

THE HERETIC FROM PUDDLETOWN

Theophilus Lindsey has been described by a recent historian as “the founder of Unitarianism”¹ (the English context being implicitly assumed), which is somewhat like calling James Freeman the founder of Unitarianism so far as New England is concerned. It can properly be said in each case that their Unitarian congregations came chronologically first, but the flow into Unitarianism came chiefly through the Presbyterian congregations in England, as through the Congregational ones in New England. The Anglican background of Lindsey and Freeman made its contribution, but much more so in England, where the Anglicans were entrenched as the Established Church, than in New England where they were a small minority, diminished through having been the church of the colonial power. Lindsey and Freeman were, however, in touch with each other, and Freeman drew heavily from Lindsey's revision of the Anglican liturgy; in fact, he told Lindsey he would have reproduced the whole of it, but didn't think the congregation at King's Chapel was as yet prepared to go that far.²

But why am I calling Lindsey the 'heretic from Puddletown'? He did indeed describe himself more than once as a heretic in letters written during his Puddletown ministry³, but he had no connection with Puddletown in his early life, and lived there only for just under nine years, a decade before he made his break with the Church of England. But the significance of Puddletown is that it was while he was there that his latent questionings of church doctrine became overt, and brought him to the critical turning-point in his life at which he was about to leave the church, deferring that decision only by yielding at the last moment to the persuasion of those who urged him to reconsider. I need also to confess at this point to a personal connection which leads me to focus on the Puddletown years. I spent the first fourteen years of my life in or within walking distance of Puddletown; as a child I sang in the gallery choir of the church facing the pulpit from which Lindsey preached nearly two centuries earlier, though at that point I had never heard of him – or of Unitarians either, for that matter.

So let me begin with Puddletown. In Lindsey's day it was called Piddletown. It is one of a string of villages along the valley of a little river in the south of England which runs parallel to the valley of the larger river Frome to a common destination in Poole Harbour. That river is called the Piddle in its upper reaches and the Puddle in its lower ones, as indicated in the names of its villages: Piddletrenthide, Piddlehinton, Piddletown or Puddletown at the point of transition, then Tolpuddle, Affpuddle, Briantspuddle, Turnerspuddle. In my boyhood the name Piddletown was still occasionally used by the older folk, but the urgings of the Post Office that one name should be made official resulted in a final vote by the County Council in the late '50s that it should be Puddletown. As the latter part of the name suggests, it is, as one writer puts it, the 'capital of the valley'.⁴ Unlike the other villages it does not straggle along the river, but is compact with streets around a market square, and in former times boasted a considerable number of shops and artisans' establishments, as well as an annual fair which dated back to the 13th century. Its population in Lindsey's time ranged between 650 and 700, and it was still under 1200 in the most recent census, with one-third of its inhabitants retired.

Whatever fame Lindsey gained at a wider level he does not enjoy locally. In the histories of the church and of the village written by two twentieth-century vicars⁵ space is given both to his predecessor and to his successor, but Lindsey is barely mentioned, and even his name is misspelt. The same misspelling occurs on the list of incumbents on an oak panel in the church porch. This is the more pointed in that he was one of only four of those vicars to be included in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Of the other three, the first was the pre-Reformation Cardinal Pole, subsequently Archbishop of Canterbury, who accumulated a large number of livings, was inducted by proxy, and made no recorded visit to Puddletown at all. The second was also an absentee: Benjamin Woodroffe, who held several other offices, mostly academic, including the founding of Worcester College, Oxford. The third was

Lindsey's successor Philip Lloyd, who did spend some of his time in Puddletown but was concurrently Dean of Norwich Cathedral, where he spent much of the year and had a significant impact upon its history. The local ignoring of Lindsey is the more significant in that the nineteenth-century revision of Hutchins's classic *History of Dorset*⁶ provides an accurate account of his subsequent career and is a source that no one looking at historical events in the county can ignore.

