Friends and Colleagues: Intellectual Networking in England 1760-1776

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The study of English intellectualism during the latter half of the Eighteenth Century has been fairly limited. Either historians study individual figures, individual groups or single debates, primarily that following the French Revolution. My paper seeks to find the origins of this French Revolution debate through examining the interactions between individuals and the groups they belonged to in order to transcend the segmentation previous scholarship has imposed. At the center of this study are a series of individuals, most notably Joseph Priestley, Richard Price, Benjamin Franklin, Dr. John Canton, Rev. Theophilus Lindsey and John Jebb, whose friendships and interactions among such diverse disciplines as religion, science and politics characterized the collaborative yet segmented nature of English society, which contrasted so dramatically with the salon culture of their French counterparts.
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Introduction

What kind of Enlightenment did England have? Scholarship records the Enlightenment beginning with Locke and ending with the debates of the French Revolution, but during the long Eighteenth Century between these two English phenomena, English intellectualism disappeared from historical interest. Rather than the big intellectual leaps attributed to thinkers elsewhere during the Eighteenth Century, English liberalization has traditionally been seen as gradual, progressing incrementally from as far back as the Glorious Revolution, or even the Magna Carta. England failed to produce the big intellectual names which historians have traditionally attributed to the Enlightenment.

The closest individuals to Enlightenment acceptance were the rational dissenters, whose activities at the end of the Eighteenth Century have long been a popular topic of scholarly research. Following the French Revolution, this group came to the forefront of intellectual and political consciousness. The Rational dissenters, characterized initially by a speech given by Dr. Richard Price, were the most steadfast supporters of the ideals of the French Revolution. The ideological battle characterized in the modern mind by Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the French Revolution* came to represent the fight between liberal revolutionary ideals and the gradual conservative English method. In the fallout of this debate, the liberals were seen to have lost, yet over the next century their influence grew throughout the British Isles and United States.

This print debate encompassed the height of these dissenters’ political, intellectual and spiritual careers, but very few historians have looked at the earlier period of their lives. During the three decades preceding this French Revolution, England’s
philosophers of both the natural and spiritual realms made important discoveries and set the stage for their later influence. This paper seeks to examine the interpersonal relationships of certain intellectuals during the middle to late Eighteenth-Century Enlightenment England in order to examine how dissenters became so prominent during the last decade. Through examining the intellectual climate as a whole, a close knit circle of friends repeatedly appeared, able to bridge middle and upper class society through their friendships, acquaintances and group organizations. As the years progressed, these friendships changed and individual interests became more pronounced, but the connections of these early years influenced the rest of these individual lives.

The first section will examine some of the most prominent areas of English intellectual society during this period and the various institutions and groups which played important roles in the movements of the time. While many of these groups have individual articles, and some even tomes written about them, this paper aims to show their interactions, specifically regarding the interplay between various individuals. Although this has been examined before over a few dimensions, such as the relationship between religion and politics or religion and science, there has been little study to question the larger scale interconnectedness, which is the aim of the second section. The social web was most dense in the half decade preceding the American Revolutionary War, when most of the prominent individuals resided in London and interacted daily. The last section examines how, during the decade leading up to the French Revolution, these individuals went their separate ways and developed different influences throughout the country, while retaining close ties with each other that facilitated their later fame.
Segments of English Intellectual Society

Unlike France, whose salon culture has been extensively studied, the intellectual societies of England are generally understood merely as individual entities or skimmed over in favor of individual studies. The institutions themselves were not unique. Every Western country had churches, schools, scientists and literary figures, but the forms these groups took and their strong association with different intellectual traditions provided a unique situation for intellectual. This group structure accounts for the lack of immortal names on the level of Voltaire, David Hume or Immanuel Kant. In this system, the most brilliant people explored the wide spectrum of the philosophies, which included science and theology in addition to the traditional explorations of the human condition. Through studying the larger groups of intellectuals of various disciplines, the incredible feats of those who crossed these boundaries may be understood.

During the Eighteenth Century, governments had some form of state religion, yet the English Dissenters are considered a special case. In 1563, the newly established Church of England drew up 39 articles by which the state church was going to be defined. These statements were drawn in the broadest of terms, describing the most basic aspects of the Protestant faith. In order to be an Anglican, constituents had to ascribe to all these tenets. Until the English Civil War, these were considered guidelines, but in the 1660s several laws went into affect restricting those whose beliefs did not conform to these standards. Parliament passed the Act of Toleration in 1689, which allowed freedom of worship to those nonconformists who ascribed to at least 36 of the 39 articles of faith, but only if they were formally registered and monitored. This stipulation prevented Catholics and Unitarians, who did not believe in the divinity of Jesus or the trinity, from
worshipping, but allowed for most moderate Protestant sects. Because only Anglicans were allowed in governmental posts, the most passionate rational dissenters were delegated to the private sphere where they were over represented in the intellectual circles up through the Eighteenth Century.

Dissenters were allowed their own educational facilities, since they were often either refused admission elsewhere or refused to attend based on contrary beliefs. Brian Simon has done an extensive study on the connection of these dissenting academies with education reform in the Nineteenth Century. Using some of the same networking ideas I use in the rest of the paper, he examines both these dissenting academies and the scientific methods of the Lunar Society to show the evolution of dispensation of knowledge in Great Britain. ¹

Throughout Europe, schools continued to operate under the jurisdiction of religious organizations, which often remained conservative regarding new scientific discoveries. Several thinkers of the French High Enlightenment thought that education reform was the solution to implementing social progress. ² There has been plenty written on the influence on Enlightenment ideas on reforming Revolutionary French schools, implying this stagnation rather than overtly proving it. ³ Elsewhere, such as portions of Germany some education reform occurred, but this had more to do with reforming religion, specifically Catholicism than education. ⁴ Unlike these institutionally required reforms, the change in English Dissenting education during this half-century had more to do with practical changes in the need for the students’ educational needs.

curriculums were decided by boards of trustees and private subscribers whose monetary contributions kept the school financially afloat. While nominally denominational in nature and established for the education of ministers, these schools were at their core capitalist ventures. Those which attracted talented students and trained successful alumni remained in business, while those which valued tradition over what students wanted and needed to learn failed.³

As much as schooling was about education, to students it was more about networking and the experience of being away from their families. Often the instructors were little more than students themselves, relating and receiving knowledge of the world while still finding their own place within it. Although the schools were generally pretty small, Joseph Priestley remembers his experience at Daventry Academy in the 1750s as intellectually stimulating, where

the students were about equally divided upon every question of much importance, such as liberty and necessity, the sleep of the soul, and the articles of theological orthodoxy and heresy; in consequence of which all these topics were subject of continual discussion⁶

This atmosphere of honest and intelligent debate fostered close friendships based on respect rather than shared opinion, though often by the end of their education the students developed shared views amongst themselves, not necessarily those of their tutors. These friendships extended throughout their lives. Two influential thinkers united by these means were Richard Price, the political philosopher, and John Howard, the prison reformer, whose friendship stemming from their days at Coward’s Academy influenced them both. Howard’s work The State of the Prisons was extremely important in

international prison reform. He traveled the world researching and compiling notes, but his writing skill left much to be desired. He had Price review, revise and often completely rewrite entire sections of the influential work. The two did not belong to any similar clubs or organizations as is the case for many of the relationships in the rest of this paper, but Howard put his career in the hands of his school friend, who was willing to devote his time and effort to another’s endeavor with no hope of acclamation or reward.\(^7\) The two remained close to the end of their days, with Howard leaving his papers to the mutual care of Price and his biographer John Aiken, but unfortunately Price was too near death to accept, passing away within a year of Howard.\(^8\) Schools fostered individuals’ growth of character, intellect and social abilities which would shape them the rest of their lives.

During the Eighteenth Century, most of these dissenting academies were Presbyterian schools for the training of ministers, but as natural philosophy and rationality began expanding, the schools shifted to accommodate new knowledge. Since the government was off limits to dissenters, their post-graduate options were limited, reduced to the private or religious sector. Traditionally graduates would automatically assume that they would become ministers of some sort, but with the growth of the middle class in England educated and motivated dissenters had new options for success. Changing curriculums showed this shift as well. In his account of his school days, Priestley discusses mainly philosophical and theological argumentation, but his description of teaching merely a decade later in the 1760s already shows a dramatic shift. The position of teaching mathematics and natural philosophy had become coveted and

\(^7\) John Aiken, *A View of the Life, Travels, and Philanthropic Labours of the Late John Howard* (New York: David Huntington, 1814), 42.
\(^8\) Ibid., 123-24.
important positions, which were never mentioned when discussing his education. The difference may be that Priestley was working at the newly instituted Warrington Academy.

Warrington Academy was opened in 1757 by John Seddon in response to the closures of Presbyterian academies in Findern and Kendall along with the stagnation of several others. Seddon saw the need for adaptation in new times and circumstances. The academy was founded upon the philosophy of a liberal education to propagate more than merely ministers. Upon complaints from religious observers that Warrington was failing in its stated purpose of training religious men, the Board of Trustees in 1764 observed that

the original design of the institution of this Academy was not only to provide a proper education for young men intended for the ministry; but to institute a plan of instruction, upon an open and liberal scheme, where young Gentlemen in general, whether intended for business or any of the learned professions, might receive at least the former part of their education

Unlike previous institutions, Warrington Academy emphasized rationality, which is evident from its choice of teachers. Almost from the start of its short duration, two of the four tutors (Dr. Aiken and Dr. Priestley) were members of the Royal Academy in London and prominent scientists. A generation of Unitarian ministers, industrialists, and occasional economist (such as Thomas Robert Malthus) or rebel (such as Archibald Hamilton Rowan) came through the Warrington Academy before its closure in 1782. In

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twenty-nine short years, this Academy affected dissention and discovery in Great Britain far beyond its stature and tumultuous lifetime would initially suggest.

