

Two Hundred Years Being Legal

Its meaning for Unitarians in the Past and the Present

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It gives me great pleasure to deliver this annual lecture that honours the name of John Relly Beard. To me he was one of the most significant, inspired and shall I say level-headed Unitarians of the nineteenth century. Not socially narrow minded in relation to our ministers, very different to his college friend James Martineau, he was a total enthusiast for education for everyone. He wrote numerous Teach-Yourself type books aimed at bringing this about, and became so well known that people even from abroad could address letters to him 'John Beard, Manchester, England' which were delivered without problem. Not many Unitarians have had this degree of universal fame.¹

The Unitarian Ministerial Fellowship (a capital U will be used throughout for the sake of simplicity) gave me this title 'Two hundred years being legal'. They asked if I was content with the phrase; the answer was an immediate yes as its brevity attracted me so I could speak of the past, present and future. It is two hundred years since what is known as the Trinity Bill was passed without dissent by both Houses of Parliament and received royal assent on 21 July 1813. Its correct title is 'An Act to relieve Persons who impugn the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity from certain Penalties.' (53 Geo III cap 160). In other words the Acts application is personal not organisational or collective. Its passing did not make chapels legal for the first time; they were that already. What had become known as Unitarian chapels had their buildings registered for the worship of Protestant Dissenters unattached to a religious statement; the word Unitarian did not appear in their trust deeds. It was the people who met and worshipped in them who were relieved by the Act if they called themselves Unitarian and held beliefs associated with the name.

The Unitarian denomination as a gathered group did not exist, nor was there

denominational feeling as we know it. The first Unitarian body of individuals had been set up in 1791 and a few associations existed aimed at spreading the name and the beliefs associated with it through the distribution of books.² The main association was the Unitarian Fund formed in 1806.³ No list of chapels nor ministers considered Unitarian existed, and the only district association - the precursor to what is now the Southern Unitarian Association - had been formed as a Book Society in 1801.

The existence of the Act had no immediate practical effect. No legal action being taken against people holding Unitarian views was dropped, indeed there had only been two such actions under the Toleration Act 1689 against people for holding Unitarian views – one against Edward Elwell in 1724 failed but earlier the case taken in Dublin against Thomas Emlyn, probably the first preacher to describe himself a Unitarian, resulted in his imprisonment for a year in 1703.⁴ Attempts in Parliament in the late eighteenth century to in effect make Unitarianism legal - the last being in 1792 - had all failed.⁵

William Smith ‘the Unitarian MP’

The 1813 Bill passed because of the commitment of William Smith, widely known as ‘the Unitarian MP’. He was an influential figure representing Norwich who had worked behind the scenes since at least 1810 to get the measure through. in several places There are several sources available which describe the tacks and turns he took to ensure the Bill passed; these can be summed up as getting the core cleared in advance with the powerful in the Church and government, including the Archbishop of Canterbury.⁶ It was however a rocky ride, it only just about happened. The government agreed with the Bill but would not to put it through themselves. Smith's Bill had to be withdrawn more than once, first because not enough Bishops were present in the Lords for a Bill that had religious implications to pass.⁷ So no enactment to create religious freedom then was possible without the Bishops of the Church of England in effect agreeing - I sometimes wonder if this is not to a degree still the position today. And secondly because a relief measure for Roman Catholics had to be dealt with first.⁸ William Smith finally got

agreement that his bill could be presented in 1813 but it was even further delayed until the last possible date in the Parliamentary session.⁹ There was a general reticence to put it through.

