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Carolyn Downs
University of Lancaster

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DANIEL ECCLESTON OF LANCASTER 1745-1821:
A MAN NOT AFRAID TO STAND ON
THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS

Carolyn Downs

University of Lancaster, England

ABSTRACT

It is unusual for an historian to be able to establish in great detail the life of any but those considered one of 'the great and the good'. The substantial amount of documentary sources, both by, and about, the Quaker radical Daniel Eccleston of Lancaster (1745-1821), provide an opportunity to view a turbulent period in British history through the experiences of one individual. The links between industrial and scientific advance, Nonconformity in religion and calls for political reform were growing increasingly common as the eighteenth century progressed.¹ This paper attempts to show the centrality of Eccleston's Quaker upbringing to his later political radicalisation. Although Eccleston was not an Erasmus Darwin, Thomas Paine or Richard Price, he was an Enlightenment radical, prepared to defend with his pen and a consequent loss of his liberty, the rights of the British to freedom of thought, speech, worship and writing.

KEYWORDS

Daniel Eccleston, Quaker, radical, George Washington, Two Acts, Atheism

INTRODUCTION

Daniel Eccleston of Lancaster was born in 1745 at Corner Row, near the township of Singleton in the Fylde and died, dismissed as an eccentric by the *Lancaster Gazette*, on 3 March 1821.² These bare facts conceal a man who was first and foremost a level-headed businessman always seeking a new opportunity to turn a profit: but who was also a philosopher, scientist, political thinker, adventurer, merchant, inventor, satirist, prisoner of conscience, republican and democrat: very much part of the eighteenth-century radical Enlightenment. The main sources of information about Daniel Eccleston are his two surviving copy-letter books, held in Lancaster City Library Local Studies Collection and Friends House Library, London. These cover

the years 1780 and 1781. The 273 letters in the copy books hold a huge wealth of information: a splendidly eclectic mix of commercial business, bills of exchange, protests at dishonoured bills, Quaker gossip and family news, all leavened by an obvious good humour. In addition to the letter books there are a number of individual items which include satires, letters of protest at the unjust imprisonment of two debtors, a petition against a local Anglican clergyman, petitions to the king, letters to the Board of Trade, and to the manufacturers Boulton and Watts, to William Pitt the younger and to two United States Presidents. Further writings traced include a series of Eccleston's scientific lectures about the possible applications of electricity and magnetism along with two books he wrote on religious freedom and toleration.³ One letter, dated 10 November 1795, to the President of the Board of Agriculture, contains information central to understanding how the industrial workers of the period fed themselves and points to an English version of the Irish Connacre practice being well established in Lancashire, Cumberland and Westmorland.⁴ To all these should be added Eccleston's 1797 tract, *Reflections on Religion*.⁵ This selection shows Eccleston's desire always to be engaged upon a new task or the next thing and his versatility and energy are apparent in all of Daniel Eccleston's writings: he was a man of many enthusiasms and this zest for life is the key to his many and extremely varied interests.

Daniel Eccleston was brought up as a Quaker, part of the Whitehaven Monthly Meeting from 1749, in a family that appears to have had a tradition of being actively involved with the work of the Religious Society of Friends – his grandmother Mary Eccleston (died 1735) was noted for her itinerant missionary work. After her marriage to Daniel's grandfather Isaac Eccleston, she and a fellow-Quaker, Agnes Tomlinson, travelled around much of northern England on a horse donated by the Freckleton Meeting.⁶ Daniel Eccleston's father was appointed an elder of the Whitehaven Meeting in 1755, indicating that as a child Eccleston was brought up as a Quaker.⁷ In fact, little is known about Eccleston's early life, though he was clearly well educated and his later writings reveal a man with an unusually wide variety of interests: an Enlightenment polymath.

Eccleston was a man who engaged with, and to an extent, anticipated, the issues and themes of his time such as religious toleration, the campaigns of Dissenters to end their obligation to pay tithes, the latest scientific developments, parliamentary reform and the question of feeding the mass of the people. As such, he deserves serious consideration as a leading example of the development of a significant body of provincial Enlightenment thought. The significance of the provincial experience in the development of the British Enlightenment, has been described by Borsay *et al.* in *The English Urban Renaissance* and more recently in *Enlightenment*, Roy Porter's magisterial survey of the English experience of, and responses to, the Enlightenment.⁸ What is most apparent from the collected writings of Daniel Eccleston is the influence that his Quaker roots had on his development as a radical thinker in politics, science and religion, and that his provincial Enlightenment experience was founded on religious Dissent and intensified by trade and family contacts with the radical politics of the New World.

SOWING THE SEEDS OF RADICALISM? A NEW-WORLD ADVENTURE

The family tradition of travelling seems to have endowed Eccleston with a nomadic streak. Whether he was seeking adventure or attempting to earn a living (although a combination of both seems most feasible), he set off on a series of remarkable journeys in 1767.⁹ By 1769, Eccleston was travelling around Montreal as well as the Hudson Valley and the Great Lakes region, probably seeking trading opportunities and business openings.¹⁰ In the late 1760s this was frontier territory and many of the local tribes, especially the French-allied Huron, were hostile to the British, for what the colonists called the French and Indian Wars (The Seven Years War 1756–63) were barely over. An important interlude in Eccleston's expedition was a journey he took with native Indians. It was, in fact, common for settlers, trappers and frontiersmen to use Indian people as guides and guards so Eccleston's journey on Lakes George and Champlain in a birch-bark canoe was not a unique experience, although it was certainly unusual.¹¹ Eccleston described the occasion thus:

In my returning from Montreal to Boston, sailed down Lake Champlain and Lake George, in a birch bark canoe, with the king of the Cohnawaga nation and five other Indians and was eleven days [and] twelve nights on the lakes and in the woods with them.¹²

The time he spent with native Americans may have helped develop Eccleston's Quaker outlook on the value of people, for his vision of a world in which all were equal and all were valued, no matter what their race or religion, was clearly expressed in his later work *Reflections on Religion*.¹³

After his journey on the Great Lakes, Eccleston arrived in Boston, Massachusetts, at that time a town of about 15,000 people, and the main port exporting to both the West Indies and to Britain.¹⁴ The later Boston Tea Party (16 December 1773) was not the first anti-British incident; for the town had a tradition of legal disputation, Dissent and protest. Eccleston is likely to have had contact with Bostonian radicalism, for the merchants of Boston, with whom he would have planned to trade, made up the bulk of the town's governing caucus and were in the vanguard of those calling ever more stridently for political reform. They were increasingly concerned that the actions of the British government were jeopardising trade and thus the prosperity of the town.¹⁵ Whether exposure to this politicised society assisted Eccleston's political education we can only speculate, but in the light of his admiration for the leaders of the American War of Independence it seems reasonable to assume that his stay in Boston had some impact on his developing political thought. As references in Eccleston's later writings reveal, his experiences in America had a profound impact on this intelligent and questioning young man, and may have triggered the tendency towards political radicalism initiated by his Quaker upbringing. Two of the most notable aspects of eighteenth-century Quakerism are its emphasis on the equality of all people, especially noticeable in their demands for an end to slavery, and their challenging stance against established authority in the refusal to pay tithes and to swear oaths. Even before he travelled with the Iroquois peoples and was perhaps

exposed to Bostonian radicalism, Eccleston was a potential freethinker and reformer. His American experiences and the later American Revolution were perhaps a fortunate coincidence of time and place that sowed the seeds of political radicalism on fertile ground.