As the trustees’ comment implied, although Warrington was ahead of its time in lay education, it was not necessarily the best academy for those intended for Presbyterian and other dissenting ministry. Joseph Priestley’s education as described above took place at Daventry Academy, which was perhaps the most prolific of these establishments during this period. More than half of the two hundred fifty four students attending Daventry studied divinity and these graduates made up about two fifths of the Provincial Assembly of Lancashire and Cheshire. Other Academies such as Manchester and Horsey’s also contributed statistically significant numbers of ministers to this Presbyterian and later Unitarian tradition. While historians have esteemed Warrington as promoting modern science and society, these other Academies shaped religious dissent which would play a key role in the following century.\(^\text{13}\)

The graduates of these establishments have generally been linked to the growth of rational dissent during the later half of the Eighteenth Century, which paved the way for the dramatic grown of Unitarianism in the Nineteenth Century. James E. Bradley’s examination of the popular impact of these radicals’ political views, contradicts this traditional view, showing that the preachers’ impact was limited as far as popular opinion was concerned. Political radicalism which began to arise during the American Revolution was shared by both the dissenting elites and many in the lower to middle classes, but this agreement in political matter did not automatically correlate to religious

conversion. Rather than trying to contradict these findings, this paper examines how the close relationship between the various dissenting ministers gave them more impact on the intellectual and political sphere than their strict influence would otherwise provide.

When Sir John Pringle was in London with Franklin in 1772, he requested to attend a church of rational Christianity. Although he knew many such ministers personally, Franklin realized he did not actually know where or when any of them preached, so he entreated a list from Richard Price. Although not an official list, Price’s response enumerates those ministers which he considered worthy of the newly elected President of the Royal Society. First he listed, Dr. Andrew Kippis, who would later be elected to the Royal Society himself, Dr. Thomas Armory, Dr. Joseph Jeffries and Philip Furneaux, who all belonged to the Club of Honest Whigs, a society which Price and Franklin associated. He then lists eight other preachers of Christianity in the rational sense throughout the city. Since rational Christianity is a fairly arbitrary term, this count from within its own membership is likely the most complete possible. In the same letter, Price reflects that the majority of these congregations were extremely small. Computing a hard number of Dissenters during this period, let alone strictly rational ones is impossible. Bradley estimates that in most counties, Dissenters numbered somewhere between five and ten percent of the population, but during the latter part of the eighteenth century their numbers were declining dramatically. The Presbyterians in London lost around thirty-nine percent of their congregations going into the 1780s. For a city the

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size of London, which was somewhere between three-quarters and a million
inhabitants,\textsuperscript{17} thirteen ministers preaching to mostly empty chapels represented an almost
insignificant number of Londoners who could be called Rational Dissenters.

Every spring, the dissenting ministers of various denominations would congregate
in Dudley in Straffordshire. While there is little direct description of these meetings,
Priestley mentions traveling to Dudley in several letters at the end of May through the
1780s and 1790s, though he implies the absence of Theodolphus Lindsey, who was at
that point one of the foremost figures in the dissenting community.\textsuperscript{18} The assemblies
were like academic conferences, characterized by a popular minister’s sermon and
general mingling. Most of the records of exact meetings can only be traced through the
published sermons of participants, such as Joseph Priestley in 1782 or Joshua Tolmin in
1813.\textsuperscript{19} There were other gatherings, as well, though equally deficient in direct evidence.
For example there is evidence and reference that the Provincial Assembly of Lancashire
and Cheshire had extensive and well educated dissenting members which followed a
format similar to the Dudley conference whereby up and coming ministers performed key
sermons. In the same publication Priestley published his sermon given at the Dudley
assembly, he included the one he wrote for this group in 1764. Published membership
records show this assembly extending strongly through the end of the Nineteenth
Century.\textsuperscript{20} Similar organizational efforts began emerging more extensively by the end of
the Eighteenth Century, specifically with the growth of the Unitarian and civil liberties

\textsuperscript{17} John Landers, \textit{Death and the Metropolis: Studies in the Demographic History of London, 1670-1830}

\textsuperscript{18} John Towill Rutt, \textit{The Theological and Miscellaneous Works of Joseph Priestley}, vol. 1 Part 2 (Hackney:
George Smallfield, 1817), 67.

\textsuperscript{19} Joseph Priestley, “Two Discourses: On Habitual Devotion,” in \textit{The Theological and Miscellaneous

\textsuperscript{20} George Eyre Evans, \textit{Record of the Provincial Assembly of Lancashire and Cheshire} (Manchester: H.
Rawson and Co., 1896).
movements. In 1792, Joseph Priestley received a letter from the newly formed Committee of Protestant Dissenters in Essex, who sought to promote a unified dissenting front in favor of religious and civil liberties despite any individual doctrinal differences. Priestley delighted in this communication because the difference of opinion did not preclude their unification under a common set of goals and leadership, although the latter was merely implied by the address itself.\textsuperscript{21} These efforts proved the incentive for dissenting organization, even though their beliefs ranged across a varied spectrum.

Reading some of these historical works, the dissenting tradition comes across as a unified movement. In reality, dissenting ministries included all those which were not explicitly Anglican, which as any study of religion following the Reformation can attest, covers a wide spectrum of beliefs. Even merely discussing the Anti-Trinitarians, there were fierce divides over religious theory, specifically between Arians and Socinians. More conservative, the Arians believed that Jesus Christ was divine, but not on the same level of God the Father. Socinians, on the other hand believe that Jesus was sent as messiah, but was strictly human. Joseph Priestley began his career as an Arian, but the more he studied theology, his views shifted to Socinianism.\textsuperscript{22} Upon moving to Leeds in 1767 to preach rather than teach, Priestley renewed his interest in speculative theology quickly solidifying the belief system he would retain the rest of his life.\textsuperscript{23} Publishing tract upon tract on the concept’s rational worth, Priestley became one of the main advocates of Socinian theory. Through careful examination of the scriptures, Priestley acknowledges Jesus was divinely inspired, but the divinity of Christ and the conception of the trinity do not exist in the Bible and are due entirely to corruption from Heathen

\textsuperscript{21} Rutt, \textit{The Theological and Miscellaneous Works of Joseph Priestley}, 179-80.
\textsuperscript{22} Boyer, ed. \textit{The Memoirs of Dr. Joseph Priestley}, 34-35.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 50.
historical religion. These public views, which Priestley published extensively on, caused many traditionalists to dismiss Priestley, and the Unitarians he claimed to represent. Many observers denied Socinians were Christian at all, because if they did not believe in the divinity of Christ then they might as well be Jews and heathens.²⁴

Richard Price, and others who fell into the Arian mindset, believed in finding a middle road by which they retained their Anti-Trinitarian mindset without dismissing Christ’s divinity altogether. Most of Price’s friends, such as Priestley and Theodolphus Lindsey, were pious Socinians, so even when writing to dismiss their belief structure Price makes it clear that they are indeed Christians. Price hoped to find a middle ground between the incompatible beliefs of the traditional Trinitarians and the radical Socinians, which he believed represented the closest approach to truth. Combining the Trinitarian ideas of a superhuman Christ who was sent to Earth for a purpose and the Socinian view that worship of any entity other than God is idolatry, Price combines rationalism, scholarship and faith to explain an often ignored alternative to the extreme options available.²⁵ This Arian belief system often, as was the case with Priestley, represented a stepping stone to eventual Socinianism, at least so far as Arian branch of Unitarianism failed to attract the sustained growth of Socinianism. Priestley wrote in a letter to Price in 1787 that he feared that Price “will be the last Arian antagonist [he] will have.”²⁶

Throughout their long friendship, Priestley and Price debated the nuances of their theological, spiritual and materialist views, most overtly in their exchange of letters

²⁵ Richard Price, Sermons on the Christian Doctrine as Received by the Different Denominations of Christians: To Which Are Added, Sermons on the Security and Happiness of a Virtuous Course, on the Goodness of God, and the Resurrection of Lazarus (Dublin: John Exshaw, 1787), 105-57.
eventually published under the name *A Free Discussion of the Doctrine of Materialism, and Philosophic Necessity* which was published by their mutual friend Joseph Johnson in 1778. Although the topic of this work was more centered on the separation of the body and soul, the main question of Christ’s divinity underscores many of the arguments. Both agree to the immortality of the soul, but their reasoning on this point revolves around their previous disagreement on Jesus’ divinity as well as that of the body/soul dichotomy. To the Arian Price, people “have obtained the hope of being saved by the most extraordinary means...by the interposition of Jesus Christ; by taking upon him our nature, by *humbling himself to death*, has acquired the power of *destroying death.*”

27 Priestley says this argument promotes the heathen perception of the entity Jesus existing before his birth on Earth and puts the entirety of his hope in God and the eventual resurrection of humanity from a state of insensibility which God’s revelation has promised. The details of this almost semantic argument characterize the relationship between the two branches of Unitarianism. When it comes to faith and worship both sides agree, but the details and meaning which are just as, if not more important to believers differ enough for public debate.

Traditional accounts of the Enlightenment have put science as diametrically opposed to religion, but recent research has questioned that conclusion in England, where the most scientific persons often seemed to be some of the most religious. 28 This connection will be further explored below, but there was Enlightenment science in England as well. The societies which promoted natural philosophy were prestigious and


exclusive, focused on discovering the true nature of the world around them. England was in an interesting position. Practical science was becoming more important than theoretical posturing, and that was already beginning to cause tension between different sectors of the intellectual community, illustrated more and more through the increasing figurative distance between the London hub of intellectual achievement and the provincial spots of practical modernization, which would give rise to the Industrial Revolution over the course of the next century.