We must wonder at William Smith's patience for without his dogged determination and expertise it would not have happened when it did - he must be classed among the 'Unitarian saints' if it could be agreed of course that such a category of person exists. How many of our modern MPs would do something similar? He was what I suppose we'd call today 'a political fixer', he was very effective at it, and thank goodness for Unitarians that he was. A high minded man he worked consistently for the abolition of slavery with his friend William Wilberforce who was of an entirely different theological belief, being an ardent evangelical. They agreed not to talk about their religious beliefs.¹⁰

The 1813 Act did give a real sense of relief in that saying you were Unitarian was now legal, a view that was encapsulated in a resolution of the Unitarian Fund of 20 August 1813 which included the following:

we had long felt the injustice of being excluded by positive statute from even that share of religious liberty which was allowed for the mass of Protestant Dissenters... That in common with all the friends of religious liberty and just government, we rejoice that persecuting laws, enacted at the era of the Revolution, in direct violation of the principles then asserted, and which, though too cruel and impolitic to be often enforced, have remained for a century the disgrace of the statute book, are at length expunged... we trust the period is advancing when Christians of every description, but also our countrymen at large, shall be free to express and defend their opinions.¹¹

Thanks were given for the measure at meetings and to government ministers but little more than this except a generalised feeling of quiet satisfaction. Robert Aspland wrote in the *Monthly Repository* that 'Unitarians became for the first time freemen in their own land'. Thomas Belsham was more excited, in a sermon at Essex Street Chapel

just after its enactment he said,

The repeal of those barbarous statutes which have so long disgraced the British code, has now received the royal and I trust irrevocable fiat. I can scarcely persuade myself that it is real. The whole has the appearance of a wonderful and delightful vision...we are like them that dream.¹²

The only example I can find of a congregation celebrating the event is at the small Unitarian church at Paisley, Scotland on the second Sunday in September 1813, reported in the *Monthly Repository*, February 1814, p 129. They read the Act at the start of their special service to mark the event. Several people spoke, calling it 'a proper ground for rejoicing and thankfulness affording the prospect of the gradual removal of long established errors by the diffusion of knowledge and charity.' The service concluded with prayer and praise, having continued about two hours and a half.' No half measures about services of celebration in those days, they were long and detailed, but there was optimism and idealism for the future in plenty.

Some historians have pointed out that the 1813 Act was as good as far as it went. It protected the Unitarians, our main concern here today of course, who were of course very respectable and well behaved, but what about the deists, or those who were critical of the broadly Christian God that all dissenters accepted? To relieve from the provisions of the 1689 Act those who doubted the existence of a God at all was rejected by majority opinion.

The law after the 1813 Act meant that those parts of the 1689 Act could still be directed against what was called Blasphemy, that is, 'remarks or actions considered to be contemptuous of God or the divine.'¹³ This omission was to create problems later on and remained with us in England at least into the 21st century. But the Unitarians had been exempted from attack - saved I suppose by their stated disbelief in the trinity rather than anything else - by the presence of the 1813 Act. No actions were ever taken against individual Unitarians for charges of blasphemy, a privileged position indeed.

British and Foreign Unitarian Association

However, over the next few years the word Unitarian was being used to describe meetings and even organisations; Unitarians were becoming increasingly confident. The Act had given Unitarians a sense of themselves. For example the Southern Unitarian Association which had started as a Book Fund turned itself in 1815 into a Unitarian Fund aimed at supporting the spread of the Unitarian message. The signal national event came in 1825 with the foundation of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association (B&FUA), the first country-wide body within Unitarianism.¹⁴ But for the 1813 Act this move would have been impossible.

In other words being legal created the denomination; without legality this step would never have been taken. The 1813 Act created the desire among some people at least to come together in a representative body. The B&FUA in its stated aims the protection and extension of the civil rights of Unitarians and others. It had a civil rights department reporting to it annually to its Council well into the 20th century. They were conscious of civil rights to a degree that I suggest that most Unitarians in the late twentieth century were not; the tendency has been to forget what being illegal means.