On the other hand, Lindsey has always occupied a prominent place in histories of the English Unitarian movement. At the present time, the leading authority on his career is Professor Grayson Ditchfield of the University of Kent, to whose work I am massively indebted for much of what I am presenting here. Two years ago the first volume of his edition of Lindsey's letters appeared, with copious informative footnotes, providing fresh insights into many aspects of Lindsey's life and work, together with his views on the ecclesiastical and political world of his day. If there was any denominational bias in the local ignoring of Lindsey, there is none here, for the book was published under the auspices of the Church of England Record Society.⁷

The Church of England in which Lindsey for so many years served was (and is) as much a part of the state apparatus as is the army. The reigning monarch, as the head of the church, appointed all its senior administrators, the archbishops and bishops, in practice following the advice of the Prime Minister. A couple of centuries later, there was to be some outrage in High Church circles when Neville Chamberlain was Prime Minister and was mistakenly believed to be a Unitarian. In fact, Chamberlain had no time for any form of organized religion, which in the eyes of the critics would have made him almost but not quite as unsuitable a person to be recommending ecclesiastical appointments.

The appointment of lower orders in the church hierarchy was in the gift of patrons, which facilitated the common practice in the aristocratic landowning families in which the eldest son inherited the title and the estate, while younger brothers could be installed in the army or the church according to their inclination. The right to present a parson to a living, as the parish was called in relation to its incumbent, was known as an advowson. Advowsons were a piece of property with a market value, and could be bequeathed, given to another party, or sold. Most of them were in the hands of aristocrats, wealthy landowners or institutions such as colleges. Ironically enough, Lindsey himself was bequeathed one, so as a Unitarian he had, and exercised, the right to appoint an Anglican incumbent to the living in question: his wife's brother-in-law, as it happened.⁸

He himself was not of aristocratic lineage, nor was he the son of a clergyman, which was the other chief source of supply. His father, who died when he was 19, was a mercer and salt merchant, but his mother had been from an early age part of the household of the Earls of Huntingdon, as a companion to the young ladies of the family. This placed her son in a favoured position, and he was named Theophilus after his godfather, the ninth earl. The good offices of these aristocrats provided for his education at a grammar school in Leeds and Cambridge university. He then, as he put it, "entered into the ministry of the gospel out of a free and deliberate choice, with a full persuasion that it was the best way in which I could serve God and be useful to man."⁹

Cambridge was in process of becoming a haven for more radical thinkers within the Established Church, but although Lindsey stated that he had always considered the 39 Articles to which its ministers had to subscribe a "strange unnecessary entanglement"¹⁰, he apparently had no serious doubts about its fundamental doctrines at this period in his life. In fact, he followed an entirely conventional course for a budding parson sponsored by aristocratic families. He was elected to a fellowship at his college and combined this with a brief period as a part-time curate. Then he spent several years as domestic chaplain to the Duke of Somerset, a friend of the tenth Earl of Huntingdon, who also made

Lindsey his own chaplain. This latter must have called for some delicate diplomacy, for the earl was profligate and irreligious to a degree which led his pious mother to agonize over the possible fate of his immortal soul.¹¹ Not that his lifestyle was notably unusual for a person of his rank at that time. As a contemporary observer noted, “the generality of the rich and great never frequent the church of God ... and deride as superstition the asking his blessing.”¹² By contrast, however, the ladies of the family were more than conventionally involved in the church. In particular, Selina, the Countess of Huntingdon, widow of the ninth earl and mother of the tenth, was an active evangelical, using her considerable wealth to promote the work of George Whitefield and set up chapels in her own name in which his interpretation of Christianity could be preached and practised. This was contemporaneous with and parallel to the Methodist movement established by the Wesleys, though their theology was Arminian and the Countess's Calvinistic. But like the Methodists, the Countess of Huntingdon's connexion was later in the century forced out of the Established Church and became a separate denomination which, though small, still exists.