The Royal Society of London collected within its membership the most prominent scientists of the country. Historians have mostly ignored this organization during the Eighteenth Century due to the perception of its decline as compared to its auspicious Newtonian roots. The origin of this view can be traced back to the popularity of a book called *Reflections on the Decline of Science in England* by Charles Babbage written in 1830, where he claimed that “science has long been neglected and declining in England” and this blame should fall on the Royal Society. While Richard Sorrenson argues that Babbage’s main points fail to hold up under scrutiny, the field remains barren of historical analysis. Indeed Sorrenson argues that the Society actually prospered during this period, in membership, income and intellectual output. It remained the main scientific organization in England.

The social composition of the Society over the course of its charter remained fairly consistent, with members pretty evenly distributed among the upper and upper

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middle class professionals. Getting into the Society was not entirely simple, even for the peers of the realm. After writing out a particularly innovative experiment regarding fire effecting negative and positive electric charge, Joseph Priestley wrote up a detailed account and related its details to those friends who might recommend him for membership. After asking four respected scientists for their support, Priestley asked one, his friend Richard Price “not to have [him] proposed at all (if it be not done) unless [he] be morally certain it will be carried.” Even Priestley, who was helping Franklin understand the workings of electricity, was afraid he would not get accepted. While the upper classes had an easier time being elected into the Society, once anyone attained membership they were on equal standing with all other members.

Once a person got in, the Royal Society was a social group as any other. It collected dues, had regular meetings and elected officials. Although royally commissioned, there was little interference with the Society from government. Meetings generally composed of exchanging information of the most recent experiments of members, whether through correspondence or through the live reading of papers. After debate and discussion, the collaboration inevitably improved understanding among the whole. The Copley Medal was awarded annually for the best presented paper of the year. The most active participants were the recognizable names of the day, but Sorrenson claims that those who lack the means and talent to achieve these feats saw themselves as patrons and sometime observers rather than as regular practitioners of science; they meant to do no more than pay their dues, read the Society’s journal the Philosophical Transactions (Phil. Trans.), and occasionally attend meetings or correspond with the Society, which they expected in

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31 Ibid.: 35-37.
32 Peach, ed. The Correspondence of Richard Price: July 1748-March 1778, 40.
turn to provide them with informative, entertaining, enlightening and useful knowledge. In the Royal Society, members got out of it what they put in. Those who paid their dues and saw science as a hobby gained knowledge and correspondence. Participants on the other hand, gained understanding and improved their own experimentation. Important friendships were cultivated, which found their start with a mutual interest in the natural and physical sciences. Finally it was a support, validation and recommendation to the public regarding publications of members. All scientists, whether serious or casual aspired to earn membership, and although many attained it, there was a level of prestige attached which cannot be claimed in any of the other memberships mentioned in the rest of this paper.

The Lunar Society of Birmingham is an example of the more focused and regional scientific societies that developed during this period. Composed primarily of members of the Royal Society, the so-called ‘Lunatics’ diverged from their London colleagues by focusing primarily on science for practical purposes. Although they had met as friends in the preceding decade, the middle of the 1770s marks the period of more formal association. The group developed around Matthew Boulton, a charismatic businessman, and included nine men by 1775, Erasmus Darwin, Thomas Day, Richard Edgeworth, James Keir, William Small, James Watt, Josiah Wedgwood, and John Whitehurst. Although Boulton collected the group around him, the personality which held it together was William Small, whose death in 1775 forced the group to set up scheduled discussion meetings. Although not exact in these first few years, the group would meet for dinner on the Sunday nearest the full moon. In his extensive study of the

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33 Sorrenson, "Towards a History of the Royal Society in the Eighteenth Century": 33.
Lunar Society, Robert E. Schofield describes “a group of people…brought together in friendship and…were tied by mutual interests in science and in industries expanding at a frontier of technical knowledge which, they were all convinced, science could help them advance.” Unlike other discussed groups, political commentary likely never bled over into the scientific conversation. During the American Revolution, the political spectrum of members ranged between both extremes, yet the individual relationships remained close. Although the Lunar Society was the most prolific, in terms of patents and communication with London, there were similar provincial scientific societies throughout England which advanced theoretical and practical scientific knowledge.

Through studying theoretical science combined with practical science and business ambition, the Lunar Society begins to blur the line between Enlightenment and the origins of the Industrial Revolution. Arguably the most important innovation of the eighteenth century was the steam engine which Boulton and Watt collaborated to create and patent in 1777. Boulton and Watt were not alone of the Lunar Society members to patent and sell the blueprints for practical inventions which had commercial applications. In 1779, several members collaborated on designing a chemical copier, which brought in money for the fifteen years which his patent covered. In many ways this group deserves to be heralded as the beginning of the Industrial Revolution than as part of an English Enlightenment, but it also fits within the context of this paper. English intellectual development during this period straddles the boundary between these two movements, with significant overlap especially at the end of the Eighteenth Century.

36 Ibid., 155.
Perhaps the most studied during this period are the Literature Societies, where the most recognizable English names congregated. In general these literature societies have most often been attributed with the French concept of a salon. During the second half of the eighteenth century, several English men and women attempted to import the French model to varying degrees of success. Much like in France, the goal was to provide intelligent and insightful conversation where the participants left improved from when they arrived. Discussions generally followed the literary and philosophical rather than practical. While the salon culture was not as extensive or famous in England, some made a significant impression to the contemporary and future observers.

The most famous was Samuel Johnson’s Literary Club. While most of the intellectual community explored here focuses on the liberal dissenting individuals of this time, Johnson’s circle was manifestly conservative. Through their traditional patriotism, they would not include dissenters of the Church of England or sympathizers with the American situation. The members of this club were some of the most important intellectual and political figures of the period, and the fiercest opponents of reform attempts at this time such as the Feathers’ Tavern Petition and the attempts to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts. Although biographically there are some questionable editing choices, the best and most complete record we have of this gathering or any other association is James Boswell’s *Life of Johnson*. During the period of the Literary Club, Boswell was actually present, so these sections include first hand understanding of events and confrontations.

The club itself began in February of 1765. Meetings occurred Fridays at the Turks-head Tavern in Gerrard Street, Soho and generally lasted a ways through the night,
though eventually this was reduced to fortnightly meetings which shifted through several locations due to availability. Its initial membership included Johnson, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Edmund Burke, Dr. Christopher Nugent, Topham Beauclerk, Bennet Langton, Oliver Goldsmith, Anthony Chamier and John Hawkins.\textsuperscript{37} Although membership was strongly regulated, by 1791 there were thirty five members. Over the years, Johnson attracted important figures to join such as James Boswell himself, economist Adam Smith, historian Edward Gibbons, physician George Fordyce and Whig statesman Charles Fox. Johnson, and occasionally Burke tended to dominate conversation. Although topics ranged across intellectual fields, with politics alone taboo, conversation most often centered on the literary. There is some evidence that although they enjoyed diversity of opinion, a certain level of agreement, or at least submission to dominant opinion and dominant speaker, was expected. After a disagreement with Burke at a meeting, Sir John Hawkins was given such a cold shoulder he decided to remove himself entirely from their company.\textsuperscript{38} Johnson’s Literary Club was both the most exclusive and most famous of the non-professional intellectual societies of this period. The members were intelligent, well read and interesting. The careers of the individuals involved speak for themselves and their alliances in the House of Commons contributed to the political power some of them held.

Another Johnson, Joseph was one of the most prominent publishers in London at this time. Joseph Johnson published the leading theologians, scientists and travelers of the day. As the years wore on, he collected around him a number of people who came to be famous in the later years. Johnson moved to London in 1761 and opened a small book

\textsuperscript{37} James Boswell, \textit{The Life of Samuel Johnson} (London: George Dearborn, 1833), 212.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 212-13.
shop. In these early years he published very little on his own, but as early as 1766, Johnson was collecting books of interest for Joseph Priestley and his other scientific friends, specifically members of Warrington Academy. For these first few years, Johnson cultivated relationships and gained a formidable reputation within the intellectual community, especially in the dissenting circles, where his long term business association with Priestley gained him business. When he finally set up shop in 1770 without any partners, Johnson’s career as a publisher truly took shape.

Johnson gathered into his establishment and social circle some of the most prominent thinkers of the period, which in time would become a kind of salon for intelligent and often unorthodox discussion. Along with Priestley and his Warrington associates, Johnson’s early authors ranged from dissenting ministers, such as Theophilus Lindsey, to scientific figures, such as George Fordyce and John Hunter, to political philosophers, such as Benjamin Franklin. Once Johnson’s publishing business became stable, Johnson expanded his publications and regularized and expanded his ‘circle.’ Eventually this diverse gathering centered on Johnson would include such names as the painter Henry Fuseli, scientist Erasmus Darwin, political agitators Thomas Paine, Gilbert Wakefield and John Horne Tooke, Romantic poets Anna Barbauld and William Blake, along with pioneering feminist Mary Wollstonecraft and her husband William Godwin. According to Gerald P. Tyson, in his detailed work on Johnson’s life and influence, the growth of this London based group in the 1780s “resulted in the establishment of an important and influential radical coterie that, for the next ten years or so, would make significant contributions through Johnson to social, political, and literary developments in

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England.” As friends and associates, Johnson could call on any one of these influential and talented writers to review or contribute to any number of issues or projects which needed a strong voice. His extensive publications helped clarify the Unitarian creed, and pave the way for its expansion in the following century. Johnson’s circle has perhaps the least direct evidence relating to it, but due to its nature was the most public. The liberal beliefs of this small group of people were published and distributed to the masses at least partially shaping the hearts and minds of the English people.  

