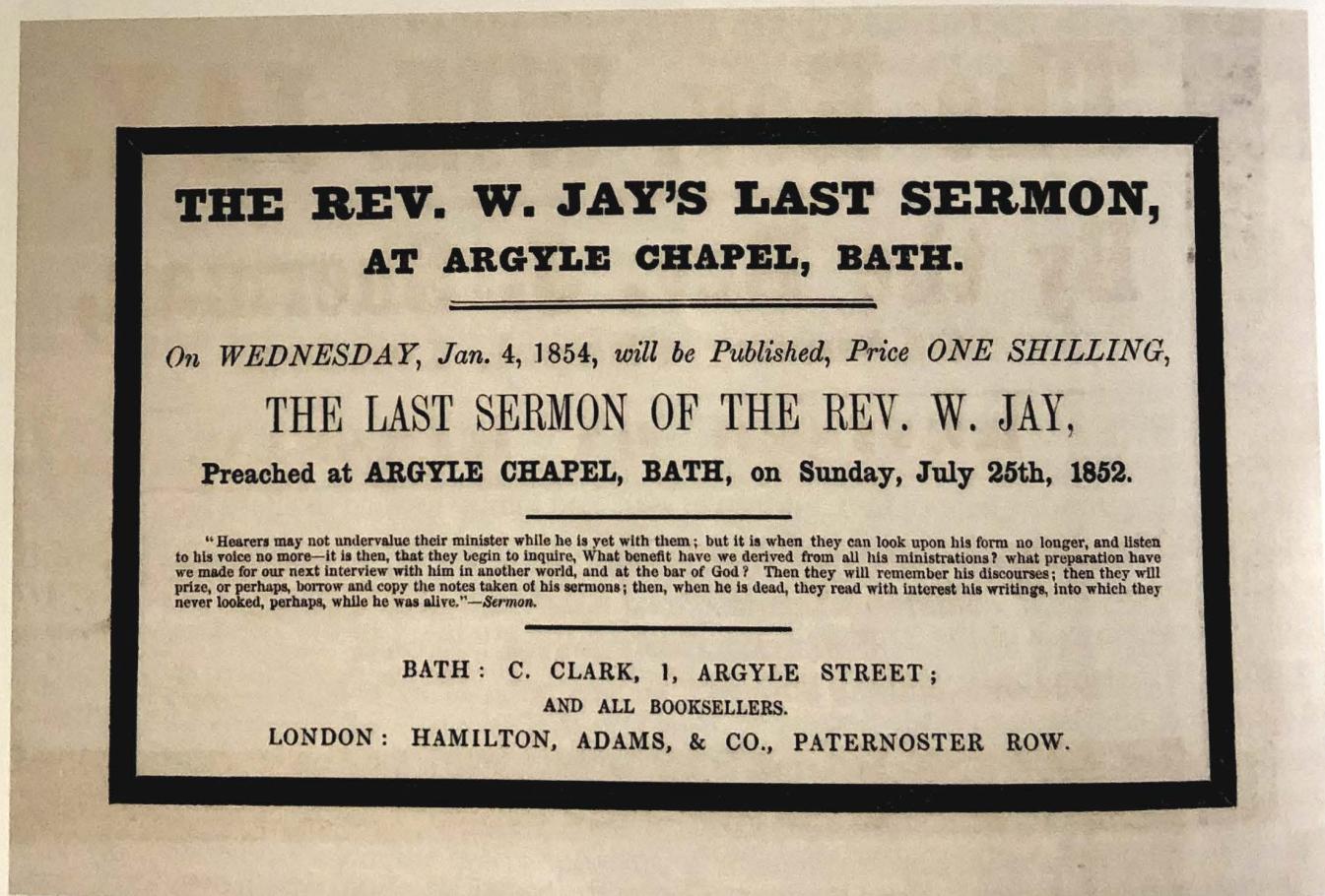


fig 11: Advertisement for the sale of Revd. W. Jay's last sermon, preached on July 25th 1852  
Bath in Time - Bath Central Library Collection

those of the established church, have been unremitting in their exhortations to their various flocks to discountenance these entertainments ... the terrible condemnation to eternal punishment itself, has been held out as the consequence to all those who may give these scenes of pleasure their countenance.<sup>53</sup>

The first meeting of the Evangelical Alliance of all denomination in Bath occurred in January, 1848. Yet, the following week, Francis Close, the Evangelical Rector of Cheltenham was advocating separation apart from the Dissenters who seemed to be reaping all the rewards.<sup>54</sup> Evangelicalism had become a formidable movement within the Established Church as well.