Apart from travelling among Indian tribes and spending time in Boston, Eccleston also travelled through Virginia and probably Maryland. It was in Virginia that one of the most formative occurrences of his politicisation occurred. He recalled:

During my residence in Virginia, when at Alexandria, I had the pleasure, and I may also add, the honour, of meeting with General Washington, who gave me an invitation to call and spend a few days with him on his estate at Mount Vernon.¹⁶

At the time of their meeting Washington was becoming increasingly radical, and his ideas of freedom seem to have settled on the young Eccleston. A letter to George Mason (1725–1792) written in 1769 is illustrative of Washington's growing discontent with the political status quo at this juncture.¹⁷

At a time when our lordly Masters in Great Britain will be satisfied with nothing less than the deprivation of American freedom, it seems highly necessary that something should be done to avert the stroke and maintain the liberty which we have derived from our Ancestors; but the manner of doing it to answer the purpose effectively is the point in question.

Washington was thirteen years older than Eccleston, not a large enough age gap for him to have appeared as a father figure, and indeed, had he appeared in that light it is unlikely that Eccleston would have been so influenced by him. Young men adventuring alone do not generally welcome anyone who might wish to offer unwelcome advice. The age gap was, though, sufficient for Eccleston to fix upon Washington as a source of wisdom, perhaps a surrogate older brother, whose opinions were of value and whose beliefs could be relied upon. He appears to have hero-worshipped this radical, older man, and the influence of Washington is clear in the later writings of Eccleston as well as in the medal that Eccleston caused to be made in memory of George Washington in 1805.

We know little of Eccleston's later journeys in America, although he certainly had contacts in New York that were probably established during his travels. However, Eccleston left the American mainland, probably from New York, towards the end of 1772, before the Boston Tea Party (1773) to which he refers in typically laconic style as: 'The disagreeable situation of affairs that took place in Boston soon after my leaving the Continent'.¹⁸ Eccleston lived in Antigua with his older brother, Isaac, for some eighteen months, acting as a junior partner in his brother's business activities. Eccleston could, in fact, have settled in Antigua, for there was a partnership with his brother in the offing.¹⁹

Eccleston arrived in Lancaster during the early summer of 1774, and spent around eighteen months in the then small but prosperous market town.²⁰ However, there are absolutely no records, which show he occupied his time at this juncture. There was a substantial Quaker community in Lancaster, but, unsurprisingly, in view of his later disownment, there is no mention in local Quaker records of Eccleston's

presenting himself at the meetings, or of his requesting a certificate of removal when he left the town.²¹ He was, clearly, well acquainted with several Quaker businessmen in Lancaster, and so he may have been acting as some sort of shipping agent. In 1776, instead of settling down to some form of remunerative respectability that fitted the Quaker ideal, Eccleston once again set off across the Atlantic.²² Since he travelled with an apparently substantial cargo that he planned to trade with in Barbados, it is reasonable to suppose that he had accumulated some capital and that at that stage in his life he had decided to settle on that island. Eccleston then remained in the West Indies for three years (1776–79), engaging in a number of business adventures, with varying degrees of success, but left the area for good in 1779. Eccleston was certainly living well when he arrived in Liverpool just before Christmas, for he mentioned that his rent was twelve shillings a week but that this was rather more than most rents in that town.²³

Eccleston appeared determined that he would now settle down, establish himself in business and seek a wife; having spent just over a year in Liverpool, he settled in Lancaster—arriving back on 25 March, 1781, via a sloop from Liverpool—living on Queen Street in the centre of the town, and being described as a gentleman.²⁴ Had matters gone as planned by Eccleston, we might have heard no more of the roving thirty-four year old bachelor and may well have assumed him to have been claimed by domesticity, destined to a life of conventional business application. However, although he stopped his literal roving in 1781, Eccleston then began his exploration of religion and politics, science and ideas – a metaphorical journey that almost certainly landed him in prison by January 1798.²⁵ Most radicals caught up in Pitt's 'reign of terror' had reluctantly submitted to the rule of law by 1800 but Eccleston, true to his Quaker inheritance, remained defiant of government attempts to control his freedom of thought, and he continued his attempts to undermine what he saw as the unjust legislation of authorities, spiritual and temporal, until his death.²⁶

THE FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF AN ENLIGHTENMENT RADICAL

England in 1780 was a nation where the stirrings of a reform movement, established by Major John Cartwright (1740–1824), John Wilkes (1725–1797) and Christopher Wyvil (1740–1822) were taking hold. Although there was no formal, countrywide reform organisation, and no specific list of grievances common to radical reformers, the fledgling Corresponding Societies were a sign that all was not well in the land of the Glorious Revolution.²⁷ The American Revolution had not been met with universal disapprobation in England – there were those who saw justice in the American claim to not be taxed without representation, and lack of representation was a matter of concern to many Dissenters, including Quakers. These English reformers were not of the stamp of the Bostonian radicalism that had possibly fired up Eccleston's political imagination, but the ideas they proposed were radical indeed in an English context. Even though the corpus of Eccleston's political writings so far traced cannot be dated before 1794, he should be seen from the time of his return to England in 1779 as an authentic initiator of a radical camaraderie in the northwest. Several of Eccleston's letters written in 1780, with their wonderfully varied mix of business,

gossip and news include satisfied mentions of the election of 'our friend' the Whig Henry Rawlinson (1743–1786) to one of the Liverpool seats in 1780. Henry Rawlinson's cousin Abraham Rawlinson (1738–1803) was a retired West Indies planter of Quaker origin, who had recently returned to England and settled near Lancaster.²⁸ He had been returned as MP for Lancaster in the same election. Abraham Rawlinson voted in favour of parliamentary reform and in favour of ending the second war with revolutionary France, and Eccleston regularly sent parcels to Rawlinson's address as he travelled around the country seeking goods for despatch to the West Indies.²⁹ The radical Whigs of the period, under the leadership of Charles James Fox (1749–1806), were determined to end the disadvantaged status of the English Catholics and Protestant Dissenters. They saw the need for Catholic emancipation under English law as in no way at odds with their expressing at the same time distaste for priest-craft and popery; such Foxite sentiments were very clearly expressed in Eccleston's later work *Reflections on the Freedom of Religion*.³⁰

Between the years 1781–97, Eccleston employed himself as an insurance broker and general and liquor merchant. Eccleston was also the inventor and manufacturer of a large pair of wheels designed to allow safer and speedier passage across the sands of Morecambe Bay. In addition, he had designed and produced a machine for weaving sails in one piece, a typically practical response to a profit opportunity. Lancaster had an active shipbuilding trade in the 1780s, and some of the firms engaged in it were Quaker-owned. The machine was, apparently, still being used in Lancaster on his death, possibly making sailcloth for the Quaker shipbuilding firm of Brockbank.³¹ As a man of prodigious energy, Eccleston did not spend his leisure only in the pursuit of pretty women and strong liquor (both of which feature in the letters and his will) but he also believed in continuing both his and others' education.³² One of his many scientific interests in the 1780s was the practical application of electricity and magnetism to industry and to everyday life. He had a copy of Benjamin Franklin's (1706–1790) *Letters on Electricity* (1774) and owned a machine that could be used to generate electricity.³³ He decided that this new technology, if harnessed, was a harbinger of the future and as a result wrote and delivered a series of lectures on the subject, probably given at the Lancaster Assembly Rooms.³⁴ The type of equipment that Eccleston was demonstrating was extremely expensive and considered remarkable in the late eighteenth century, and the lectures must have proved a great attraction in a regional capital such as Lancaster, with a ready audience of the well-to-do, educated, middle class. The links between a fascination with the potential of new technology and radical politics in the eighteenth century are well documented, and Eccleston's interests and ideas exemplify the progressive Enlightenment mind-set that had developed through the eighteenth century.³⁵