Lady Montagu’s ‘Bluestockings’ have been traditionally been called a salon. In some ways this title fits better than the other examples, especially regarding the influence of women in organizing the gatherings. At the height of the feminist interpretation of history, the Bluestockings were an especially attractive subject. Their activities were seen as a reaction against the misogynistic exclusivity of such clubs as Samuel Johnsons. Through examining the individual writings, it becomes clear that it was “the sharing of a feminine consciousness that provided cohesiveness to the Blue-Stocking movement,” even if limited only the most central members. In some ways this narrative is oversimplified, but the feminist aspect is an important way of understanding the gatherings. Nevertheless, these women were consciously adopting the empowering French model, but had goals beyond the advancement of their sex. 

In other ways the Bluestockings resembled French salons to a greater extent than the other literary societies discussed. The friendships were not based on a single individual and membership was open to anyone who could contribute stimulating

\[41\] Ibid., 66.  
\[42\] Ibid., 57-91.  
conversation. Beginning some time in the early 1750s, the Bluestocking tradition extended through the rest of the decade, finding its final ending upon Montagu’s death in 1800. Enumerating individual participants is all but impossible, since attendance was constantly shifting. Attendants at various points included, Samuel Johnson, Richard Price, Anna Barbauld, James Boswell, Mary Wollstonecraft and numerous other men and women of letters. The main hostesses were Elizabeth Vesey, Frances Boscawen and Elizabeth Montagu, whose homes and personalities characterized the different meetings. None of these women wanted the fake stiff wit which they equated with their French model. Instead, the English Bluestockings “repudiate wit that is French and wit that is tainted, and exalt common sense in its stead.” The Bluestockings valued comfortable conversation with both good friends and new acquaintances. Although the origins of the name remain fiercely debated, in the term ‘Bluestocking’ would become fashionable. Individual members, especially the main circle of women, became incredibly influential within the literary community, but failed to change the structure of English intellectualism on the whole.

In examining these literary clubs, each of which has been terms a kind of English Salon, it is clear that the French model could not be transferred unchanged. Each faded out along with its founding members, unable to continually perpetuate itself beyond a certain point. In Tinker’s examination of the Bluestockings and the Johnson Literary Club, he observes that the salons “judged by classical models, must be said to have

46 Ibid., 166-214.
The majority of English authors failed to participate, especially in the female run Bluestockings, so they were unable to unite the entire intellectual movement under a single system as in France. Taylor attributes this to prejudice, whether of people towards the Bluestockings or Samuel Johnson’s circle against everybody else. In examining the other clubs and institutions, London and England as a whole had a completely different intellectual structure than France. Clubs were designed to attract individuals of certain interests. Instead of forcing everybody to conform to an established salon community, people could join one or more clubs which appealed to their own personal tastes, within which they were most likely to find friends with whom they had the most in common.

If this hypothesis is correct, then political groups must have collected significant numbers of individuals. There have been numerous examinations of these groups during the later part of the century. During the 1770s, a club formed haphazardly of a group of men religiously unorthodox, politically liberal and scientifically minded. The resulting ‘Club of Honest Whigs’ met every Thursday through much of the year originally at St. Paul’s Coffee House, then after 1772 at the London Coffee House. There is ample evidence this club existed, and the membership were quite open with their acclaim for the friendships and discussion. The most consistent participants of the club took it for granted, leaving no description beyond tantalizing references of close friendships centered around membership. Visitors were most likely to describe the experience and specific discussions within. The most complete description of a single meeting came

47 Ibid., 213.
from James Boswell who attended sparingly during the late 1760s. The following
description is illuminates membership, discussion topics and even the menu, most of
which would otherwise be lost to historians.

I went to a club to which I belong. It meets every other Thursday at St.
Paul’s Coffee-house. It consists of clergymen, physicians, and several
other professions. There are of it: Dr. Franklin, Rose of Chiswick, Burgh
of Newington Green, Mr. Price who writes on morals, Dr. Jeffries, a keen
Supporter of the Bill of Rights, and a good many more. We may have
wine and punch upon the table. Some of us smoke a pipe, conversation
goes on pretty formally, sometimes sensibly and sometimes furiously. At
nine there is a sideboard with Welsh rabbits and apple puffs, porter and
beer. Our reckoning is about 18d. a head. Much was said this night
against Parliament. I said that, as it seemed to be agreed that all Members
of Parliament became corrupted, it was better to choose men already bad,
and so save good men. 50

From this description, Boswell paints a fairly comfortable, but formal gathering, centered
on primarily political discussion. As he said, parliamentary corruption was merely the
discussion topic for the night, implying by way of his personal descriptions that he was
intimately familiar with Price’s moral stances and Dr. Jeffries’ stance on the Bill of
Rights. Since these were the only two specifics mentioned combined with the name of
the club, it is fairly safe to conjecture most discussion centered on politics. Interestingly
As a member of Samuel Johnson’s Literary Club, Boswell was much more conservative
then the rest of the ‘Honest Whigs,’ yet he seemed to enjoy the political discussions
taking place. This implies that this was truly a discussion group rather than an echo
chamber for the dominant opinions. After years being away, Franklin recalled the Club
of Honest Whigs wondering “how it happened that they and my other friends in England
came to be such good creatures in the midst of so perverse a generation.” 51 After

51 John Towill Rutt, ed. The Theological and Miscellaneous Works of Joseph Priestley, vol. 1 pt. 1 (London:
G. Smallfield,1817), 361.
mingling with the great men of the three great nations of the eighteenth century, including the exalted Founding Fathers of America, Franklin exalts these men as his only example of the decency of humanity.

Who then were the Honest Whigs? Membership was fairly consistent and likely stayed around twenty to twenty five people, the majority of which had religious backgrounds. When Benjamin Franklin claimed that he knew many rational Christian ministers himself, but had never seen them preach, he was likely thinking of many of the members of the Honest Whigs. In addition to Price and Priestley, Samuel Morton Savage, Thomas Amory, Joseph Jeffries, Philip Furneaux, Ebenezer Radcliff, Andrew Kippis and John Calder were all ministers of some sort. Most of these were also teachers and tutors at dissenting academies at various times in their life. While not specifically ministers, James Burgh ran a dissenting academy, while William Rose and James Densham taught at them. John Canton and John Pringle considered themselves primarily scientists. James Densham eventually left his ministry in order to participate in commercial business. Other ministers made a greater impact in their intellectual pursuits than religious. James Burgh’s political tracts made a significant impact on political consciousness, while William Rose published the magazine *Weekly Review*, which provided literary contacts to the group as well as giving a showcase for his friends’ writings.\(^52\) The Club of Honest Whigs more than any other group shows the themes which permeate the rest of the paper. It was mostly the members of this group who connect the various social groups so closely together. Religion, science, politics and intellectual pursuits intertwined in these career choices in addition to their choice of social club.

Organizational and Individual Overlap

Each of these individual organizations has at least one, if not numerous extensive studies on their membership, objectives and affiliations, but there is a dearth of scholarship examining the interconnectedness of them. These groups did not exist in a vacuum, with people choosing one over the other. The most interesting and revealing examination revolves around individuals who refused to define themselves by a single membership. Who were these group jumpers? Where exactly did their loyalties lie? What did this mean for the larger intellectual community? These questions came to the surface, which made the people the focus rather than the objective trends. By studying individual overlap, I am able to show a more nuanced view of the groups themselves as well as English intellectual society as a whole.

Education is both the easiest and most difficult to use as a connector. Just because somebody went to the same school around the same period did not automatically create an association. Nevertheless some individual connections can be ascertained, for example, Jeffries had been taught by Amory, who had gone to the same school as Price and Densham, all of whom were ‘Honest Whigs.’\(^53\) When recalling his school boy days, Priestley recalled planning annual meetings with his closest friends, determined to stay in touch regardless of their inevitable success, but when writing his memoirs in 1795 he only “kept up more or less of a correspondence,”\(^54\) and none of these boyhood friends show up in the rest of his memoirs. Associations between schools and clubs might be established through their tutors’ memberships. Most members of Warrington Academy’s faculty published their works with Joseph Johnson. Leadership positions may overlap as

\(^{53}\) Ibid.: 219.
well. Lord Willoughby of Parham was at various points Vice President of the Royal Society and President of Warrington Academy. Dissenting academies also generally formed around prominent churches, for example Mary Wollstonecraft opened a school for girls on Newington Green in large part to be under the influence of Richard Price’s chapel there.\textsuperscript{55} Education and the educational system forged connections which are less clearly defined than other combined memberships.

Within the scientific communities, there was a great deal of overlap. The leading members of the Lunar Society, including Priestley, Darwin, Watt, Boulton, and Keir, were all elected fellows of the Royal Society. Their participation was likely minimal due to their residence in Birmingham. The Lunar Society was closely connected to publisher Joseph Johnson through the end of the century. Most of Johnson’s scientific publications were written by Joseph Priestley, who was a member of the Lunar Society after 1780, but according to Gerald Tyson, “most of Johnson’s scientific authors were further linked intimately or casually with the Lunar Society of Birmingham.”\textsuperscript{56} Johann Reinhold Foster, Richard Kirwin and Samuel Galton Jr may not have been the most active members of the Lunar Society, but they were involved with both this club and Joseph Johnson’s publishing world. The most important connection between the two was the physician Erasmus Darwin, who was both a leading member of the Lunar Society and one of Johnson’s bestselling poets. Darwin’s poetry, collected initially in two volumes entitled \textit{Botanical Garden}, earned such popular acclaim that Darwin published \textit{Zoonomia} in 1794. These collections included artwork by Fuseli and Blake which are still admired today.\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{57} Tyson, \textit{Joseph Johnson: A Liberal Publisher}, 110-13.
Residing in Birmingham, membership in any other immediately interactive clubs was all but impossible, but these few connections were important.