Unitarian events regularly had the toast 'to civil and religious liberty the world over.'¹⁵ This is not generally given today and the toast has almost disappeared (it is given yearly at the asparagus lunch at Evesham Meeting House and in a couple of other places). The General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches (GA) has in its current constitution an object which affirms the worth and dignity of all people which is best served where the mind and conscience are free - a fine sounding but rather tame statement. Where is the GA civil rights and freedoms department which forbears in the B&FUA maintained? Except as expressed by individuals it can be argued that Unitarians have lost their fire in the pursuit of civil and religious liberty the world over, though the situation has changed of late. Seemingly in the twenty-first century they have become more involved in its pursuit.

In the revision of the GA objects in the late 1980s these liberties were included, but the Charity Commission ruled that advancement of civil and religious liberty was political in nature and therefore unacceptable. To keep charitable status the GA rather meekly gave in and removed the reference to civil and religious liberty.¹⁶ They gave in rather quickly, so easily in respect of one of their central affirmations. Should not the fight on this subject be returned to now? It's possible in changed times that a different answer from the Charity Commission might be obtained. Being legal has tended to produce caution amongst Unitarians, and possibly even timidity, in dealing with the law and the state.

The opening years of the nineteenth century was the time when denominational feeling started to appear even if, apart from the Particular Baptists in 1811, formal Unions or Associations had yet to be created nationally. Among what we now would recognise as theologically orthodox Congregationalists and some assertive Baptists, there was more than unease that Unitarianism was now being proclaimed openly throughout the country. As commentators have pointed out the 1813 Act was but the final step in clearing the ring for Unitarian controversy in particular with the assertive Christian evangelicals. Both sides were fired up to be aggressive and their clash saw the end of the relative unity of the old Dissent.¹⁷ It was breaking down before the 1813 but the Act hastened its end

The evangelicals were saying – all right Unitarianism has been legal since 1813 but what about before this? It follows, they argued, it was illegal then but that hadn't stopped Unitarians, insidiously in their view, taking over chapels and trust funds from 'true' Christians. A platform for the fight to knock Unitarians out of the ring was looked for and the Lady Hewley Charity was a convenient vehicle to use to achieve this end in 1819, the same year incidentally that Unitarians set up a Civil Rights Association to build on what was achieved in 1813.¹⁸

This is not the place to give a detailed description of what happened over the next 25 years in this case and those that followed it on the same point of law. Suffice it to say

that the Hewley Charity, which had Unitarian trustees gave grants to what were now recognised Unitarian chapels. Set up by Lady Hewley in the early eighteenth century the test she gave for its application was a piece of theological writing she admired. This was very orthodox and the non Unitarian trustees argued that it was therefore illegal to give support to chapels advocating Unitarian principles. The courts agreed with this, and the dispute widened and when combined with the Wolverhampton Chapel case led up to the mid 1840s to seemingly endless legal wrangles.¹⁹

The upshot was that the courts found that because Unitarianism was illegal those chapels and trusts formed before 1813 which advocated Unitarianism could potentially have their trustees removed by court order, to be replaced by others of orthodox view. These continuing court actions crippled Unitarian organisation and expansion, and even fund raising was uncertain – did monies donated to existing churches and funds risk ending up in the hands of mainstream dissenters? The issue came to a head in 1844 in a final legal ruling which the judges involved did not like giving but based on precedent they stated that they could do nothing else; in their view the issue should be addressed by Parliament. In preparation for the arguments to come Unitarians formed a caucus, with an address in the Strand in London where they gathered. It is the only occasion that Unitarians in Britain have taken such an action, much depended on the result. The aim was to lobby MPs and Peers to get a measure through Parliament to eliminate the possibility of their being turned out of their chapels and trust funds. Leading Unitarians directly lobbied MPs and Peers by visiting influential figures in two and threes.

Dissenters' Chapels Act

The events of 1844 leading to the Dissenters' Chapels Act were exciting with the result that Unitarians could retain their chapels. It was a Unitarian triumph. If it was not for the 1813 Act this anti-Unitarian move by orthodox dissenters would not have arisen. If Unitarianism had remained illegal the dispute would not have happened but the struggle did much to create the feeling among Unitarians - we're all together in the same plight. When the issue was resolved in 1844, the biggest expansion over the following 25

years took place in respect of the increase in the number of Unitarian chapels in Britain. Unitarianism just flowered and fully felt the beneficial effects of being legal. There is nothing like a little perceived persecution to expand a cause.