In his early years Lindsey felt close to and was supported by the countess, though it was her wayward son who was his patron and even in some senses a friend. His recommendation had procured Lindsey the position of chaplain to the Duke of Somerset, and after the latter's death his widow, in turn, recommended Lindsey to her son-in-law, the Earl of Northumberland, with the result that Lindsey was asked to be guardian and tutor to that earl's nine-year-old son and take him for a year's visit to France. On his return he was presented by Northumberland to a living in Yorkshire for which he held the advowson, but at this point Lindsey spent a great deal of his time enjoying the social world of his aristocratic patrons. The behaviour of many Anglican clerics of the day was described thus by one of them: “It is grown a fashionable thing, among these gentlemen, to despise the duties of their parish; to wander about, as the various seasons invite, to every scene of false gaiety; to frequent and shine in all public places, their own pulpits excepted.”¹³ I don't want to suggest that Lindsey fitted exactly into this description, but he certainly spent a considerable amount of time travelling around with his aristocratic friends, and being entertained in their grand homes. In a later letter to a friend of less exalted status he wrote: “I shall never desire nor solicit for any thing more than what may give an opportunity of seeing more frequently, and with more ease, one or two friends ... and of being more at liberty ... of doing what I think might be more useful than haranguing always to a country parish.”¹⁴

But for at least part of his time in each of his ministries Lindsey was an assiduous parish minister. A good deal of the work was done by curates, which again was very typical of the times, but Lindsey personally attended to some of it. More significantly, it was during this first Yorkshire ministry that he became intimately acquainted with Francis Blackburne, a neighbouring cleric who was one of the most liberal thinkers in the Church of England. He must have absorbed some of Blackburne's views on theology and church organization, though there was no outward indication of this at the time.

Then, at the beginning of the year 1755, came an opportunity for Huntingdon to present him to the living of Puddletown, which was in his gift and near some of his family estates. A month after his settlement there Lindsey began a letter of thanks with these words: “My ever honoured Lord, I paid my dutiful respects to you at the eve of my setting out for the palace your Lordship has bestowed upon me, and should have saluted you sooner from thence but that I waited for somewhat more to say than that your Lordship's vicar's house is not quite so large, but both that and his garden much pleasanter than his neighbour Lady Orford's, that he does most sincerely thank his patron for lodging him so agreeably and so much to his liking...”¹⁵

This description of the Puddletown vicarage as a palace, repeated in a later letter,¹⁶ may be a little exaggerated, but it was certainly imposing for a country vicarage. It had been extensively remodelled

and extended by his wealthy predecessor, Henry Dawnay. I remember it from having been in the senior class of the Sunday school which used to meet on Sunday afternoons in its library, with walls lined with formidable-looking books and large windows looking out into the walled garden with its spacious lawns on which church fetes were held once a year. It has more recently been sold by the church and divided into two substantial residences. The church itself is also a fine medieval building, virtually unchanged from its modification in the Jacobean era, and is included in a book entitled *England's Thousand Best Churches*.¹⁷ At the west end is a choir gallery which in Lindsey's time would have been occupied not only by singers but by instrumentalists rather than an organ, as described in Thomas Hardy's *Under the Greenwood Tree*. The instruments included a bass viol, cello, oboe, clarinet, flute and bassoon. Violins were sometimes but not always tolerated, being tainted by their use for dances in taverns. Hardy is a good witness to what that little town used to be like; many of his family lived there and he himself spent the early part of his life within walking distance. It is called Weatherbury in his novels.

Though Lindsey took his parish responsibilities seriously in Puddletown, he also employed curates to take his place during his frequent absences. During his first year he made at least two extended visits to the Countess of Huntingdon's house near Bristol, a long day's journey by horseback. The following year he was with the countess in Brighton, where she had set up a chapel in which he preached, even being described by a later writer as having laid the foundation of Methodism in that town. He was also frequently in London, on one occasion at least for a couple of months, and made a similarly lengthy visit to Ireland.. The letter to Huntingdon already quoted was followed by a series of others in which Lindsey covered at length the political news and society gossip of the day, for the earl was at that point in Italy and had asked Lindsey to keep him informed of what was going on in England. Much of the gossip that he had not picked up by himself Lindsey seems to have retailed from the countess of Northumberland, with whom he was also in frequent correspondence, which included pressing invitations to her home. A few remarks in the letters to Huntingdon shed a little light on his personal attitudes, such as his patriotic comment that if war with France should break out, "I should not hesitate ... to carry a musket, if commanded to do it."¹⁸