There were numerous other individual connections between groups. John Pringle was both an Honest Whig and President of the Royal Society from 1772-1778, a position the king expelled him from when he took his American friend Franklin’s side in a question of scientific fact.58 Most members of Samuel Johnson’s Literary Club occasionally attended Bluestocking gatherings until Johnson printed a scathing commentary on Mrs. Montagu’s friend Lord Lyttleton, causing a schism which could not be overcome.59 The prominent women of Joseph Johnson’s circle were also attendants of Bluestocking assemblies. There was significant overlap between these various assemblies of individuals which provided a vast intellectual network across London and more widely all of England.

The Circle of Friends until the American Revolution

At the center of this network lie many of the members of the Club of Honest Whigs, specifically Dr. Joseph Priestley, Dr. Richard Price, Dr. Benjamin Franklin, Dr. John Canton and eventually Rev. Theophilus Lindsey and John Jebb. These men considered themselves the best of friends, but their associations outside these friendships extended through the breadth of intellectual society, intertwining the various associations together in a network which one day would strongly impact the course of British history.

Science, religion, philosophy and politics all contributed to these dissenters’ accomplishments. Historians either tend to fixate on one or two aspects from this period,

usually either religion or politics, or on individuals, all of which have numerous biographies. While these studies may show the interaction between divergent and seemingly contradictory passions which the individuals should be lauded for, by definition, these works tend to give a sense of exceptionality, whereby this single person was the only one of this time to encompass the whole of the era. A true picture of this period requires a more broad understanding which combines individual stories over numerous themes. While this whole image is far beyond the scope of this paper, the examination of interactions over a wider range of themes can only strengthen our understanding.

Much has already been said about Joseph Priestley in this paper and elsewhere. In his time he was esteemed in many fields. Following his schooling at Daventry, Priestley preached for a few years at Needham in Suffolk then took a teaching position at Nantwich in Cheshire. He started building his reputation when he accepted a teaching position at Warrington Academy in 1761. Beginning his tradition of spending at least a month a year in London, Priestley “was in this situation when...introduced to Dr. Price, Mr. Canton, Dr. Watson (the physician), and Dr. Franklin,” leading him to take more interest in natural philosophy than he had previously known. During the six years he taught there, Priestley published on education and theology, but his most important work *The History of Electricity* consolidated the various discoveries in the study of electricity. In 1765, these four aforementioned London acquaintances recommended and attained Priestley’s membership to the Royal Society. Hoping to make a more livable salary, Priestley took a pastorate in Leeds, where he stayed for another six years, solidifying his Socinian views and publishing often controversial works on theological questions. He

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was also allowed more freedom to pursue experimentation rather than his previous requirement to rely on the observations of others. This led to his discovery of Oxygen in 1772 and a myriad of experiments relating to electricity. With two growing sons, Priestley once again needed a new position which could cover his growing expenditures. After being offered a position on one of Captain James Cook’s voyages, Priestley accepted instead the position in Lord Shelburne’s employ nominally as a secretary, which was arranged by their mutual friend Richard Price on account of Priestley’s growing reputation. Although Shelburne did not live in London, Priestley spent quite a bit of time there. This period marked the highpoint of this association we are exploring, where almost all of the central membership resided or visited the city frequently.

Unlike Priestley, Richard Price spent his entire career settled in Newington Green, preaching from the same pulpit from 1758 through his final illness in 1790 and death in 1791. Price felt that London was the center of intellectual fulfillment and that he could not be happy elsewhere, even turning down positions in more prosperous congregations. 61 Initially he made his reputation through preaching and publishing on the intersection of morality and politics. His combination of faith, moderation and popular notions of individualistic liberalism eventually gained the respect and acclaim among dissenters. Throughout his life, Price was one of those people everybody liked. His friends and companions described him as intelligent, humble and sincere. 62 His respectful and tolerant nature even earned him the respect of those he most strongly disagreed with philosophically, such as David Hume whom Price sought to disprove in

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62 Ibid., 57-58.
his early writings. As such, Price had many friends, spread across numerous clubs, professions and social classes.

Price split his time between many passions and associations. In addition a dissenting minister, he was a mathematician, a writer and a philosopher. For each of these definitions, he had friends and clubs with which to interact. On the basis of his studies on probability, Price was elected to the Royal Society in December of 1765. He would eventually expand this study to pioneer the concept of life insurance. Through this membership, Price likely met Canton and Franklin, who in turn introduced him to Priestley during his trip to present a paper to the Royal Society. Price, along with these friends, formed the core group of Honest Whigs, but unlike the others, remained in London through its entire being, likely being the only one to see most of its membership shift their loyalty to overtly political organizations such as the Revolution Society. Although he was not nearly as close with Joseph Johnson as others in his close acquaintance, Price went on to introduce proto-feminist Mary Wollstonecraft to him who, as mentioned, adopted her into his publishing family and went on to print her most controversial works. Feminist historians have often pointed to Price’s influence when Wollstonecraft attended his services in Newington Green in shaping her views against inherited superiority and advocating improvement through education. While attending a Bluestocking gathering, Mrs. Montagu introduced Price to Lord Shelburne who would become the first Marquis of Lansdowne and Prime Minister from 1782-1783. Price’s

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64 Ibid., 37-40.
66 For example Miriam Brody, *Mary Wollstonecraft: Mother of Women's Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 46-48. though all her biographies seem to mention this connection
friendship with Montagu and Shelburne helped integrate Price within the higher circles of society during the 1780s, which contributed to the few inroads the early attempts to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts made as well as Priestley’s secretarial job in the 1770s.

Outside of dissenting circles, intellectuals and civil servants recognized Price for his groundbreaking actuarial science and insight into the national debt. His first recorded discussion on these topics followed from a conversation and subsequent letter with John Canton in April 1768.68 During the two decades, Price’s most revered publications reinterpreted practical use of mathematics and statistics. In 1786, Price worked with Prime Minister William Pitt the Younger to resolve the debt problem facing Great Britain. Pitt had used several of Price’s ideas in his plan in 1784, but in a series of letters exchanged in early 1786, Pitt and Price worked together to establish a Sinking Fund to balance the budget.69 To what extent Pitt accepted Price’s contribution remains up for debate,70 but Price’s expertise was sufficient enough to personally help the Prime Minister overhaul the financial system. Price’s fame in finance extended beyond England. In 1778, Price received a letter from the three Americans Price would eventually consider among his closest friends from that country; Benjamin Franklin, Arthur Lee, with whom Price had been corresponding for some time,71 and John Adams, who would befriend Price upon his Ambassadorial appointment to England during the mid 1780s.72

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68 Ibid., 56-58.
71 Peach, ed. *The Correspondence of Richard Price: July 1748-March 1778*, 252.
Continental Congress which was sent “to apply to Dr. Price, and inform him, that it is the Desire of Congress to consider him as a Cityzen of the united states, and to receive his Assistance in regulating their Finances.”\textsuperscript{73} Despite his sympathy and flattery for the offer, Price quickly sent his regrets due in great part to his advancing age and his humility relating to his abilities.\textsuperscript{74} Richard Price was not only a sounding board for his close friends, but also for domestic and foreign leaders.

Dr. Benjamin Franklin is a more important figure in American than British history. In the United States, Franklin is a founding father, the epitome of political and scientific innovation. Between 1757 and 1775, Franklin intermittently came to England representing American interests, initially to bring complaints of the Penn family but increasingly bearing pan-colonial grievances against the crown. Franklin spent more time cultivating intellectual and social connections than the political ones which he was directed. Although he only lived there part time, Franklin managed to establish himself within almost all of the London intellectual circles. His closest London friendships were those in this unofficial circle of Priestley, Price and Canton, but more generally in the Club of Honest Whigs. When Franklin was away from London, his letters were filled with references to the club, whether informal as early as 1766\textsuperscript{75} or a fond memory in 1786.\textsuperscript{76} In 1767, Franklin and fellow Honest Whig John Pringle traveled to France where they met with the King as well as the Parisian intellectuals. As a diplomatic measure, Franklin downplayed this trip as his accompanying the also scientifically

\textsuperscript{73} Peach, ed. \textit{The Correspondence of Richard Price: March 1778-February 1786,} 29.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 34-36.
\textsuperscript{75} ———, ed. \textit{The Correspondence of Richard Price: July 1748-March 1778,} 41-42.
renowned Pringle.\textsuperscript{77} Franklin was already a member of the Royal Society, winning the Copley Medal for his experiments in electricity and elected in 1756, the membership of which he maintained through extensive scientific correspondence when he was not in England.\textsuperscript{78} Franklin also had long term connections with Matthew Boulton, John Baskerville and Erasmus Darwin of the eventual Lunar Society of Birmingham as early as 1758.\textsuperscript{79} Whenever Franklin was in the country, he made sure to visit these friends and continued correspondence until the last years of his life. This extensive and by no means exhaustive list of Franklin’s activities gives merely the picture of his London activities in gathering friendships, influence and respect.