Other things followed. The first listing of Unitarian chapels and their ministers had been made by the assertive and remarkable minister George Harris in 1819.²⁰ There was nothing else until after the 1844 Act – it was John Rely Beard who created a fuller and more comprehensive list in his *Unitarianism Exhibited in its Actual Condition* published in 1846 – a tribute to him, the book can be seen on websites. The following year the first annual *Unitarian Pocket Almanac* appeared, the direct ancestor of the present GA Directory and Handbook.

Before that date no lists of ministers serving known Unitarian churches existed. It is not overstating the case to say that the nature of the Unitarian ministry flowed out and developed from the presence of the 1813 and 1844 Acts. Without them for example the Home Missionary Board, now the Unitarian College Manchester, would not have been created in 1854. Being legal under these Acts enabled Unitarianism to exist and to flourish and the congregations formed after 1850 have become an essential element of the denomination.

It was in the 1850s that most of the district associations were formed. The congregations were sensing that they had been too much apart working as separate entities. Most of the new district associations had amongst their aims the fostering of fellowship between individuals and congregations. As so much has been dependent on the passing of the 1813 Act we might ask at this point if much was made of it on appropriate anniversaries.

What happened on the fiftieth anniversary in 1863? The *Inquirer* of 18 July 1863 in its opening article gave the history of what had happened and lamented that the reform had not gone further in particular highlighting that blasphemy had not been yet been repealed. The *Unitarian Herald* 24 July 1863, looking back to 1813, argued. 'As our

fathers were faithful in their day, so let us be faithful in ours, and do our part in sweeping away every remnant of narrow bigotry.' Apart of this reference I have found no evidence of special events to mark the event - they were then too involved in the expansion of Unitarianism and maintaining their face against what were seen as the attacks of the orthodox to become over involved in anniversaries. That is a relatively modern phenomenon

It was the time when the toast to civil and religious liberty was most heard and the denominational press has numerous examples of it being given, often up until 1872 by one of its most well known sons Sir John Bowring.²¹ He consistently pointed out that civil and religious liberty was better than when he was a boy in Exeter but could be improved. Some said it was a bit thick coming from him as in the early 1850s when Governor of Hong King he was not exactly its friend when using gunboat diplomacy to get his way.²²

It was all very different on the hundredth anniversary in 1913 which was seen as the recognition of a significant event. The May meetings of the B&FUA had much on the anniversary. The Association's council wanted to make the anniversary an opportunity for expansion - 'It would prove eminently fitting if the anniversary were marked by a carefully planned and vigorous campaign to make known the principles and faith of Unitarian Christianity in every city, town and village in the British Isles.' A big aspiration which unfortunately was not remotely achieved.²³

The Essex Hall Lecture given by Alexander Gordon on 'Heresies Ancient and Modern' discussed the 1813 Act in a factual and very dry way, while J Estlin Carpenter gave an address to the conference on 'Unitarian Freedom and Progress 1813-1913'. Carpenter pointed out what had been achieved in science and in thought generally and that we were pressing on to a more enlightened world. The tone of the reports in the denominational press showed that optimism, so cruelly to be dampened just over a year later with the commencement of the First World War, was the sense of the time. The hundredth anniversary was being used to show how a new exciting world was in creation.

The *Christian Life* went the whole hog and produced a Commemoration Number 1813-1913 as its issue of 10 May 1913 of well over a hundred pages with numerous photos and greetings from abroad.