EXCLUSION FROM THE LANCASTER MEETING

As a man of many parts, Eccleston obviously found much to fill his life. However, active participation in the faith of his parents was not one of his many activities. He was clearly not taking any interest at all in the local Quaker Meeting; he had in fact never officially notified local Friends that he had moved to Lancaster. However, he

had attended at least one Yearly Meeting although his motives were not those of seeking religious succour. He wrote to a friend:

For as I'm still unmarried, and now being settled in England, I'm on the lookout for a Bedfellow, on which Account I was at the Annual Meeting of Quakers, which was held at Penrith.³⁶

Nine years later, and still unmarried, his failure to make any public religious observances at all was causing the Lancaster Monthly Meeting a great deal of anxiety. Eccleston was clearly identified by the people of Lancaster as a Quaker; accordingly, his failure to attend meetings concerned the Lancaster elders.³⁷ The Monthly Meeting resolved to send a deputation of three worthy elders whose duty was to persuade Eccleston of the error of his ways. This attempt failed and a subsequent minute was made in January 1790.³⁸ This disownment seems to have encouraged Eccleston to dislike all organised religion, not simply the religion of the establishment. He replied to the Lancaster Monthly Meeting by returning the minute annotated, 'Father forgive them for they know not what they do'.³⁹ The reaction of the Lancaster Meeting on receipt of this document is, sadly, not recorded for posterity; one can imagine, however, that its irony was not especially well received. It was at that point in his career that Eccleston seems to have made the cognitive leap from mainstream religious Dissent to the realm of Deism and Unitarianism and then to his ultimate search for a religion that could encompass any number of individual beliefs.

Eccleston's spiritual journeying neatly illustrates Sommerville's contention that by the late eighteenth century a secular mind-set was the inevitable consequence of the differentiation of religious institutions, the rapid progress of ideas of scientific certainty and the fact that Protestantism itself was a religion founded more on reason than on myth. Sommerville expresses this change in outlook thus: 'There can be no history of thought that does not take into account what holds together the horizon of the thinkable and the tools for thinking it'.⁴⁰ Paradoxically, it was Eccleston's Quaker background that provided him with the tools for rationalising religion. In common with all Quakers, Eccleston was brought up rejecting the tenets and even the right of existence of the Established Church as the church of the establishment; he was also taught that all men and women were equal before God and therefore before men. It was this background that allowed him to develop his ideas of religion and to later reject all forms of religious organisation—including Quakerism itself. He did not develop these ideas in isolation: Richard Price (1723–1791), Thomas Paine (1737–1809) and other writers of the period expound similar ideas on religion in their writings to those Eccleston developed in his work.⁴¹ The creed of the Enlightenment was a belief in reason and justice, the ending of prejudice and the application of science, with an overarching belief in the freedom of the individual as supreme – a set of beliefs that can be seen to have had the potential to grow out of the Quaker foundations of freedom of worship and the equality of all.⁴²

Eccleston was far from downcast at his exclusion from the Lancaster Meeting and even began taking an active interest in the affairs of the Established Church in Lancaster. Some of the influential inhabitants of Lancaster opposed the Bishop of Chester's plan for the building of a new chapel of ease, that of St John and St Anne.⁴³

They held a meeting and proposed to establish their own church, under the leadership of the Reverend William Coulton, curate of Lancaster priory, and got up a subscription fund to which £4200 was subscribed in less than one week.⁴⁴ Eccleston was especially exercised over the decision by Lancaster worthies to grant this proposed living to Coulton, whom he had no fear of lambasting in a provocative broadside to the people of the town, datable to 1795:

Who not content with the ample provision and revenue of his predecessor, hath already rendered himself obnoxious to the people, by his avaricious and ill-timed exaction's on the property of the parishioners of St Mary's.⁴⁵

It is evident from the tone of this document that just as Eccleston was not prepared to defer to the elders of the Quaker Meeting, neither would he allow the influential citizens of Lancaster to remain unchallenged in their support for a man whom Eccleston saw as reflecting all that was rotten in late eighteenth-century society—patronage, pensioners and placemen—and he was ready to put up a spirited and public defence of what he believed to be right. He also used the occasion to rehearse the nature of his increasingly unitarian beliefs. The reference is unambiguous, and will have irritated and exasperated those in the Established Church, and probably caused the local Quaker Meeting genuine anguish too. Eccleston called on the people of Lancaster to:

Convince the world that you are men, and not slaves, expunge from your prayerbooks that uncharitable, unintelligible doctrine of St Athanasius's creed.⁴⁶

Quakers were and are trinitarians; by 1795 Eccleston clearly was not.⁴⁷ The increasingly radical nature of Eccleston's beliefs is also indicated by the pseudonym he used, 'Phileleutheros', for this translates as 'lover of freedom'. Eccleston seems to have been concerned at the increasingly reactionary activities of both public opinion and the government in their responses to calls for reform by 1795.⁴⁸ Early Quakers had been so persecuted that they had effectively been the first organisation to develop their own political lobby,⁴⁹ and although the Lancaster Meeting in 1790 did not regard Eccleston as a Quaker after his disownment, his political activities were in the tradition of Quaker protest.⁵⁰

THE FURTHER RADICALISATION OF ECCLESTON

Although Eccleston clearly took an interest in local and national politics and could be described as being on the radical wing of Whiggery the factor that was the most likely impetus for Eccleston's move into open defiance of the government was probably the trial of Thomas Walker (1751–1817) for treason. This took place in Lancaster in April 1794 and it is inconceivable that Eccleston did not go to the aid of a friend.⁵¹ It was after the trial that Eccleston took his political grievances to a national stage with his 1795 signed petition to the king. In the circumstances of the age and in the light of Walker's recent trial this was the act of a brave man. The lengthy petition reflected his views on the danger of 'gagging' legislation, and offered a defence of an individual's right to have freedom of religion and conscience.⁵² The

Pitt government (1783–1801) was finding it increasingly difficult to silence a growing tide of radicalism, which it believed might lead the British to revolution, and was particularly worried about the spread of radical ideas in print. The London Corresponding Society had developed a countrywide network that was demanding reform, and radical publishers and printers were disseminating ideas the government considered revolutionary. Eccleston was clearly engaging in the radical debate of the period; he had certainly read radical literature and he printed appeals for freedom of conscience and worship on many occasions. Ideas of freedom and equality of worship, if they were enshrined in law, relentlessly and almost inevitably led towards concepts of freedom of speech, thought and the political equality of men and it was this that concerned the government. The degree of alarm that Eccleston felt about the increasing encroachments of the Church and State on individuals' right to freedom of conscience becomes clear when his petition is considered. Many radical ideas were based on the notion that justice was done not only to individuals, but also to society. Eccleston was a man with a passionate belief in justice, who, in the face of increasing persecution of radicals, was prepared to speak up. Where earlier Quakers had spoken up for their right to worship a triune God as they chose, Eccleston spoke up for his right to share in public any ideas he chose, and was prepared, in a protest against the 'Two Acts', to make public his dislike of both the increasingly repressive measures being introduced by Pitt, and of the continuing war with France.⁵³