Officially, Franklin’s presence in London was as an ambassador to relate the interests of the colonists to the King, court and Parliament. While he met with mixed results, his intimates were some of the strongest English advocates for American interests. Franklin’s friendships also expanded trans-Atlantic relationships with this sympathetic community. When other Americans, especially those considered the Founding Fathers of the American Republic, visited England, they tended to associate with these dissenting intellectuals, due to a combination of reputation and their mutual connection in Franklin. This was the case with John Temple, a Boston born civil servant who came to England during the American Revolution. His friendship with Franklin and Price’s correspondent Charles Chauncy led him to the dissenting circles in 1776. In remaining letters to American friends, Price talks of his discussions with Mr. Temple which he will relate back to Chauncy and Franklin upon his return to America, specifically relating to

\textsuperscript{77} Jr., \textit{Franklin in France: From Original Documents}, 1-6.
sympathies in England. Once back in America, Temple became one of Price’s correspondents in his American network, which consisted of several individual who relayed news and greetings among themselves.

On the other hand, Americans not specifically acquainted with Franklin often found contacts in this group as well. One of the best examples of this is when Josiah Quincy secretly visited London in 1774 to argue the colonists cause to Parliament as a last ditch effort to prevent war. Quincy arrived in November of 1774 carrying a letter of introduction to Price from his long term American correspondent Charles Chauncy, asking Price to introduce Quincy “into the company of those, who may have it in their power to be serviceable to the Colonies in general.” On November 24, Price and Franklin introduced Quincy to the Club of Honest Whigs, and on December 13 arranged for a meeting with Lord Shelburne, whose influence was steadily growing in Parliament. Although these introductions were only a very small portion of Josiah Quincy’s communications, they numbered among the most enthusiastic supporters of the American cause in the long term. This case complicates the question of whether Franklin’s acquaintances were pro-American due to his influence, or if they were friends with him because they already had complimentary values. The most likely reason is some combination of the two, with Franklin’s advocacy spurring on ingrained sympathies.

In the long term, Dr. John Canton probably had the least individual impact of this group, but initially was the main force uniting them. Born into a lower middle class

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background, Canton’s education was haphazard, but by adulthood had excelled in mathematics. He lived in London his whole life, making his living as a schoolteacher. Canton was elected to the Royal Society in 1750 and won the Copley Medal in 1751 for his work on artificial magnets. He won this award again in 1764 for his work on compressed air. Although his scientific works made him famous in his time, his contribution to the organization of the Club of Honest Whigs had a greater influence on his larger system of acquaintance. Unfortunately for his friends and colleagues, he died in 1772, precluding his participation in the greatest accomplishments history has remembered his friends for.\(^{85}\)

The story of Franklin flying a kite in a thunderstorm provides a cute anecdote for elementary school students, but his ‘discovery’ of electricity can be mapped through a series of papers and letters exchanged with Joseph Priestley and several other members of the Royal Society, more specifically this group of Priestley, Price and Canton. Today, Priestley’s name is best remembered for the discovery of Oxygen along with his contributions to understanding electricity. In 1766, Priestley recalls that he “kept up a constant correspondence with Dr. Franklin, and the rest of [his] philosophical friends in London; and [his] letters circulated among them all.”\(^{86}\) Several of Richard Price’s letters mention this arrangement through the late 1760s and early 1770s before they were all together. In a letter Priestley wrote to Price in 1766, he took for granted that Price and Canton would have seen a letter discussing the positive and negative charges of electricity which he wrote to Franklin the fortnight before, and assumes Price will relate

\(^{85}\) Andrew Kippis, *Biographia Britannica; or, the Lives of the Most Eminent Persons Who Have Flourished in Great Britain and Ireland, from the Earliest Ages, Down to the Present Times: Collected from the Best Authorities, Printed and Manuscript, and Digested in the Manner of Mr. Bayle's Historical and Critical Dictionary*, vol. 3 (London: W. and A. Strahan, 1793).

Priestley’s subsequent findings back to them all. Salutations and parting thoughts about these friends appeared in various letters through the years leading up to Priestley’s move closer to London. At this point, tracking the friendship of these four grows far more circumstantial. When the individuals live within the same city, there is no reason to write letters detailing their activities. Both Priestley’s and Price’s memoirs mention these friendships as being especially important, but Franklin’s autobiography hardly mentions his years in London and the friendships he formed. Through the rest of his life Franklin never thought of his friendships from the Club of Honest Whigs and “of the Hours [he] so happily spent in that Company, without regretting that they are never to be repeated.” In addition to the understandable lack of letters, none of the men in question had remaining diaries or journals of day to day activities to consult, leaving merely strong suppositions but little evidence of their closeness during these years.

While in many ways, Price and Priestley come across and claim each other as the closest of friends, there is perhaps the least evidence of this during the period when Priestley was secretary to Lord Shelburne. Where previously there had been numerous letters discussing everything from religion to science to politics, the lack of correspondence or reference is suspicious. A solution to this problem is not to look at the subjects of the letters, but rather the greetings they exchange from common acquaintances. There is evidence that some letters were lost, possibly because all Priestley’s letters were sent under cover of Lord Shelburne during this period. The retained letters were generally those received and collected by individuals. Several

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87 Peach, ed. The Correspondence of Richard Price: July 1748-March 1778, 37-40.
88 ———, ed. The Correspondence of Richard Price: March 1778-February 1786, 57.
89 ———, ed. The Correspondence of Richard Price: July 1748-March 1778, 238.
90 Rutt, ed. The Theological and Miscellaneous Works of Joseph Priestley, 220.
letters Price wrote to Lord Shelburne, for whom Priestley worked at this time, closed with salutations to convey to Mr. and Mrs. Priestley. When discussing events taking place in London, Priestley often mentioned Price, especially during the period of organizing the Essex Street Chapel and the early attempts to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts which took place during this period. Their friendship continued until Price’s death which,

On the next Sunday after the funeral Dr. Priestley preached a sermon on the occasion to a numerous audience at the meeting-house in Hackney; nor was it possible that any one could have been found better qualified to pay this last tribute to his memory than the person who for more than thirty years had enjoyed and deserved his highest esteem and affection.

This friendship, which extended across almost every conceivable social line, whether professional, religious, intellectual or political, influenced the course of their lives.

Priestley and Price’s relationships with Franklin initially were characterized by the same situations. Scientifically, Priestley and Franklin complimented each other. It is unquestionable that their combined efforts to understand electricity have contributed significantly to the modern world. Price and Franklin had a more socially oriented friendship. When Josiah Quincy was in town, Quincy sent a letter to Price via Franklin, which illustrated his view of their friendship, that Franklin was likely to see Price in the near future. The remaining letters between Franklin and Price outnumber and outlast Franklin’s relationship with Priestley. During the opening months of the American Revolution, Price’s letters to his American friends contained greetings and messages

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93 Ibid., 229.
from Franklin, previewing the mediator role Price would hold later. Yet, when he decided he needed to go back to fight for his country, Franklin chose to spend his final day secluded with Joseph Priestley, commiserating over the horrors which his countrymen were combating. Soon thereafter, all communication with the rebelling colonies had to be circumspect, especially with so prominent a figure as Benjamin Franklin. It was extremely difficult for Franklin’s London friends to exchange direct letters, especially without instigating claims of disloyalty for themselves. For example, on December 12, 1775, Price alludes to an anonymous letter which told that several of his friends were well, but this specific exchange along with a letter Dr. Priestley received from Franklin soon before had been destroyed. Of Franklin, Price tells Charles Chauncy “to deliver to him [Price’s] most affectionate and respectful remembrances,” and inform him that “there is no one whom [Price and Priestley] talk of with more regard and pleasure.” Although none of them were as close following the revolution, the three remained in contact.

Within this period, the events surrounding the integration of Theophilus Lindsey and John Jebb into this close circle of friends illustrates the potential these individuals had, which would come out during the rest of the century. Although the Feathers’ Tavern Petition was ultimately a failure, it set the stage for dissenting efforts through the next three decades for toleration. The opening of the Essex Street Chapel was both a success and an important stepping stone for future dissenting interests, specifically the expansion of Unitarianism in the English speaking world. This central group of friends and the groups to which they belonged played instrumental roles in these seemingly minor events.

96 Ibid., 207.
97 Rutt, ed. The Theological and Miscellaneous Works of Joseph Priestley, 211-12.
98 Peach, ed. The Correspondence of Richard Price: July 1748-March 1778, 234.
that had long term implications. Lindsey’s decision to leave the church followed the failure of attempts to reform the established church.

While there has been little overt study of Lindsey or Jebb\textsuperscript{99} as individuals, there has been extensive research on the movements to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts during the late Eighteenth Century, mainly focusing on general trends of toleration or the Parliamentary debates and failure of the movement. Specifically research has focused on the later movement in 1789, which corresponded closely to the organizations of the French Revolution debate, but in 1772 the Feathers’ Tavern Petition displayed the organizational potential of the younger participants. G. M. Ditchfield saw the actions in the years 1787 to 1790 as illustrations of the growing relevance of Protestant Dissent in the political sphere. His extensive quantitative analysis of Parliamentary voting records shows the growing support through the 1770s and 1780s for some form of official reform of religious toleration, as well as the electoral consequences of support. He argues that while certain districts, position on religious dissent was important, for the most part it was a minor concern.\textsuperscript{100} As examined earlier, Bradley further supported this conclusion in his recent monograph on popular religion. What remains for this paper is to examine the origins of this movement in dissenting circles and how they attempted to manipulate the system.

Theophilus Lindsay was ordained as an Anglican priest in 1747 and over the next fifteen years moved through increasingly prosperous posts. In 1763, he settled in the vicarage of Catterick, Yorkshire near his family and friends, where he stayed until 1773.