To superficial appearances Lindsey appeared at this point to be happily settled. Though still unmarried, he had a palatial residence, a good income and many friends in the highest circles. There was no possibility of any of this being threatened by disturbances at his church, given the nature of his tenure. None the less, inwardly he was in torment. He had become acutely aware that he did not share the theology that was required of him by the Church of England both by his subscription to its 39 Articles and by his regularly officiating at its prescribed forms of worship. There was barely anyone close at hand from whom he could get counsel, and the person whom he had described as 'the guide of my life',¹⁹ his mother's lifelong friend in the Huntingdon family, Lady Anne Hastings, had just died. He had to share his wrestlings of conscience by correspondence, and he proceeded to write to one or two people, including Blackburne and the Countess of Huntingdon. The most comprehensive account of his thinking appears in a document he forwarded to the countess in July 1755, less than seven months after his arrival in Puddletown.

The salient points in this confession are as follows: "no clergyman can be admitted to minister in [the Church of England's] holy things, without declaring on oath that he will conform to the liturgy, etc., and that he thinks it agreeable to the will and word of God, and without subscribing his unfeigned assent and consent, etc. I myself declared this upon oath before the Bishop of Bristol ...But I do not conform, nor can I in conscience ever do it... I also did read the articles and publicly before God and in the congregation declared my unfeigned assent and consent, etc. Whereas at the very time itself, and much more since I have thought more deeply on the matter, I do dissent from these articles in many

respects and entirely condemn that authority which would impose them....

“To avoid the force of this when I read the articles publicly in the church and made the declaration, I added of my own accord, *so far only as they are agreeable to the word of God*. This I thought made the matter then easy to me. But I am now convinced that the forms subscribed and the sense of those who framed, appointed and imposed the whole system allow no such rights of private judgement nor admit of such after-explanations and abatements.

“I have therefore most assuredly been guilty of gross prevarication, lying and hypocrisy before the great God and my Saviour Jesus Christ, and double-dealing and insincerity before man. Such unfair and dishonest practice and equivocation would not be allowed in a court of justice. I can subscribe to nothing, nor it seems to me ought any one, but to the Holy Scriptures. They only are infallible.”²⁰

He did not in this document divulge, as he did years later in his *Apology*, that he had felt doubts about the doctrine of the Trinity, which had led him to a closer study of the Scriptures. “The more I searched”, he wrote, “the more I saw the little foundation there was for the doctrine commonly received and interwoven with all the public devotions of the church, and could not but be disturbed at a discovery so ill suiting my situation. For in the end I became fully persuaded, to use St Paul's express words ... that *'there is but one God the Father'*, and he alone to be worshipped.”²¹ That this way of thinking dated back beyond his crisis of conscience at Puddletown and accounted for many of his difficulties with the liturgy is apparent from a letter written at the time by another friend from whom he had sought advice, the eminent Whig politician Grey Cooper. Cooper, in turn seeking theological guidance he did not feel competent to give, said of Lindsey, “The doctrine of the Trinity in particular he stumbles at, believing the Father alone to be the One God...”²²

In his memorandum to the countess Lindsey went on to declare his “full resolution of ridding myself of my present bonds ... as soon as may be.” He needed only a little time to implement this decision “for should I quit at present, I know not where to go, nor have I morsel of bread to eat.” The countess, as well as the few other friends to whom he had communicated this intention to resign from the post to which he had so recently been appointed, did their best to argue him out of it. Cooper reported: “I pressed him at least to suspend his resolution for some time.”²³ Lindsey agreed to do so. Blackburne, who himself had similar reservations about the Articles, had satisfied his conscience by a refusal to make any further move from his current living, since such a move would have involved his having to sign the Articles again. He suggested to Lindsey that his calling as a minister put him under an obligation “prior to all engagements in church modes, and church nonsense in support of them.”²⁴