It's a comprehensive account with an appendix on the state of Unitarianism in Britain and the world. The whole is a unique record of its history with an extensive display of photos which was a new departure; photos hardly ever appeared in the *Inquirer* of the time. The Commemoration Number has been widely used by those researching the movement's history - if you can get hold of a rare copy do so, it can only engage your interest. The whole constitutes a celebration of what had been achieved and what could be done with more money and effort. Self congratulation went a little far with a section given over to showing photos of 'Ministers who have come over from Orthodoxy'. It comes near to being in part an expression of Unitarian triumphalism - look what we've done . A hundred years of being legal was seen as a time to rejoice, almost to be jubilant.

And what about 1963, the 150th anniversary? What happened then? The answer is nothing as far as I can see, or recall - I was about then. There is no reference to the anniversary in the *Inquirer*, and we are now into a time of living memory, well mine at least and that of others. Nothing happened; British Unitarians were in the throes of one of many partial re-organisations of the GA and its Council that were carried out in the twentieth century which took up most of the attention of involved Unitarians at that time. The preoccupation of British Unitarianism in mid century tended to be internal, too concerned for example with the humanist-theist argument and similar disputes. The cry of to 'civil and religious liberty the world over' was not often heard and Unitarians had become very settled in their legality.

At two hundred years of legality Unitarians now it seems are much more conscious of the anniversary, the possible limitations of their vision, and perhaps of what Unitarians have not achieved. The *Inquirer* had a special issue on 20 July 2013 highlighting the history and included an article by the GA Chief Officer on the continuing fight for religious freedom round the world, pointing out that the issue of blasphemy had

not disappeared. Blasphemy against Christianity had not been repealed in legal terms for very long even in Britain; it was not finally put to rest until 2008, and that event was a close run thing. Some Muslims in particular sought to retain it as a defence of religion against rising secularism, even if the religion of Christianity that it seemingly defended was not theirs.

The GA created a Worship Pack to mark the bicentenary which concluded with extracts from Article 18 of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights, so expressing a modern view of liberty in our world. Events were held in different parts of the country on the bicentenary for example in April 2013 by the Manchester District Association.²⁴ The national press even noticed the bicentenary more than would be thought possible for what was a specifically Unitarian event.

An appropriate comment came, again from the GA Chief Officer, on the two hundredth anniversary which appeared in that most unlikely of places- *The Church Times* 2 August 2013 'Unitarians celebrate "emergence from the shadows"'. Derek McAuley pointed out that Unitarians in the UK have moved from defining themselves as against the Trinity, now focusing on the oneness of God and the oneness of human kind. He added that our tradition is constantly evolving. 'We advocate civil and religious liberty. Our commitment to religious freedom stems directly from our own experience.' Then there was the feature article in *The Independent* by Boyd Tonkin on 13 December 2013 which started with:

One bicentenary seems to have slipped right under the media radar this year. Despite its soporific title, the Doctrine of the Trinity Act 1813 did something truly revolutionary. Through an amendment to the Blasphemy Act, it gave legal protection to Unitarian worship after three centuries during which religious radicals in England who denied the divinity of Jesus Christ had faced vilification, ostracisms', persecution, the prison cell...Two hundred years after the forgotten Act, nobody would say a bad word about the Unitarians, that enlightened congregation of gentle seekers whose notable adherents stretch from the novelist

Elizabeth Gaskell to Web pioneer Tim Berners Lee. Along with Quakers and Liberal Jews, Stephen Fry - the supreme pontif of a certain brand of British pluralism finds them" very easy to get along with since they are not concerned with conversion, with proving themselves better or righter than anyone else, nor with splitting up into factions." Yet Unitarianism was once, in Christian terms, the foulest heresy of all.

Unitarians have come a long way in 200 years, to be called that 'enlightened congregation of gentle seekers' with the bonus of praise from Stephen Fry, one of the gurus of our time! In some ways Unitarians certainly seem to have arrived.

Religious Freedom

That last sentence of the *Church Times* article from Derek McAuley is a key one: 'Our commitment to religious freedom stems directly from our own experience.' That surely is a major area of significance of the 1813 Act today, or should be. Hopefully the last two centuries have taught Unitarians to value religious freedom. Maybe they have not always been as active in its proclamation as they could or should be in the light of their stated principles. Sometimes being legal has made Unitarians over concerned with their legality in any action taken it seems they are very concerned about not stepping out of line, particularly in relation to the state.