\textsuperscript{100}G. M. Ditchfield, "The Parliamentary Struggle over the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, 1787-1790" \textit{The English Historical Review} 89, no. 252 (1974).
When he first received this position, Lindsey was already questioning key tenets of the thirty-nine articles, specifically regarding the Trinity. Through a lifetime of religious contemplation, he came to believe and advocate “that there is but one God the Father...[but he] purposely refrained from those technical scriptural names Trinity, Person, Substance, and the like, and everything that bore the air of controversy, in the pulpit.”\textsuperscript{101} Despite Lindsey’s personal reservations, Catterick remained Lindsey’s home and, though he downplayed the aspects he disagreed with, he advocated the thirty-nine articles as the basis of his preaching. He believed that he was performing an important social function that truly improved the spiritual lives of his petitioners.

As the years passed, the “softenings and qualifications of the Trinitarian forms in the liturgy”\textsuperscript{102} had begun to irritate Lindsey’s religious conscience. In 1769, Lindsey met Rev William Turner and Dr. Joseph Priestley at Archdeacon Blackburne’s house and became fast friends, sharing both liberal religious sentiments and delighting in company “who were all equally animated with the same ardent love of truth, and with the same generous zeal for civil and religious liberty.”\textsuperscript{103} Both Lindsey and Priestley mark this meeting and subsequent friendship among their closest. Through the rest of their lives the two maintained their relationship regardless of distance and situation.

On July 17, 1771, Lindsey went to London in response to a newspaper advertisement which called for a meeting of those of the clergy and laity who sought to reform the requirements of clerical subscription to the Thirty-nine articles of the Church

\textsuperscript{101} Theodolphus Lindsey, \textit{The Apology of Theodolphus Lindsey on Resigning the Vicarage of Catterick, Yorkshire}, 5th ed. (London: George Smallfield, 1818), 185.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 189.
\textsuperscript{103} Thomas Belsham, \textit{Memoirs of the Late Reverend Theophilus Lindsey, Including a Brief Analysis of His Works, Together with Anecdotes and Letters of Eminent Persons, His Friends and Correspondents; Also a General View of the Progress of the Unitarian Doctrine in England and America} (London: Williams and Norgate, 1873), 22.
of England. This meeting of only twenty-four people in the Feathers Tavern laid out plans to petition Parliament to allow mere avowal of belief in the Bible sufficient to preach within the Anglican Church.\textsuperscript{104} Since it took place within a few months of the first attempt to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts, The Feathers’ Tavern Petition is often referenced but never directly studied. Often it is mentioned in conjunction with this dissenting movement, but since it dealt primarily with the established Church, there is much less written about it. This marked the first effort of the dissenters, within and without the Church, to organize support within Parliament to promote toleration and free thinking. Lindsey saw this as the greatest possibility for reconciling his beliefs while retaining his position in the church and society.

In his \textit{Apology}, Lindsey recalls the clearest description of the membership and motives of the movement.

The clergy-society at the \textit{Feathers} was made up, as the like voluntary combinations of serious and inquisitive persons unknown to each other ever will be made up, of men differing in opinion from each other in many respects, but united in this, that subscription to human formularies of faith was an unjust imposition upon the consciences of man, and an invasion of Christ’s authority, the only Lord of conscience and head of his church.\textsuperscript{105}

While there is no full list of participants, in Lindsey’s memoir, Belsham includes the names of Lindsey, Blackburne (who was Lindsey’s father-in-law), Wyvill, Jebb, Law, Chambers and Disney (who would eventually succeed Lindsey in the Essex Street Chapel, as well as go on to write John Jebb’s memoirs).\textsuperscript{106} While some of these individuals can be proven to agree with Lindsey’s Unitarian values, the above quote implies the

\textsuperscript{104} Rutt, ed. \textit{The Theological and Miscellaneous Works of Joseph Priestley}, 144.  
\textsuperscript{105} Lindsey, \textit{The Apology of Theodolphus Lindsey on Resigning the Vicarage of Catterick, Yorkshire}, 3.  
\textsuperscript{106} Belsham, \textit{Memoirs of the Late Reverend Theophilus Lindsey, Including a Brief Analysis of His Works, Together with Anecdotes and Letters of Eminent Persons, His Friends and Correspondents; Also a General View of the Progress of the Unitarian Doctrine in England and America}, 32.
unorthodoxies spanned the religious spectrum. The specific complaints against the thirty-nine articles were irrelevant in light of the belief in individual consciousness dictating belief. Lindsey remained in London through the second meeting September 25, 1771, where the membership had increased substantially through the efforts of the original enthusiastic few. Although at its height the membership only reached around two hundred and fifty in number, their momentum gained significant public recognition, giving them confidence enough to unanimously approve the decision to petition Parliament for a rule change. Upon his return to Chatterick in October, Lindsey was optimistic.

During the next several months, many of Lindsey sent many letters to John Jebb, who would remain close with Lindsey through the rest of their lives. Although John Jebb was not intimate with the dissenting cause before the organization of the Feathers’ Tavern Petition, Priestley was at least aware of his writings as early as 1770. He quickly ranked among the closest friends of many, especially Priestley and Lindsey. His education and early professional life centered on the University of Cambridge, where he tutored and occasionally lectured on the New Testament. After being passed over a second time for a language professorship he believed he deserved, Jebb published a collection of his lectures advocating a more open minded public. Following the first meeting at the Feathers Tavern, Jebb was appointed to the committee which drew up the formal petition to Parliament, which following acceptance by the participants was prepared for publication as well. During the next several months, Jebb’s main focus was on his appointed job of circulating their views among the populace and combating those,

such as Dr. Samuel Hallifax, who defended the established tradition. Jebb’s efforts appeared in papers and publications, which were as well read as could optimistically be expected.  

In petitioning Parliament in the 18th Century, gaining popular acclaim was far less important than winning influential patronage. Lindsey and Jebb both debated with the elite of London Society to convince them to support their goals. In some cases this met with complete failure. Lindsey particularly put an effort into winning over the intellectuals of Lincoln’s Inn. In a letter written by Mr. Lee, he regrets that there was no possibility that Lord Rockingham and his followers would support the effort. Although it is not clear who convinced him, Jebb and Lindsey exchanged several letters celebrating the fact that they had convinced Thomas Pitt, elder brother of William Pitt the Elder, to second their motion in Parliament.

The House of Commons debate took place on February 6, 1772 and lasted fully eight hours. The opposition was led primarily by Lord North, who initially wanted to just bench the proposal indefinitely, but some strong opposition empowered the supporters into spirited defense. The resulting marathon debate spanned numerous topics ranging from subscription requirements for university attendees and even the thirty-nine articles themselves. Those against claimed that the traditional rules protected against dangerous orthodoxies such as Socinianism, while those in favor observed that “some of the Articles are absolutely intelligible,” and likely “there is not a clergyman in England, who thoroughly believes them in the literal and grammatical sense, as he is required by the

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110 Rutt, ed. The Theological and Miscellaneous Works of Joseph Priestley, 159.
111 Ditchfield, ed. The Letters of Theophilus Lindsey (1723-1808), 115-21.
nature of his subscription.”

The combination of Edmund Burke’s violent declamation and the strong ecclesiastical minority in opposition, the petition failed. Yet Lindsey, though “defeated we sing a victory, as truth and reason were all for [them], and overpowered only by Power.” Over the next week, most of the major London papers covered the debate extensively proving that freedom of thought intrigues the public. Lindsey’s faith in the establishment was shattered, but his faith in humanity invigorated.

Even in its failure to Lindsey’s mind, this petition did much to expand popular exposure to opinions opposed to the thirty-nine articles. Symbolically, this was the ideal opportunity to finally resign his position. In leaving the church and Yorkshire to move to London, Lindsey lost most of his acquaintances. Rather than because of his Anti-Trinitarian views, he ostracized the majority through his radical action in leaving the church. In Belsham’s memoir of Lindsey’s life he describes the transition for Lindsey and his wife from loving support to alienation as harrowing,

Former friends looked coldly upon them; and some, of whom better things might have been expected, whose conduct was silently reproved by the magnanimous example of Mr. Lindsey, were not sparing in loud and strong expressions of disapprobation of what they were pleased to term the precipitancy and imprudence of his conduct in abandoning a situation of respectability and utility in the church.

There is significant evidence that Archdeacon Blackburne supported and even shared Lindsey’s unorthodox interpretations, but despite their previous closeness, refused to communicate with Lindsey following his resignation. Through the end of 1773, the Lindseys stayed with the few remaining friends and family they had, including dissenters

113 ———, ed. The Letters of Theophilus Lindsey (1723-1808), 125.
114 Belsham, Memoirs of the Late Reverend Theophilus Lindsey, Including a Brief Analysis of His Works, Together with Anecdotes and Letters of Eminent Persons, His Friends and Correspondents; Also a General View of the Progress of the Unitarian Doctrine in England and America, 86.
such as William Taylor and the Reverend Newcome Cappe, who exalted his stand for truth. Upon arriving in London in January 1774, Priestley adopted Lindsey into his closest circle of acquaintances, bringing him into the Honest Whigs and introducing him to prominent people in the city. This would be important for Lindsey to begin instituting his plan to open an avowedly Unitarian church in London.