There appears to be no record of how Lindsey communicated his intention to resign to the Earl of Huntingdon, to whom he was indebted for the settlement. No doubt in the earl's mind this was simply a quibbling over forms of words no more significant than a request to bid someone “Good morning!” when one was totally indifferent to what kind of morning that person would have. If Lindsey wanted to starve on account of his stupid scruples over trifles, that was his affair. But when Lindsey changed his mind about leaving the earl was furious, not because he wanted to see Lindsey go, but because the decision to resign and later retraction was going to cost him, the earl, money. On receiving the news that Lindsey was leaving he had entered into an agreement to sell the advowson, and was now going to have to renege. For a while relations between the two men were distinctly cool, but three years later, in a letter to Lord Rawdon, husband of Huntingdon's sister, Lindsey wrote: “I must tell your Lordship that with regard to myself, all is now well betwixt my Lord [Huntingdon] and me, and I believe he rather rejoices at the choice I have made, though it was, by my wavering, such a disappointment to him.”²⁵

Undoubtedly the urging of his friends was an important factor in causing Lindsey to reconsider his decision to leave the church. But he had to satisfy himself with reasons that would at least quieten his conscience. In his later account of his decision he itemized three such reasons.

The first was that he loved the work of the ministry and felt that through it he could make a useful contribution to the life of the world. If he left the ministry he would deny himself the opportunity of making that contribution. He added that such rethinking did not include what he called “any worldly retrospects or motives, by which I was never much influenced. And beside, I had then a prospect of not being left entirely destitute of support, if I had gone out of the church.” Just what that prospect might have been he did not specify, but there were certainly openings for someone with his background. For instance, when he did leave, years later, the Earl of Huntingdon offered him a position as his librarian.

Lindsey's line of reasoning here was one employed by many others before and since in order to justify their remaining in a church with a theology into which they did not exactly fit, in order to do the work for the welfare of others that their position made possible. I remember a conversation I had years ago with the minister of a large and influential church in a small town. In the course of that conversation he admitted that he could properly be called a Unitarian, but if he followed the logic of that and joined the Unitarian body he would deprive himself of the opportunity of making the contribution for good to the life of that little town and its inhabitants that he could justifiably believe he was making.

Lindsey's second argument was much along the same lines and can be stated briefly in his own words: “Many worthy persons, and some of my own acquaintance, whose opinions varied little from mine, could nevertheless satisfy themselves so as to remain in the church and officiate in it. Why then, it often occurred to me – and others did not spare to remonstrate – why must I alone be so singularly nice and scrupulous, as not to comply with what wiser and better men could accommodate themselves to...?”²⁶ It must have occurred to him in the course of these reflections that if he did act on his first impulse and resign from the church, he was by implication passing judgement on people like Blackburne who decided to stay.

His third point was that the dilemma he faced was not of his making, and so he did not need to feel a personal responsibility for it. After the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, Parliament had had the option of setting up the national church on an inclusive basis which would have respected conscientious differences among its ministers and members. Instead, it had legislated so many restrictions that nearly two thousand ministers were ejected from their livings at that time for not accepting them, which left the country permanently divided in religion. Later Whig parliaments had modified some of these restrictive requirements, but most of them remained, embodied in the 39 Articles and the Book of Common Prayer, as well as in a number of supplementary pieces of legislation, including the act which specifically excluded Unitarians and Roman Catholics from toleration. It was of course, Lindsey argued, not his fault that things were as they were; why not then comply with what was legally required? In the meantime, it could be possible to work for further reform and gather support for it.

The cumulative effect of these reasonings persuaded Lindsey to reverse his decision to resign from Puddletown – a decision of which his parishioners had remained unaware, so there was no need for explanation to them. But he still could not find peace of mind without achieving some reconciliation of his belief that worship should be addressed solely to one God, the Father, with the trinitarian language he was obliged to use every time he officiated at a service. He was undoubtedly by now spending time in that library in the Puddletown vicarage doing a great deal of reading in what others had had to say on this subject, But the exact sequence of such reading is not recorded. The eminent nineteenth-century

Unitarian historian Alexander Gordon attempted to reconstruct this phase of Lindsey's thinking, and I quote his judgement:

“His examination was directed primarily, and almost exclusively, to the Scriptures. He enumerates no books of divinity, orthodox or heterodox, as having biased his judgement, though he tells us that he found confirmation of his results in statements of some of the early Fathers. The writings of Socinus, he distinctly tells us that he had not seen. We may find a clue to a proximate agency of his conversion. When accounting for his continuance in the Church, he quotes an argument of John Wallis, the Oxford mathematician and divine. With characteristic honesty he tells us whence he got the quotation; not directly from Wallis, but from an anonymous tract of which he gives the title. The tract was written by Stephen Nye, and is included in the second volume of Unitarian Tracts, belonging to the period 1687-97. We may fairly draw the inference that this volume at any rate was in Lindsey's possession at Piddletown, and materially contributed to the process of his change.”²⁷

Gordon was here primarily concerned with the sources of Lindsey's overall theology, which he came to call Unitarian, following the precedent set by the writers of those tracts from the previous century. Lindsey went beyond them, however, and beyond Socinus too, in saying that worship should be directed solely to the Father, and he eventually caused outrage by calling the worship of Christ idolatry. But the relevance here to Lindsey's concern in 1755 about following the prescribed forms of worship lies in what Nye, under the shelter of anonymity -- for he too was an Anglican parson -- quoted from Wallis. In response to the argument that the theology of the Church maintained that there was 'more than one divine Person, or more than one Person who is true and most high God', Wallis had replied:

“This reasoning is grounded on this silly mistake, that a Divine Person is as much as to say, a Divinity or God; when indeed a Divine Person is only a mode, or respect, or relation of God to his creatures. He beareth to his creatures these three relations, modes or respects, that he is their Creator, their Redeemer, their Sanctifier: this is what we mean when we say that God is three persons. He hath those three relations to his creatures, and is thereby no more three Gods than he was three Gods to the Jews because he calleth himself the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”²⁸

This, after all, is an idea that has been around since the early days of Christianity and is usually known as Sabellianism or modalism. Originally designed in response to critics who had argued that the trinitarian doctrines were making the Church in effect polytheistic rather than monotheistic, it was endorsed by so many figures in the eighteenth-century Church of England that it seems remarkable that Lindsey should have quoted it from a Unitarian tract. Perhaps, as Gordon implied, he had broader reasons for wanting to mention the tract in his *Apology*. At any rate, this kind of argument has had a renaissance in recent times, not least because of the feminist critique of the traditional Trinity as exclusively masculine.

But his acceptance of it enabled Lindsey to quieten his conscience for a while and continue his ministry at Puddletown. It was only later that he asked himself, as he put it in the *Apology*, “how I had been able to bring myself to imagine that I was worshipping the Father in spirit and in truth ... whilst I was addressing two other persons, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, and imploring favours of them in terms that implied their personality and distinct agency and Deity, as much as that of the Father.”²⁹ He might as well, he added, have adopted the Catholic invocation of the Virgin Mary and still fancied he was praying to the one God. Moreover, there was a certain duplicity in using language he interpreted in one way and his hearers in the congregation would certainly have interpreted in another. But all this was still in the future. His acceptance of Wallis's argument for the present freed him to turn his attention to other matters. The long series of gossipy letters to the Earl of Huntingdon continued.

As already mentioned, he accompanied the earl's mother, the countess, in her journeys to Brighton and preached for her there, presumably with no need for equivocation in that setting, though expected to display an evangelical fervour for which he was temperamentally ill-suited. He also began for the first time to cultivate an acquaintance with persons from the dissenting denominations whose outlook was similar to his own. Of these, the most significant was Thomas Hollis, a wealthy liberal Baptist and a benefactor, among other causes, of Harvard College, whose estate at Corscombe was within easy riding distance of Puddletown. Lindsey also visited him at his London home, meeting his wide circle of friends and associates who shared his liberal approach to religion and politics. Among these was William Harris, dissenting minister at Honiton in Devon, with whom Lindsey entered into correspondence, made occasional visits, and shared books.