The Unitarian denomination - I call it that and not a sect although on occasions it has looked very much like one - does not take radical action though its principles indicate that it should do so. The concern for being legal sometimes has prompted Unitarians to take no action at all, particularly at certain periods in the twentieth century. Some have said that around the mid twentieth century this was due to having too many lawyers and civil servants in their midst. However that phase of timidity seems now to have passed and we have recently been more ready to speak out and be counted. That surely is the message today and for the future reach of the 1813 Act.

Summary

Can I summarise what being legal has meant over the last 200 years? It's certain that Unitarianism would have eventually been legalised at some stage in the early nineteenth century if it had not happened in 1813; however further delay would have left Unitarians in a form of limbo. The drift of the age would have required it however much the evangelicals within dissent would have opposed it. It could have happened in the 1790s but for the impact of the French Revolution on British sentiment; Unitarians were seen as being too much in support of the principles of the Revolution. The Church of England, unreformed and bloated with anomalies as it was, was judged as requiring defence and legalising Unitarianism was seen in some way as potentially undermining the establishment. The support given to the principles of the Revolution by many Unitarians was seen to be dangerous to the body politic.

The rising sense of denominationalism generally, including Unitarian assertiveness created from the presence of the 1813 Act, was matched by the spread of evangelical Christian feeling. This made the challenge commenced in 1819 and finishing in 1844 with the Unitarian triumph an almost certain development, aided of course by the large number of Unitarian MPs. The completion of legalisation took place with the Dissenters' Chapels Act and it was only then that Unitarian congregations were safely free in law and could expand. Their message matched the spirit of the time, most supported the message of Darwinism for example, and they entered a form of golden age.

The creation of the General Assembly in the twentieth century would have been impossible without the existence of the 1813 and 1844 Acts. What Unitarians are today can be traced back to the influence of these two pieces of legislation. Our attitudes and polity have to a large degree arisen out of the nineteenth century experience of legality. 200 years being legal is a real cause for celebration, it has for good or ill, influenced Unitarian attitudes and maybe even parts of its theology. Being legal has made them what they are particularly in organisational terms.

We can usefully ask what is the challenge of being legal today? Perhaps a clue is developed by Boyd Tonkin in the *Independent* article from which I've already quoted. The spark for his article was the decision by the Supreme Court to allow a Church of Scientology to count as a location of religious worship, and so a fit place for the solemnisation of a faith-based ceremony of marriage. He argued that the Court's logic in allowing the Scientology marriage was in a line of decisions going back hundreds of years which includes the 1813 Act. He points out that 'During Britain's long religious twilight, traditional believers have routinely complained about the rise of what they see as wacky sects and fringe faiths.'

Unitarians and others have been proscribed by these complainants until the courts intervened, which is still happening as demonstrated by the Scientology decision. Boyd Tonkin closes his article with the statement, 'The blessing of these supposed superstitions is the triumph of freedom.' Is there still a limit to the triumph of religious freedom in the twenty first century? While 2013 was 200 years of being classed as insiders, are there others outside whose rights Unitarians must fight for in the quest for comprehensive civil and religious freedom? Who next are to be supported in the name of freedom to take their place under the legal religious umbrella? And perhaps on a wider front how is civil and religious liberty is to be extended the world over? It hardly exists in many places. Unitarians claim to press for these freedoms. Unitarian ancestors in the nineteenth century had these liberties as major concerns because they felt the lack of them. In our comfortable position today are Unitarians concerned as they were? That I put to you is the challenge for the future.

This is an amended version of the John Relly Beard Lecture delivered at the Annual Meetings of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches held at Whittlebury Hall, Northamptonshire on Sunday, 13th April 2014.