The opening of the Essex Street Chapel on April 17, 1774 required extensive organization, especially in fundraising. Upon the publication of his Apology, Lindsey became a minor celebrity. The criticism of influential thinkers combined with popular interest persuaded Lindsey to even write a sequel in 1776.115 His thoughts on responsibility and the state of the Anglican Church drew some print debate that caused his name to be recognizable to the general masses. Within months of his arrival this publication combined with the efforts of Priestley, Lindsey had more friends than he ever expected.116 Lindsey would need these friends to fulfill his goal of opening up a new chapel espousing his Unitarian views. Within days of his arrival, Lindsey and Priestley were discussing the practicalities of starting a new Church, including finding a location, creating the liturgy and most importantly raising the funds, since the room he eventually found, with the help of Joseph Johnson, would cost around two hundred pounds to fit up and rent for two years. Priestley and Lindsey tapped into the national network of dissenters in order to procure the necessary funding, which they had managed to raise in a few short months.117 The opening service was well attended, primarily composed of interested dissenters as well as several more prominent members of society curious about

115 Theodolphus Lindsey, A Sequel to the Apology on Resigning the Vicarage of Catterick, Yorkshire (London: J. Johnson, 1776).
116 Ditchfield, ed. The Letters of Theophilus Lindsey (1723-1808), 180.
117 Ibid., 181-82.
this boldly Unitarian undertaking, though he failed in attracting a great number of disaffected members of the established church.\(^\text{118}\) From this auspicious start, characterized by dissenting organization and determination, Unitarianism began its march towards the influence which would extend over England and America in the coming century.

**Influence and Fame: The Circle upon Dispersal**

After these few years of close friendship, the discussed individuals went their separate ways. By 1780 most had left London and were firmly established in their various specialties. In the years leading up to the French Revolution and the next era of organization and debate, these individuals mostly made their names well known in the households throughout England. Those who could remained in touch through letters and occasional visits. Even though they were apart, these friendships continued to have a strong influence on their lives and careers.

Following Franklin’s return to America in 1775, close friendship with his English friends became a risk to their reputations and well-being. Through the rest of the year he exchanged numerous letters with both Price and Priestley, along with several American intermediaries. Franklin kept his friends informed of events and interpretations of events, which they in turn spread through the rest of their acquaintance. In 1776, Franklin was sent as an Ambassador to France, where he stayed through 1785. If anything, it was even more dangerous for the English to attempt to send letters to him. After publishing a tract supporting the colonists, Price received significant abuse, and “had become a person so marked and obnoxious that prudence requires [him] to be very cautious…that [he]

\(^{118}\) Belsham, *Memoirs of the Late Reverend Theophilus Lindsey, Including a Brief Analysis of His Works, Together with Anecdotes and Letters of Eminent Persons, His Friends and Correspondents; Also a General View of the Progress of the Unitarian Doctrine in England and America*, 70-72.
avoid[s] all correspondence with Dr. Franklin, tho’ so near [him] as Paris.”¹¹⁹ Priestley, always the less reticent of the two, continued exchanging letters though with slightly less frequency. In 1782, Franklin wrote to Priestley about his nostalgia for his English company and regretting the lack of time to perform his scientific studies.¹²⁰ The rest of Franklin’s life consisted of stabilizing the new American Republic, which he returned to in 1785 to attend the Constitutional Conference. For the next three years, Franklin served as President of Pennsylvania, growing increasingly weaker. During the final years of his life, Franklin sent his autobiography requesting that Dr. Price “would be so good as to take the trouble of reading it, critically examining it and giving [him] [his] candid opinion whether [he] had best publish or suppress it.”¹²¹ Price gladly acceded, so when Franklin died on April 17, 1790 he left an account of his life for prosperity.

Dr. John Jebb practiced medicine for several years in London before turning into a full time political activist. Jebb initially attempted University reform at Cambridge before leaving in 1776. Upon his arrival in London, taking up the occupation of doctor, he continued to cultivate his friendships with Lindsey and other dissenters. His friendship with Priestley for example had expanded to such mutual respect that in 1777 Priestley dedicated his *Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity* to Jebb in honor of his strong Unitarian conviction.¹²² In 1780, Jebb quit his medical practice and became a full time political activist, advocating primarily for Parliamentary reform. He specifically wanted

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a more representative system more in line with enlightened opinion. Jebb died in 1786, before he could see any of his efforts come to fruition.\(^\text{123}\)

During the rest of his life, Theophilus Lindsey focused on establishing the long-term stability of his Essex Street Chapel. Lindsey’s congregation grew fuller as the years progressed, composed mostly of middle class and professional individuals, though as the years progressed his constituent tended to improve socially. He took effort to find a suitable replacement, preferably not of dissenting stock and education. He initially hoped Jebb would take a position as his partner, but he eventually settled on John Disney, who also participated in the Feathers’ Tavern Petition and later resigned his living. Lindsey increasingly considered himself a dissenter, rather than a dissatisfied Anglican. He continued to associate primarily with dissenters and quickly found himself in the company of the Club of Honest Whigs. Lindsey resigned his ministry in 1793 at the height of the disturbances of the French Revolution. He died November 3, 1808.\(^\text{124}\)

Richard Price’s career following the onset of the American Revolution must be seen in light of his relationship with Lord Shelburne. The strength of this friendship was already clear in 1772, when it helped get Priestley his secretarial position and again in 1774 during the first major attempt to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts. In addition to Shelburne, Price’s association with Mrs. Montagu and the Bluestockings led to several high ranking associations. While he never held official office, Price had significant impact on government policy during the 1780s. Price participated enthusiastically in the print debate of the American Revolution, so when his friend Lord Shelburne became Prime Minister in 1782, Price convinced him to officially end hostilities with the newly


\(^{124}\) Ditchfield, ed. *The Letters of Theophilus Lindsey (1723-1808)*, lx-lxx.
formed country. As described above, Price contributed to the resolution of the debt crisis following the American Revolution as well. While many saw them less favorably in England, Price’s political publications found popularity in the educated circles of the new American Republic, especially those who were forming policy at the constitutional convention. Price participated in several attempts to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts, as well as the forming of the more radical clubs, such as the Revolution Society. After helping instigate the great debates of the French Revolution, Price died April 19, 1791 after a long illness.125

In 1780, Joseph Priestley left Lord Shelburne’s employ on less than warm but cordial terms. After finding a series of subscriptions to support his experimentation full time, Priestley moved to Birmingham. Priestley considered his “settlement at Birmingham as the happiest event of [his] life, being highly favourable to every object [he] had in view, philosophical or theological.”126 Scientifically he joined the Lunar Society of Birmingham, which challenged him to excel at his practical sciences. This was considered the Golden Age of the Group when their greatest scientific advances occurred all around him. In July 1791, Priestley decided to have a dinner party celebrating the first anniversary of the storming of the Bastille. Instigated by patriotic and anti-dissenting furor, the countryside rose up in what became known as the Birmingham Riots or the Priestley Riots. Priestley’s home and lab were completely destroyed, forcing him to move to Hackney, where he taught at a dissenting academy for three years. Increasing animosity toward himself and his philosophical contemporaries

126 Boyer, ed. The Memoirs of Dr. Joseph Priestley, 81-82.
forced Priestley to immigrate to America, where he introduced and began popularizing Unitarianism.\footnote{J. D. Bowers, Joseph Priestley and English Unitarianism in America (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007).} Priestley died February 6, 1804 after three years of near incapacity.

**Conclusions**

This brings us to the great debates surrounding the French Revolution and the much studied social organizations that developed around those ideals, which have occasioned too much study to have extra ink wasted here.\footnote{See for example Kramnick, Republicanism and Bourgeois Radicalism: Political Ideology in Late Eighteenth-Century England and America, or a historiographical examination of the topic H.T. Dickinson, British Radicalism and the French Revolution, 1789-1815 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985).} The key players are recognizable from the rest of this paper. During a celebration of England’s own revolutionary heritage, Dr. Richard Price presented an optimistic speech, celebrating the storming of the Bastille as a victory for liberal ideals and humanity as a whole. In response, Edmund Burke wrote *Reflections on the French Revolution* which would come to epitomize the English Conservative model. This was the era of the Revolution Society and the Constitutional Society, which due to Burke’s publicity, came to represent the most destructive beliefs in the country. The rest of the surviving dissenters participated in the ensuing debates, creating popular animosity towards many of them. The innumerable studies of these debates fixated on these later points often ignore the preceding period, or the individuals’ interests which did not correspond to the immediate study.

More than an investigation of the earlier under-studied period, this paper sought to define interpersonal and group activities as a worthy of historical research. Not only does this method bridge the gab between the agency of individual actors and structural conception of large-scale movements, it also bridges the divided disciplines such as religious, intellectual and political histories. By investigating communication groups
historians may be better able to understand the interrelationship between the often distinctly studied aspects of society. History is more than segmented events and personalities. Through examining history through this lens, where friendships and social connections take the fore, a much greater understanding emerges. In this case study, the society of religious dissenters formed a social network which facilitated their eventual fame, as well as the notoriety of friends in other intellectual fields. It becomes disingenuous to discuss this circle in the simple terms of rational dissenters, which history had relegated them, because these individuals were far more complex than that.

While these great thinkers deserve more attention for their own accomplishments, it is their friendships which made them who they were. While it is impossible to quantify the degree which these relationships contributed to individual events and discoveries, the evidence shows the interaction within organizations and between individual intellectuals influenced the course of natural and metaphysical philosophy. In the dedication to the *Free Discussion of Materialism, and Philosophical Necessity*, where Priestley and Price are at their greatest intellectual odds, Priestley observes,

> He who can have, and truly enjoy the society of such men as Dr. Price, Mr. Lindsey, and Dr. Jebb, cannot envy the condition of princes. Such fellowship is the true balsam of life; its cement is infinitely more durable than that of the friendships of the world, and it looks for its proper fruit, and complete gratification, to the life beyond the grave. I think myself happy in being able to call myself one of such a fraternity.\(^{129}\)

To Priestley, his friendships inspired his religious faith and their minds complimented and challenged his own. The philosophical, religious, political and scientific advances may be attributed to individual names, but the achievements were accomplished due to the support of friends.

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