The link with Blackburne and his family strengthened when Lindsey began a two-year courtship of Hannah Elsworth, daughter of Blackburne's wife by a previous marriage. They were married in 1760, Blackburne officiating. Lindsey was now 37, his bride only 20. Ditchfield records that "the marriage seems to have been a harmonious one, although there were no children. For the rest of his life Lindsey had the advantage of a wife who was well read, familiar with clerical duties and gifted with a medical knowledge which she frequently put to good use. Above all, she gave Lindsey the fullest possible support in his theological decisions, came to share his unitarian convictions, was an active partner in the foundation of the Essex Street chapel and dealt with his correspondence when he was ill. Lindsey's letters are replete with expressions of obligation and gratitude to his wife as religious collaborator as well as domestic partner."³⁰ Alexander Gordon's account of her, while corroborating most of this, adds another side to the picture. He quotes Catherine Cappe, who was closely acquainted with the Lindsey family at a later stage, as saying, "How often have I heard it regretted that Mr Lindsey had not married a person whose disposition and temper would have assimilated more completely with his own."

Hannah appears to have been a tough-minded independent spirit who "regarded very little what others might say or think." "Hence" said Gordon, "while Lindsey was by all beloved, his wife's capacity and virtues made her a very appreciable force, but failed to render her generally attractive." He added that Joseph Priestley had a very high opinion of her, but when he expressed in writing his assurance of his friend's eternal reunion with her in another world, a critic whom Gordon does not identify commented: "A very indifferent prospect for poor Lindsey."³¹

Their first years together in Puddletown seem to have been uneventful, though Lindsey's correspondence from that period has not survived, so details are lacking. The most notable event was the appointment of Northumberland, now a duke, to be Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. The duchess promptly wrote to Lindsey on her husband's behalf inviting him and his wife to accompany them as the duke's chaplain, promising to accommodate them in the vice-regal palace until there was some other opening. It would, she added, be a great favour to the duke and herself, who would greatly appreciate "the society of so kind and faithful a friend in a situation so new and untried."³² It did not need to be added that such a move would in due course result in appointment as a bishop in the Irish church, which in fact was what happened to the cleric who filled the post after Lindsey declined it. He had no ambition to make such conventional moves up the ladder, and was content to settle down as a parish priest in Puddletown.

The situation was altogether different, however, the following year, when the living at Catterick in Yorkshire suddenly fell vacant on the death of its incumbent. Other things being equal, this would not have been a temptation to a move from Puddletown. The climate was more severe, the income lower, the living quarters less palatial and the parish was sprawling and unwieldy. But other things were by no means equal. Catterick was only four miles from Richmond, which was Blackburne's parish.

Hannah Lindsey was elated at the prospect of being so near to her family and friends, and Lindsey himself was no less attracted to being in the vicinity of his old friend and mentor. There was the problem of having to subscribe again to the 39 Articles and to accept the Book of Common Prayer as totally in accordance with the word of God, which Lindsey had followed Blackburne in intending never to do again, but at this point he swallowed hard and convinced himself that it was no different really from what he was already doing at his services every week.

The advowson for Catterick was in the hands of the Crown, but by this time Huntingdon had the office of groom of the stole for George III, and thereby had access to the king. Lindsey asked him to use his influence, the earl obliged, and the road was opened. The Lindseys moved to Catterick in November, 1763. The heretic from Puddletown was there no longer -- a quite unusual kind of move, for Lindsey's predecessor Dawnay had died in office after a 32-year ministry, while for the following two centuries there were only eight incumbents – an average ministry of over 25 years.

I briefly sketch the remainder of Lindsey's career only for the sake of completeness, this being the most familiar part of his story. He applied himself diligently at Catterick to the work of a parish minister, but his mental tribulations were not at an end. Two major events triggered them anew. The first was the resignation of a minister of the Church of Ireland, William Robertson, on exactly the same grounds as had led Lindsey to contemplate his own resignation, and he felt shamed by this example of moral integrity. Secondly, Joseph Priestley had moved to Yorkshire and while not a close neighbour was a frequent visitor to Lindsey's new circle. Eventually they became very close friends. Their theological views were closely compatible, but as a Dissenting minister Priestley, as Lindsey noted enviously, was not tied down by the requirements imposed upon him. However, apart from the doctrinal requirements, Lindsey loved the Established Church and had no wish to move over to Dissent, though he had some attractive offers.