And should those bills at present pending in the two Houses of Parliament, which has excited such a general alarm amongst your subjects, be sanctioned by YOUR MAJESTY, and become a part of the laws of this country, I shall be really apprehensive for *that life*, which I have always considered, and which the concurrent circumstances of the TIMES, at this important Crisis, hath rendered so peculiarly and essentially necessary to the tranquillity of this Kingdom... Had this unfortunate MONARCH listened to the *voices of his people*, and cordially accepted the Constitution that was offered Him by the Legislative Body, LOUIS the SIXTEENTH, might have been at this day, the first Crowned Head in Europe.⁵⁴

As all petitions addressed to the crown were sent to the Treasury Solicitors in order to assess whether the content warranted the prosecution of the author, Eccleston must have excited the interest of the authorities – for his petition, unlike many others circulating at that time, was not anonymous.

Throughout the period after Eccleston's return to England, he and other radicals had been inspired by the success of the Americans in gaining their liberty (although equality for all was not on the American agenda) while the French had gained both liberty and equality. However, by 1795, many radicals were distancing themselves from the French Revolution, on the grounds that even the sacred cause of liberty did not justify the increasing violence, but also as a result of the rising tide of British patriotism after war was declared in 1793. While leading radicals younger than Eccleston were being imprisoned for seditious libel or had emigrated to avoid imprisonment, Eccleston wrote in defence of the French people.⁵⁵

I believe there never was in the History of Mankind, an instance of so great a REVOLUTION in so large an EMPIRE, and Twenty Six Millions of People:

effecting their emancipation from a System of both Civil and Religious Tyranny, under which they had groaned for many generations, *with so little bloodshed*.⁵⁶

Over the same period, it had become apparent that the 'Freeborn Englishman' was not to be granted those liberties that the radicals felt should have been theirs by right. The various campaigns by Dissenters for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts had been rejected, while government was seen as increasingly corrupt and uncontrolled – a place of pensioners and sinecurists that had abandoned the principles of Magna Carta and natural justice. Late eighteenth-century radicals, for the most part, were not democrats; neither did they have a list of specific demands that can be equated to the early nineteenth-century reform campaign that led to the Great Reform Act of 1832. Indeed, the Corresponding Societies apart, they were barely organised. The 'Friends of Liberty' and the 'Friends of Peace' were just that – loose groupings of like-minded people, with no formal constitution or organisational framework.⁵⁷ They wanted to contain and curb the government, to eradicate pensioners, placemen and patronage and to prevent further abuses by establishing checks and balances that protected the natural rights of the people. They made no demands for extensions of the franchise and had no national campaign platform. Eccleston, though, seems to have moved to the extreme edge of British radical thought during the late eighteenth century. He was certainly in favour of the French Revolution and remained an admirer of Napoleon long after most radicals had abandoned admiration of him as unpatriotic. In large part Eccleston's views were those of the Foxite Whigs, who, by 1797, were concerned that English radicals might become so aggrieved by the lack of modest reform that they would rise up in imitation of the Jacobins across the channel. However, Eccleston was to diverge from the Foxite Whigs in the depth of his antagonism to establishment controls over freedom of conscience and it was this that led to his most spectacular brush with the authorities.

REFLECTIONS ON RELIGION

Eccleston's 1797 work, *Reflections on the Freedom of Religion—No Atheism*, was published in Lancaster, as a precursor to his *General History of the Religion of all Nations in the World*, and is described in the advertisement for the book as, 'the amusement of my leisure hours'.⁵⁸ *Reflections on the Freedom of Religion* drew on many sources, which he cheerfully acknowledged (although not by name) as expressing ideas 'perfectly coinciding with my own sentiments'.⁵⁹ In 1790s Britain the anti-radical Church and King movement equated the French Revolution with state-sponsored atheism.⁶⁰ Fear of radical ideas was linked to a fear of atheism, and indeed it was that fear that drove on the Church and King mobs who regularly attacked radicals and Dissenters. English radicals viewed the French Revolution from a different perspective to the Church and King upholders of the status quo. They saw the French Revolution as part of a realisation of Enlightenment thought that would allow reason, truth, justice and liberty to prevail. If the Enlightenment and its associated radicalism were to succeed, and lead to a progressive, tolerant society, then fear of the unknown, including atheism, had to be dispelled. In *Reflections on Religion*,

Eccleston argued strongly that atheism simply could not exist. He also, in effect, denied the doctrine of the Trinity.⁶¹ The book must have been quite widely circulated, for several copies survive, and, indeed, the advertisement that appears at the front of the book is widely quoted and often misinterpreted:

From my not having for some time past frequented the meeting of the Religious Society I was born and educated amongst, or any other place of public Worship, and from my having, on all occasions, spoken very freely against *Superstition* and *Priest-craft*, *Persecution*, *Tithes* &c. I apprehend it has been maliciously represented by some, and believed by others, that I must be either an *Atheist* or *Deist*. And I shall here, as a general answer, repeat the reply I made when accused on this subject. Viz. 'That I had a Church in my own bosom, which *at present*, I was perfectly satisfied with; and that there was a parson in the pulpit, who preached sound doctrine, without demanding any *Tithes*'. But I think it necessary, in my own justification, to publish my Religious principles: and which I can't do better than by an extract from the preface to a *General History of the Religion of all Nations in the World*, which I have made some progress in collecting materials for, and which continues, at times, to be the amusement of my leisure hours.⁶²

Smith's descriptive catalogue quotes the advertisement in full, which has led some commentators to assume that Eccleston's main reason for publishing the book was to rebut accusations that 'I must be either an *Atheist* or a *Deist*'.⁶³ However, the book itself seems to be built on the ideas of Thomas Aquinas, John Locke, William Paley, Richard Price and other major philosophers. Eccleston used his book to condemn priest-craft (although not Catholics), superstition and bigotry. He argued for the essential equality of all people (a Quaker tenet) and all religions (not a Quaker belief):

We ought to love and cherish every man, let him be black or white, Jew, Gentile, Pagan or Christian, *if he is a good member of society*.⁶⁴

This level of equality of religion and the discussion that followed of the route into heaven for all, 'no matter what their beliefs', was clearly open to accusations of blasphemy.⁶⁵ However, Eccleston did not stop there, but continued the argument by describing the benefits of worshipping the Supreme Being (singular and not triune) through the 'broad scale of *nature*'.⁶⁶

Nature, the minister of his irrevocable commands, the depository of his immutable decrees, never deviates from the laws he has prescribed for her. She alters no part of his original plan: but in all her operations, she exhibits the Eternal Lord of the Universe.⁶⁷

The book is worthy of a far more detailed examination than can be conducted here. Eccleston concluded with an assertion that:

Whatever Religion is incapable of making proselytes... without the alliance or coercion of civil power, that religion is not divine. Laws made to restrain the religious opinions of mankind are... absurd... penalties inflicted to enforce conformity to any certain mode of worship, are so many insults to the Almighty and to the human understanding.⁶⁸

Having undoubtedly attracted the attention of the Treasury Solicitor by his previous petitions, Eccleston, in this public synthesis of ideas of individual liberty and religious liberty coupled with his printed criticism of government and church laws, was

provocative in the extreme. The omission of the publisher's details on the title page of the book, thus circumventing the 1792 regulations demanding that publishers take responsibility for the contents of any work they produced, is a clear indication that Eccleston was prepared for his work to result in some sort of prosecution.⁶⁹ Indeed, it caused the authorities to take notice immediately.