It is clear Evangelicalism was in the ascendancy in nineteenth-century Bath. Prior to 1780, the Evangelical movement had made little impact on the City. The catalyst for the change appears to be the arrival of William Jay. The young preacher had all the tools to make such a change possible. He was a local Wiltshire product who had deep connections to the Evangelicalism of George Whitefield. He was a gifted orator that even attracted the admiration of the theatrical community. He had direct connection to the influential London Evangelicals through his annual preaching engagements at Surrey Chapel. He was embraced by Evangelicals in the Establishment as well Dissent. He arrived at a critical moment as the population of Bath began to swell with the genteel class who would find great appeal in the activism of Evangelicalism. And while the Argyle Chapel had great financial resources and leadership within the membership, they had yet to make an impression among the fashionable elite. Jay bridged that gap. As Jay's celebrity grew nationally through his preaching and publishing, so did the chapels reputation. The Argyle Chapel became the Evangelical attraction in Bath. By the end of Jay's career [fig. 11] there was a distinct Evangelical presence in Bath to justify Trollope's nineteenth-century characterisation of the city.

## Notes

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2. Ibid., pp. 19-20.
3. Ibid., p. 32.
4. See Jeremy, David. 'The Social Decline of Bath', *History Today*, 17 (1967): pp. 242-249, Graham Davis and Penny Bonsall. *A History of Bath: Image and Reality*, (Lancaster: Carnegie Publishing, 2006), pp. 217-245, and P.T.Phillips, 'The Religious Side of Victorian Bath, 1830-1870', *Social History*, 6 (1973): pp. 224-40.
5. Christabel Dale, *Wiltshire Apprentices and Their Masters, 1710-1760*. Devizes: Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society, 1961, p. 83.
6. Lease grant of Lord Arundell to William Jay, Tisbury, February 9th 1765, WSHC 2667/1/13/285.
7. Redford, George and James, J.A. *The Autobiography of William Jay*. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974, p. 17.
8. This article follows David Bebbington's quadrilateral theory of Evangelicalism found in David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*. (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), p.3.
9. Mary Wells, *Memoirs of Mrs. Joanna Turner, as Exemplified in Her Life, Death and Spiritual Experience*. New York: John Midwinter, 1827, p. 120.
10. D.A. Crowley, 'Tisbury' in D.A. Crowley, (ed.), Victoria History of the Counties of England, History of Wiltshire, Vol.13, (Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 245.
11. Ibid., p. 23.
12. Wells, *Memoirs of Mrs. Joanna Turner*, p. 186.
13. Redford, *Autobiography*, p. 44.
14. Jay, *Recollections of William Jay of Bath*. (London: Hamilton, Adams and Co., (1859), p.12.
15. Redford, *Autobiography*, p. 65.
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21. Davis, *A History of Bath*, p. 159.
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24. George Whitefield, *George Whitefield's Journals*. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1978), pp. 82-84; p. 213.
25. Ibid., p. 232.
26. Richard Watson, *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley*. (New York: B. Waugh & T. Mason, 1836), p. 75.
27. Mitchell, *Letters from Bath*, p. 44.
28. Joseph Benson, (ed.), *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 2. (London: Conference Office, 1809), p.122.
29. Whitefield, *Journals*, p. 236.
30. Bruce Crofts, (ed.), *At Satan's Throne: The Story of Methodism in Bath over 250 Years*. (Bristol: White Tree Books, 1990), p. 13.
31. Thomas Jackson, (ed.), *The Journal of the Rev. Charles Wesley*, Vol. 1. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), p. 286.

32. Croft, *At Satan's Throne*, p. 25.
33. R.S. Neale, *Bath: A Social History, 1680-1850*. (London: Routledge & Keene, 1981), p. 29.
34. Croft, *At Satan's Throne*, p. 29
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47. *Bath and Cheltenham Gazette*, January 15<sup>th</sup> 1828.
48. Wiltshire and East Somerset Association Minute Book, July 5<sup>th</sup> 1997, WSHC 2755/1.
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