What he really wanted was to see the Church of England reformed on a more inclusive basis, and he decided to make one last desperate effort to achieve this. Together with Blackburne he initiated a petition to Parliament, which alone had the power to change the constitution and forms of worship prescribed by law, and travelled the country collecting signatures. The petition was debated in the House of Commons in February 1772 and rejected by a vote of 217 to 71. For a few months Lindsey clung to the forlorn hope that it might yet be reintroduced and succeed, but it had lost its momentum and never regained it. Lindsey now accepted the logic of the situation and resigned, wrote his *Apology* explaining what this was all about, moved to London, and set about establishing an independent model of the church he had hoped to see, with an avowedly Unitarian theology and using the Anglican Book of Common Prayer amended only so far as was necessary to accommodate it to this theology. "My design", he wrote, "is to try to gather a church of Unitarian Christians out of the Established Church... to awaken others to come out of Babylon, [out of] her witchcraft and idolatries."³³

Though his pilot project drew sufficient support to continue as a congregation, his hope that he might precipitate an exodus from the Establishment was certainly disappointed. Most of his colleagues with similar views were not prepared to sacrifice their comfortable positions, and it was only after great difficulty that he was able to find an ex-Anglican co-minister and successor for his own congregation. In the end it was absorbed into the stream of Dissenting congregations, and the only lasting impact was to stimulate in some of them a taste for liturgical worship. But it took its place in history as the first congregation in England with an openly declared Unitarian basis, though others had evolved to a point where they were already in effect Unitarian and eventually so declared themselves.

NOTES

I have used conventional English spelling consistently, rather than Lindsey's sometimes abbreviated or idiosyncratic spellings.

1. B.W. Young: article on Francis Blackburne in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.
2. Conrad Wright: *The Beginnings of Unitarianism in America*, Boston, 1955, pp. 211-212; Thomas Belsham: *Memoirs of Theophilus Lindsey*, Centenary edn, London, 1873, p. 156.
3. G.M. Ditchfield (ed.) *The Letters of Theophilus Lindsey*, Vol. I, 1747-1788, Woodbridge, 2007, pp. 76, 80.
4. Monica Hutchings: *Inside Dorset*, 2nd edn., Sherborne, 1968, p. 97.
5. A.L. Helps: *St Mary's Church, Puddletown*, revised edn., 1955; O.D. Harvey: *Puddletown: a Short History*, Puddletown, 1968.
6. John Hutchins: *History of Dorset*, 3rd edn., revised, 1973 reprint, Vol. 2, p. 625.
7. Published in the USA by Boydell Press, 668 Mount Hope Ave, Rochester, NY 14620-2731.
8. Ditchfield, *op. cit.*, p. 491.
9. *The Apology of Theophilus Lindsey*, 4th edn., reprinted, London 1888, p. 148
10. *Ibid.*
11. Ditchfield, *op. cit.*, p. 492.
12. S. Chandler, 1750, as quoted by W.A. Speck: *Stability and Strife, England 1714-1760*, Cambridge, MA, 1977, p. 104.
13. J. Brown, 1758, as quoted by Speck, *op. cit.* p. 98.
14. Ditchfield, *op. cit.*, p.84.
15. Ditchfield, *op. cit.*, p. 35.
16. Ditchfield, *op. cit.*, p. 67.
17. Simon Jenkins: *England's Thousand Best Churches* (Ditchfield, *op.cit.*, p. xxxii.
18. Ditchfield, *op. cit.*, p. 39.
19. Ditchfield, *op. cit.*, p. 45.
20. Ditchfield, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-47.

21. Lindsey; *Apology*, p. 149
22. Ditchfield, *op. cit.*, p. xxxvii.
23. Ditchfield, *op. cit.*, p. xxxviii.
24. Alexander Gordon: *Addresses Biographical and Historical*, London, 1922, p. 249.
25. Ditchfield, *op. cit.*, p.75.
26. Lindsey: *Apology*, pp. 151-152.
27. Gordon, *op. cit.*, pp. 246-247.
28. Lindsey: *Apology*, pp. 154-155.
29. Lindsey: *Apology*, p. 157.
30. Ditchfield, *op.cit.*, pp. xxxv-xxxvi.
31. Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 253.
32. Belsham, *op,cit*, p. 9.
33. Gordon, *op. cit.*, pp. 265, 267.

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