Lancaster was part of the Diocese of Chester in 1798, but was administered by the Archdeanery of Richmond. Although the government had brought a number of high-profile treason trials as an attempt to contain radical views, juries were extremely reluctant to convict defendants. However, the 'Church and courts in England had a long tradition of working together', and trials for blasphemy where a publication attacked the legally constituted Church were used as a means of containing radical thought.⁷⁰ Eccleston was a man who believed, before all else, in justice and the power of reason; he undoubtedly thought that he would be able to trust to English justice and the power of his reasonable and reasoned argument to either avoid prosecution or to achieve an acquittal. However, this was not to be, and by 1 January 1798, Eccleston was a prisoner in Lancaster Castle.

Eccleston occupied his time in a number of ways while in prison, and as a prolific letter writer he was certainly engaged in protesting his innocence to whomever he thought might or ought to listen. He also took up the case of two imprisoned debtors, Daniel Holt and George Ward, describing the unjustness of imprisoning men for debt, and demanding that the laws that allowed imprisonment for debt be reappraised so that such iniquities ceased. Eccleston's insistence that justice be done to all, and his increasing anger at the lack of justice for 'freeborn Englishmen', are also exhibited in the satires and verses he wrote while in prison: 'O. My Country. How long wilt thou suffer such fellows to have anything to do with the *Liberty of Englishmen*'. While some of the writing he produced in prison was signed, one of the more defamatory items ends with the challenge to the authorities: 'If thou intends prosecuting the author of this Incendiary Letter, thou must prove the handwriting'.⁷¹ Since Eccleston was not prosecuted for the satire and its accompanying libel, we must assume that no-one attempted to prove his handwriting on that occasion.

ECCLESTON'S DEFIANCY AFTER IMPRISONMENT

Following the influential work of E.P. Thompson, there has developed an understanding that the persecution of radicals in the 1790s did not cause radicalism to die and then be resurrected again with Luddism and Peterloo, but that there was some continuation of underground radicalism during the 'fallow years' of 1796–1815.⁷² There is no doubt that the early Regency radicals were rather more discreet in their methods, relying on anonymous broadsides and ballads to spread their message, and often disguising any organisation they may have had as friendly societies, so as not to attract the attention of the authorities.⁷³ Eccleston, though, decided to thumb his nose at the establishment in several fairly public ways in the years after he was released from Lancaster Castle late in 1798. His immediate reaction was to add a sobriquet to his name, and to ensure that he signed all future correspondence in full as Daniel Belteshazzar Plantagenet Eccleston. Contemporaries would have easily understood

these additions to his name as a reference to Eccleston's political opinions. Belteshazzar is a biblical reference to the book of Daniel.⁷⁴ The parallels between the biblical Daniel and Eccleston's giving of advice to an increasingly unbalanced George III through his petitions, and having that advice ignored, are plain. The references to the Jews' right to freedom of worship outside the established religion of the land in which they were exiled also have an obvious parallel with Eccleston's contention that all people of any faith should have a right to freedom of belief and worship. These analogies would have been perfectly clear to Eccleston, who was a self-confessed scholar of religious history.⁷⁵ The Plantagenet reference was one with which English radicalism was in perfect harmony.⁷⁶ The English radical tradition differed from the French in that it was not demanding universal rights as a result of natural law, but rather the restoration of lost ancestral privileges.⁷⁷ Eccleston's use of nomenclature to express his continued radical beliefs fits well with Wood's contention that: 'The inheritance of the 1790s had changed not only what radicals thought but how they could communicate their thought'.⁷⁸

While Eccleston's addition of a slightly subversive sobriquet is not necessarily indicative of a continuing strand of radicalism in Britain, in the political climate of the time it would certainly have been understood as indicative of his dissatisfaction with the current establishment. In the event, Eccleston continued to make clear his disapproval of the British government by first sending in 1802 a commemorative medal celebrating the achievements of Napoleon to the French government, following it up in 1805 with a medal commemorating George Washington, who had died in 1799.⁷⁹ The medals of Washington resulted in a continuing correspondence with Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826) and James Madison (1751–1836). In his first letter to Jefferson dated 20 May 1807, he commented under the address 'Thomas Jefferson, President of the United States: I think there is a dignity in the *plain address*, superior to all the titles in the world'.⁸⁰ The republican tone is obvious, and a logical continuation of the radicalism that Eccleston maintained as his life progressed.

ECCLESTON'S LATER WORKS

The mystery of Eccleston's premature obituary has still to be fully unravelled.⁸¹ It includes a reference to Eccleston as the author of several works, including *Lamentations of the Children of Israel* (1813). It was thought by Edith Tyson, one-time curator of Lancaster Museum and author of a monograph about the life of Eccleston, that this work did not exist, and previous attempts to trace it had proved futile.⁸² However, a book with the title *Lamentations of the Children of Israel* recently turned up as an anonymous addition (published in 1813) to a copy of *The Three Trials of William Hone* (1818).⁸³ While *Lamentations of the Children of Israel* then disappeared from view again, on the basis of information so far received it does appear to be a typical Eccleston publication.⁸⁴ It calls for the removal of civil disabilities from all Dissenters, with special pleadings for Unitarians, Catholics and Jews. It reportedly contains the Eccleston trademark rhyming couplets. Eccleston did not live to see the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts (1828), nor Catholic Emancipation (1829), but he would have been delighted by these measures towards equal rights for all.

CONCLUSION

Eccleston died in 1821, naming two much younger men as executors to his will. He appears to have become frail in his last months, for the handwriting on his will was shakky. At this stage in his life Eccleston may have remembered his own comments to his frail father forty years earlier:

I know tis an easy matter for the sound to give advice to the sick. I wou'd only just recommend thy endeavouring to bear thy illness with as much patience and resignation as possible. Something must bring us all to our Dissolution, and if it is my lott [*sic*] to live to thy age, when it comes to my turn I hope I shall be resigned⁸⁵

It is possible to speculate that his own lack of children and his lively mind led Eccleston to seek friends in many age groups, rather than mainly from among his contemporaries. The executors of his will were Dr Lawson Whalley, born in 1782 and left fatherless in 1783,⁸⁶ and the attorney William Robinson (1792–1862) who later became Liberal Mayor of Lancaster. As young men, both were members of the Lancaster Reform Association between the years 1828–32: did their earlier association with the radicalism of Eccleston engender their political activity? Though his obituary reduced his achievements to mediocrity by dubbing him eccentric, his papers and publications reveal a man of extraordinarily diverse character and strongly held conviction and a man of courage and humour.