¹ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (Oxford DNB)*, J.R. Beard by Alan Ruston.

² S.H. Mellone, *Liberty and Religion, First Century of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association*, (Lindsey Press, 1925), p 15-21.

³ *Liberty and Religion*, op cit, p 21-26.

⁴ *Oxford DNB*, entries for Elwell and Emlyn.

⁵ G.M. Ditchfield, Anti-trinitarianism etc: the Unitarian Petition of 1792, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Vol 42 No 1 January 1991, p 39-67.

⁶ For background on William Smith, see Richard W. Davis, *Dissent in Politics: The Political Life of William Smith MP*, Epworth Press, 1971, in particular Chapter 11, The emergence of Unitarianism.

⁷ *Monthly Repository (MR)*, August 1815 Vol 10, p 510.

⁸ A relief measure to benefit Protestant Dissenters more generally had been passed in 1812, prompting Henry Crabb Robinson to comment in his diary 6 August 1812 (mss Dr Williams's Library). 'We congratulated each other on the new Toleration Act: With which all but the Unitarians have reason to be satisfied.' It had been proposed then that a Unitarian relief bill would be introduced but this was bypassed so creating the feeling amongst them of being discriminated against..

⁹ *Journals of the House of Commons*, session 1812-1813, commencing 15 June 1813, p 567.

¹⁰ Alan Ruston, William Wilberforce and Unitarianism, *Transactions Unitarian Historical Society*, Vol 17 No 3 1981, p 129-131.

¹¹ *MR*, November 1813, p 745. Other resolutions passed by Unitarian bodies, p 746-748.

¹² Thomas Belsham, *The Suffering of Unitarians in former times, urged as a ground of thankfulness for their recovered Liberties*, sermon preached at Essex Street Chapel 25 July 1813, J Johnson London, 1813. Belsham believed that the enactment put Unitarians all square with the rest of Dissent, and he opposed denominational organisation as the creation of a split with fellow dissenters, see Alexander Gordon, Chapter 9, Thomas Belsham, his place in the Unitarian movement, in *Addresses Biographical and Historical*, Lindsey Press, 1922.

¹³ Pew Research Centre Report, quoted in Religious Freedom Blasphemy Laws, D. McAuley, *Faith Initiative*, journal of the Interfaith Trust, October 2013, p 38.

¹⁴ *Liberty and Religion*, op cit, chapter 3, p 29-48.

¹⁵ Early examples of the toast being given include at the Unitarian Fund anniversary 25 May 1820, (*MR*, June 1820, p 370); and the General Baptist Assembly 24 May 1831 (*General Baptist Advocate* 1832, p 108).

¹⁶ The contortions of the Objects revision process is summarised by Andrew Hill in the *Inquirer* 7 December 2013, p 4.

¹⁷ Davis, op cit., p 209.

¹⁸ *Liberty and Religion*, op cit, p 26-28.

¹⁹ For background on the Dissenters' Chapels Act see articles in the *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society* Vol. 20 No 4 1994 on the 150th anniversary of its passing.

²⁰ George Harris, *Unitarianism the only Religion that can become Universal*, sermon delivered at Renshaw Street Chapel Liverpool, 1818, published Liverpool 1819, list of chapels in an appendix.

²¹ B&FUA Annual meetings dinner 28 May 1874, the chairman proposed civil and religious equality all the world over, slightly varied from the old wording which was 'always introduced as a matter of right by the noble hearted man, Sir John Bowring' (*Inquirer* 30 May 1874, p 353.)

²² A few of his imperious acts are described by Stephen Conway, Bowring in Government Service, in *Sir John Bowring, Aspects of his Life and Career*, edited by Joyce Youings, The Devonshire Association, 1993.

²³ *The Unitarian Monthly*, May 1913, p 65.

²⁴ Worship Pack, 200th anniversary etc, produced by Derek McAuley, April 2013, 11 pages. Dennis Crompton on the AGM of Manchester District Association, *The Unitarian* June 2013.