The brief sketch of his life outlined here can only be a foretaste of a more detailed work that has yet to be undertaken. What is certain is that Daniel Eccleston was a man who engaged with, and to an extent, anticipated, the issues and themes of his time, such as religious toleration, the campaigns of Dissenters to end their obligation to pay tithes, the latest scientific developments, parliamentary reform and the question of feeding the mass of the people. As such, he deserves serious consideration as a leading example of the development of a significant body of provincial Enlightenment thought. He was part of the radicalisation of England that took place in the wake of the American and French Revolutions. His influence on events may have been greater than has currently been established, as many papers, including correspondence with Pitt and various government ministers, remain unexplored as yet. The links between Eccleston, Thomas Walker and Matthew Boulton need to be investigated, with a thorough examination of the Walker papers held at Manchester and the Boulton papers in Birmingham, as evidence so far suggests more substantial contact between radical groups across the country than has previously been established. Whatever the extent of Daniel Eccleston's involvement, there remains no doubt that the man himself lived life to the full and left a legacy of value to both Quaker and secular historians; a paradox he would have appreciated.

NOTES

1. See Bradley, J.E., *Religion, Revolution and English Radicalism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990; Clark, J.C.D., *The Language of Liberty 1600–1832*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983; Dickinson, H.T., *Liberty and Property: Political Ideology in Eighteenth Century*

Britain, London: Methuen, 1977; Stafford, W., *Socialism, Radicalism and Nostalgia: Social Criticism in Britain 1775–1830*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

2. Abbatt, D., *Quaker Annals of Preston and the Fylde*, Preston: Hedley Bros., 1931, p. 150.

3. Friends House Library (hereafter LSF) TEMP MSS 145/2: The works in question are *Daniel Eccleston: Lectures on Natural & Experimental Philosophy*, 1785; and *Lamentations of the Children of Israel*, London, 1813, published anonymously, but referred to in his obituary. For the letters see Birmingham Reference Library: Matthew Boulton Papers (hereafter Birmingham MBP) 230/43 and Birmingham MBP Box E1, Lancaster Library Local Studies Collection (hereafter LLLSC) Scrapbook Two, Rothamsted Institute of Agriculture Sinclair papers S192.6, Eccleston to Sir John Sinclair, 1795; LLLSC Scrapbook 2, p. 228, T. Jefferson, letter dated 21 Nov. 1807; Lancaster Library Local Studies Collection Scrapbook 2, p. 209, J. Maddison (1751–1836), letter dated 18 July 1810.

4. Connacre was a system by which farmers provided a small plot of land (perhaps one or two perches) to poor people in the locality, for either a peppercorn rent (perhaps with the proviso that the land should be manured) or no rent. The land would be used to grow potatoes, which would then help to feed the poor and – it was hoped – prevent them from becoming a charge on the parish.

5. Eccleston, D., *Reflections on Religion*, Lancaster, 1797.

6. Freckleton was (and is) a village in the Fylde area of west Lancashire.

7. Winchester, A.J.L., *The Diary of Isaac Fletcher of Underwood Cumberland, 1756–1781*, Kendal: The Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society, 1994, p. 423.

8. Borsay, P.N., *The English Urban Renaissance: Culture and Society in the Provincial Town 1660–1770*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989; Porter, R., *Enlightenment: Britain and the Making of the Modern World*, London: Allen Lane, 2000.

9. LLLSC: MS3734: Eccleston to James Arby of New York, 24 June 1781.

10. LLLSC: MS 3734: Eccleston to James Arby of New York, 24 June 1781, and Eccleston's correction of his premature obituary notice in the *Lancaster Gazette*, 28 Dec. 1821.

11. *Lancaster Gazette*, 28 Dec. 1821.

12. Lake Champlain, then known to the local tribes as 'Bitaubágw', stretches north to south roughly 100 miles. It connects with Lake George, called 'Andiatarocté', by the Mohawk, at the Ticonderoga peninsula, where a small stream, now known as 'La Chute', affords an outlet from Lake George: *Lancaster Gazette*, 28 Dec. 1821.

13. Eccleston, *Reflections on Religion*.

14. The town should have been prosperous, but had been subjected to fire, disease and natural disasters in the years immediately preceding Eccleston's arrival, and the effects of these misfortunes had left it poverty-stricken and lacking many basic amenities, with even the houses of the rich having no more than six rooms and often lacking glass for the windows. Warden, G.B., *Boston 1689–1776*, Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1970, pp. 149–225.

15. Warden is clear that the most radical group in Boston were the merchants. This was because of the limitations to trade that the taxes and regulations imposed by Britain were causing. They wanted to create a prosperous town and thought this would be possible only if they were left to tax themselves as their charter of incorporation allowed. In Warden, *Boston*, Chapters 6 and 7.

16. *Lancaster Gazette*, 28 Dec. 1821. George Washington (1732–1799) was then aged about thirty-seven and was moderately active in the political life of Virginia. At around the time Washington and Eccleston met, George Washington was becoming increasingly, although reluctantly, convinced that America could not remain subservient to the British crown for much longer.

17. George Mason later drafted the Virginia Declaration of Rights (1776) that was adopted by Washington as the basis of the constitution of the United States of America. Flexner, J.T., *George Washington: The Forge of Experience*, London: Leo Cooper, 1973.

18. LSF TEMP MSS 145/1: Eccleston to James Arby, New York, 24 June 1781.

19. Shortly after his arrival in England Eccleston wrote to his brother assuring him that, 'Thou need not defer on fixing on a partner in expectation of my coming to the West Indies', LLLSC MS

3734: Eccleston to Isaac Eccleston, 3 Jan. 1780. It seems likely that Eccleston left the West Indies because he preferred to take charge of his own destiny rather than live life in the shadow of an older, perhaps more successful, brother.

20. LSF TEMP MSS 145/1: Eccleston to James Arby, New York, 24 June 1781.

21. A certificate of removal was effectively a Quaker passport. It was a means of introducing a Friend as a bona fide member to the Quaker community in a new area. Beakbane, R., *Beakbane of Lancaster: A Study of a Quaker Family*, Kidderminster: Ken Tompkinson, 1977, p. 41.

22. LSF TEMP MSS 145/1: Eccleston to James Arby, New York, 24 June 1781.

23. A further indication of his comfortable station in life is that at the time of the calamitous hurricanes and tidal wave in Barbados (late 1780–81) Eccleston was owed several hundred pounds in remittances from that island. Thus he was on a fair way to making at least a very comfortable living, LLLSC MS 3734: Eccleston to William Eccleston, 8 Apr. 1780.

24. LSF TEMP MSS 145/1: Eccleston to Isaac Eccleston, Antigua, 3 Jan. 1781; LLLSC: B12, Universal British Directory, Manchester, photocopied extract, 1799, p. 618.

25. LLLSC MS 3734: Eccleston to William Eccleston, Whitehaven 25 Mar. 1781.

26. Mori, J., *Britain in the Age of the French Revolution*, Harlow: Pearson Educational, 2000, p. 34.

27. See, for example, Bradley, J., *Popular Politics during the American Revolution in England*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998; Christie, I.R., *Wilkes, Wyvill and Reform*, London: Macmillan, 1962; Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*; Goodwin, A., *The Friends of Liberty*, London: Hutchinson, 1979; Stafford, *Socialism, Radicalism and Nostalgia*.

28. LLLSC MS 3734: Eccleston to Shaw and Helme, 10 Feb. 1780. In total four letters refer to this election.

29. Many merchants were opposed to war with France, on several grounds. Thomas Cooper, the Manchester radical and merchant, put out a pamphlet in an effort to counter the anti-Jacobin calls for war, which neatly summarised the arguments of the anti-warlobby: 'Consider what class of ye can be benefited by WAR? ... Will it diminish the excise, or the land tax, or the commutation tax, or any of the long long catalogue of taxes which lie so heavy on this devoted country? ... The ignorance and bigotry of Church and King politics may deprive us at a stroke of every market for our manufactures which the World affords... What will the weaver say to this who already finds his wages fallen, his reeds called in and employment scarce...', in Knight, F., *The Strange Case of Thomas Walker: Ten Years in the Life of a Manchester Radical*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1957, p. 92.

30. Eccleston, *Reflections on Religion*.

31. *Lancaster Gazette*, 21 Dec. 1816 (premature obituary).

32. 'We got to drinking Liverpool Ale aboard the old hulk, and did it pretty freely, but not satisfied with that, must call at Condor Green in coming home, where several trials ensued, and the upright being once judge and twice on the jury, of course you may be sure brought in damages, which with the Ale we drank on board the Hulk, made most of us, not as we ought to be, but as we ought not to be'. LSF TEMP MSS 145/1, Eccleston to Thomas Park, Liverpool, 5 Apr. 1781. He also ordered punchon's of the best rum (for himself) from Barbados as well as acting as a liquor merchant. LLLSC MS 3734: Eccleston to John Bispham, Barbados, 20 Feb. 1780. He only made six specific bequests to individuals in his will. The three largest were to Elizabeth Maling and Jane and Mary Battersby. For a transcript of the will, see Tyson, E., *Daniel Eccleston*, Lancaster: Lancaster Museum Monographs, 1972, p. 11.

33. Franklin's scientific writings took the form of letters addressed to individuals, in this case Peter Collinson and others. Collinson, an English Quaker who was a cloth manufacturer and botanist, was a Fellow of the Royal Society, and in that capacity introduced Franklin's letters into the Society's meetings. Eventually the letters would find their way into the Society's publication, *Philosophical Transactions*. The equipment used by Eccleston was a Copal Globe Electrostatic Generator, an expensive item that since the 1760s had attracted those of a scientific turn of mind with sufficient wealth to purchase one.

34. LSF TEMP MSS 145/2: *Lectures on Natural & Experimental Philosophy*, 1785.

35. Benjamin Franklin was fondly labelled 'the oldest revolutionary'. Tom Paine invented a candle that gave off a brighter light while Joseph Priestley and many of the other luminaries of the Birmingham Lunar Society combined radical politics with advanced technology.

36. This was not the London Yearly Meeting. TEMP MSS 145/1 LSF: Eccleston to James Arby, New York, 24 June 1781.

37. 'This meeting is informed that Daniel Eccleston who hath resided a number of years within this meeting and hath not for a considerable time past attended any meetings that we know of, who on being visited did not give any encouragement to hope he would be more diligent in future'. Minute of the Monthly Meeting 4 Jan. 1790, in Beakbane, *Beakbane of Lancaster*, p. 59.

38. 'It is the judgement of this meeting that...with such neglect of this duty of assembling together for worship of the Almighty we hereby exclude the said Daniel Eccleston...John Field is asked to hand him a copy of this minute'. Minute of the Monthly Meeting 4 Jan. 1790, in Beakbane, *Beakbane of Lancaster*, p. 59.

39. Minute of the Monthly Meeting 4 Jan. 1790 in Beakbane, *Beakbane of Lancaster*, p. 59.

40. Sommerville, C.J., *The Secularisation of Early Modern England*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 63.

41. Since Eccleston left a large collection of books that included works by both the above authors as well as writings by authors as diverse as St Thomas Aquinas and John Locke; we may deduce that he may have read and synthesized the ideas of some of these authors. In his will Eccleston left the contents of his library to the Lancaster Meeting.

42. Eccleston's later writings reveal him as a man taking full part in the debate that had Pitt's government so worried about an English revolution that Habeas Corpus was suspended in June 1794. This was the first of a series of repressive measures designed to limit the freedom of ideas that the English Enlightenment was spawning. Mori, *Britain in the Age of the French Revolution*, p. 8.

43. The church of St John and St Anne was built but is no longer used for worship. The building has been converted into the Duke's Theatre, on Moor Lane, Lancaster.

44. Tyson, *Daniel Eccleston*, p. 6.

45. This allusion refers to the collection of tithes: LLLSC Scrapbook 2, p. 34, *Mr Coulton's Church*.

46. LLLSC Scrapbook 2, p. 34: *Mr Coulton's Church*. This reference goes back to a fourth-century conflict regarding the divinity of Christ. St Athanasius represented the 'winning side' that ultimately became orthodox Trinitarianism.

47. The significance of his open condemnation of St Athanasius's Creed goes far deeper than an acknowledgement of unitarian beliefs. There had been several blasphemy trials centred on the denial of the Trinity in the early eighteenth century. The resulting publicity had led to a clear understanding among those professing unitarian beliefs that they should be careful about exactly what beliefs they expressed publicly and in writing.

48. The Church and King movement was rapidly gaining ground in Lancashire, and they published many handbills linking Dissent to disloyalty. An early example (1789) printed in Manchester read, 'And it came to pass in the thirtieth Year of the Reign of George the Third, who was anointed King of Great Britain, that the Set of People called Dissenters (who prospered in the land) conspired together, "Let us chuse [*sic*] among ourselves a King, Governments, Rulers and Men of cunning devices, and let us depose, dethrone and put to death this King... And moreover we will deny Christ and confess Arius, Socinius and Pelagius and we will entirely overthrow the Brittanic Constitution these things they will do, and many more to make their names famous throughout the Earth"'. This document, in common with other broadsides of the time, parodies the King James translation of the Bible: this example is in the style of a parable. Quoted in Knight, *The Strange Case of Thomas Walker*, p. 39.

49. Sommerville, *The Secularisation of Early Modern England*, p. 93.

50. Sommerville, *The Secularisation of Early Modern England*, p. 124.

51. Thomas Walker was a close friend of Matthew Boulton and James Watt, and Eccleston maintained a correspondence with Boulton and Watt until 1810. James Watt's son was a trusted

employee of Walker. Walker was also a friend of Mr Heywood (of Robinson and Heywood, suppliers of checks to Eccleston) and of William Hone and John Souter (who were later linked to Eccleston and possibly involved in the publication of Eccleston's alleged work *Lamentations of the Children of Israel* [1813]). See Knight, *The Strange Case of Thomas Walker*, p. 144.

52. Birmingham MBP 230/44.

53. The Pitt ministry had not managed to stem the increasing tide of radical writing and network of groups by the use of such measures as the 1792 Royal Proclamation Against Seditious Writing and the 1794 suspension of Habeas Corpus. The 'Two Acts' (Seditious Meetings Act and Treasonable Practices Act) were given Royal Assent on 10 Dec. 1795, and were successful in stemming the tide of radical Dissent and protest.

54. Birmingham MBP 230/44: Petition to King George III from Daniel Eccleston of Lancaster.

55. Thomas Spence served several prison sentences; William Hone was tried on three separate occasions for blasphemy and acquitted on each charge; Thomas Muir and five others were transported after being convicted of seditious libel.

56. Birmingham MBP 230/44.

57. It appears that Eccleston was asked to leave the Lancaster 'Friends of Liberty' after his 1795 petition to George III caused a furore among them. He had sent the petition without reference to the group, and they felt that it called into question their loyalty to the throne. As a result, they immediately dropped their opposition to the Two Acts and for good measure sent a loyal address to George III. ANON, *The History of the Two Acts*, London, 1796, pp. 536–48.

58. Eccleston, *Reflections on the Freedom of Religion*, n.p. Advertisement included as frontispiece.

59. Eccleston, *Reflections on Religion*, p. 24, includes recognisable extracts from John Locke and Pope plus ideas clearly developed from Price and Paine.

60. The link between atheism and treason was effectively made in 1676 by Chief Justice Matthew Hale: 'To reproach the Christian religion is to speak of subversion of the law'. Holdsworth, W.S., *History of English Law*, VIII, London: Methuen, 1937, p. 403.

61. William Paley (1743–1805) argued for a similar 'Natural Theology' to that described by Eccleston. This in itself built on the foundations of Hume and Voltaire. He effectively set out to show that Deism was not Atheism. Eccleston's argument went one step further and stated that atheism was impossible. His enthusiasm for all other religions and his insistence that any good person could be assured of a place in paradise would have been considered a denial of the Trinity and therefore blasphemous. Since Eccleston was definitely not in prison for debt, as the relevant debtors calendars have been checked, and since he was not tried either at the Assizes or the Kings Bench, it is likely the Church courts tried him.

62. Eccleston, *Reflections on Religion*, Advertisement.

63. Smith, J., *A Descriptive Catalogue of Friends' Books*, I, London, 1867.

64. Eccleston, *Reflections on Religion*, p. 7.

65. Eccleston, *Reflections on Religion*, p. 8.

66. Eccleston, *Reflections on Religion*, p. 13.

67. Eccleston, *Reflections on Religion*, p. 13.

68. Eccleston, *Reflections on Religion*, p. 17.

69. The government had tried to control the publication of radical material by holding publishers responsible for the content of work they published. The government sought the prosecution of publishers responsible for work considered treasonable or blasphemous.

70. Wood, M., *Radical Satire and Print Culture, 1790–1822*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994, pp. 100–105. Eccleston's ideas were extremely similar to those of William Whiston (anti-Trinitarian and attacker of the Athanasian Creed) who was convicted of blasphemy in 1710. Wood, *Radical Satire*, p. 101.

71. LLLSC Scrapbook 2: *Friend John*, p. 226.

72. Thompson, E.P., *The Making of the English Working Class*, London: Gollancz, 1963; Wood, *Radical Satire and Print Culture*, p. 63.

73. The dying months of the London Corresponding Society were marked by the issuing of broadsides. One written just after Eccleston was sentenced reflects all of the issues that concerned him and is couched in the form of the Nicene Creed. It is too interesting not to reproduce here: A Creed for all Good and Loyal Subjects who go to St Paul's. On 19 Dec. 1797. 'I believe in God as by law established in Billy Pitt, Heaven commissioned Chancellor of the Exchequer; Promoter of all court intrigues, visible and invisible; creator and master of laws and commons whose politics are pure and morals untainted; and Secretary Harry Dundas, the only beloved of Billy Pitt, beloved before all women, man of men, head of heads, minister of ministers, beloved not hated, being of one opinion with his patron, by whom all ministers are made; who for us men and our taxation came out of Scotland and talked much in the house of integrity and was appointed East India Comptroller under Billy Pitt, and went into Scotland, and was there burned in effigy; and the third day he came back again (according to the newspapers) and ascended into office and sitteth on the right hand of his patron, to judge both loyal and disloyal, whose folly shall have no end – and I believe that murder, rapine, plunder and burning are the true and proper means of conciliating the affections of the inhabitants of Ireland, whom I believe to be the natural slaves of the British Cabinet; and I believe in the House of Boroughs, the legal representatives of the people, elected by one hundred and sixty-two persons, either peers, sinecure placemen or immediate servants of the King, who can do no wrong – and I believe in George the Third, Lord and giver of places, who, together with Billy Pitt, is worshiped and glorified, who spoke by a proclamation; and I believe in paper money and national bankruptcy as outward and visible signs of the nation's prosperity; and I look for the remission of taxes not till the resurrection of the dead, and I look for better government in the world to come'. The broadside was found in a volume compiled by Francis Place, and catalogued in Place's handwriting under the caption 'Corresponding Society Publications'. In 1912 it was in the private collection of Professor E.R.A. Seligman of Columbia University. It is quoted in Hall, W.P., *British Radicalism 1791–1797*, New York: Octagon Books, 1912, repr. 1976.

74. The book of Daniel itself was a radical and seditious book in its time. It was written during the second century BCE when the Jews were being persecuted by a foreign king and were no longer at liberty to practice their religion. The author of the book had to disguise his message as a history, describing an earlier persecution of the Jews while exiled to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar gave the hero, Daniel, the name Belteshazzar (the name was the same as that of Nebuchadnezzar's god), after Daniel proved able to interpret dreams and offer advice to the king. Nebuchadnezzar unfortunately failed to take Daniel's counsel and went mad for seven years, whereupon, realising the error of his ways, he sent for Daniel and restored him to favour and upon following Daniel's advice recovered his wits. Daniel's more famous confrontation with the later King Darius is also relevant, as this was in defence of the right of the Jews to freedom of religion.

75. Eccleston, *Reflections on Religion*.

76. E. Vincent-Macleod, *A War of Ideas*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998, p. 125.

77. These rights were traditionally held to have been granted in 1215, under the Plantagenet King John, in Magna Carta, and eroded by subsequent, foreign monarchs.

78. Wood, *Radical Satire and Print Culture*, p. 63.

79. One of the medals of Washington was sent to the then reform-minded Tsar of Russia, Alexander I (r. 1801–25) probably in the hope that he would be moved by the inscription and inspired to free his people.

80. Thomas Jefferson Papers Series 1, Letter from Eccleston to Jefferson dated May 20 1807 (emphasis in original).

81. *Lancaster Gazette*, 21 Dec. 1816, original obituary; and 28 Dec. 1816, Eccleston's correction of that notice.

82. Tyson, *Daniel Eccleston*.

83. Hone was a leading Regency radical whose defence (in 1818) of his freedom to print material deemed blasphemous by the courts, was very much a *cause celebre* of the later Regency period. The victory of William Hone was itself significant in the development of the new radicalism that was signalled by the outcry over the Queen Caroline affair.

84. *Lamentations of the Children of Israel* was first traced to Gown Books in Northern Ireland on Good Friday, 2001, but they had sold to a customer in the USA. The purchaser then found it was not what he had wanted and he sold it to a book-dealer in Leicestershire. The book was then re-sold at a book fair in London. The Leicestershire dealer read *Lamentations of the Children of Israel* and was particularly struck by the style of the book. He thought it humorous and noticed that it contained rhyming couplets. Eccleston's work matches the description, but without a comparison it cannot be claimed that the book sold was definitely the missing Eccleston work.

85. LSF TEMP MSS 145/1: Eccleston to William Eccleston, 8 June 1781.

86. LLLSC MS 5098.

AUTHOR DETAILS

Carolyn Downs completed her MA work at the University of Lancaster on the links between nonconformity and political radicalism, and has completed her PhD at the same institution on the social and economic history of bingo.

Mailing address: 6 Cumberland View Road, Heysham, Lancashire LA3 1EE, England.