THE VISIT OF A POTTER

TO SALENDINE NOOK IN 1723

A letter deposited in the manuscript collection of the City Museum, Stoke upon Trent, gives an interesting insight into the activities of the Salendine Nook church at an early date. The origins of the congregation can be dated back to a registration of 1689 of the house of Michael Morton, a Presbyterian potter from Scotland who had migrated south. This is one of twenty such places that William Mitchel lists as places he preached at in 1691, and which together formed what came to be known as the Rossendale Confederacy. By 1710 this group of churches had adopted Baptist beliefs, though in the process breaking up into separate churches. The small group at Lindley Moor (or Linlow Moor or Salendine Nook) now became an outpost of the church which met at Rodhill End and Stoneslack, formed in 1717 under the pastoral oversight of Thomas Greenwood. Four years earlier an application had been made for the registration of two houses, one in his name at Heptonstall and the other in the name of John Morton in Quarmby (of which Lindley Moor was a part). By 1739 this congregation was using the title of Salendine Nook and in 1743, still numbering only eleven members, it became an independent church with Henry Clayton as its first minister, who had been preaching for them since 1731.[1]

The addressee of the letter is Richard Wedgwood (of Smallwood and Spen Green, 1700-82), father-in-law to Josiah, who, although associated with the pottery industry in his youth, subsequently became a prosperous cheese-merchant with wide business connections over South Cheshire and North Staffordshire. After his wife died, he came to live with his famous son-in-law at Etruria, and the record is one of exceptionally good relations. The Wedgwood family were closely associated through several generations with the Old Meeting House in Newcastle-under-Lyme, originally Presbyterian but by the time of William Willetts, brother-in-law to Josiah Wedgwood, and minister at Newcastle from 1727 for almost half a century, a majority of the congregation, including its minister, inclined to Unitarian beliefs. There is evidence of a group of continuing orthodox members, though Wedgwood was not one of them.[2]

William Harrison, like Wedgwood, moved away from the Potteries but in his case retained his existing trade and established a pottery at Bretton in Yorkshire, six miles south-west of Wakefield, for a short period from c.1723-26. He is identified by an entry in the parish registers of the neighbouring church of St Helen's, Sandal (three miles south of Wakefield), which records: 'January 28 1737/8 William Harrison of Bretton, potter, a Presbyterian buried, affidavit before Mr John Burton, curate of Hoyland'.[3]

It seems inescapable that Harrison, as both a Presbyterian and a potter, must have had some contact with the Morton family, a much more substantial potting dynasty in that area. Mortons are recorded in the parish registers of Lindley-cum-Quarmby from 1676 and continue in the area to the present. A family split in the nineteenth century led to this traditional country pottery being physically split in two: the northern part traded as Joseph Morton & Sons, becoming in the twentieth century 'Lindley Moor Potteries' *until closure in 1945; the southern part traded as Enos Morton & Sons and is still worked today by Mr Harold Morton as 'Lindley Moor* Pottery', *on the Laund Road site in Salendine Nook. There were other Morton potteries in the area: the Exley Potovens at Southowram, Halifax, were worked by John Morton from at least 1774. Half a mile away the Cinderhills Potteries were operated by John Morton from at least 1781, proprietorship having been secured in 1785. At Salendine Nook there seems to have been a family feud in the nineteenth century which led to the separation of the Smallware and the Largeware Potworks, which even went to the extent of building a*

wall down the centre of the warehouse. In the latter nineteenth century the works were reunited and continued trading into the twentieth century.[4]

The letter to Wedgwood is of interest not only in indicating something of the domestic life of provincial presbyterianism of the early eighteenth century but in providing outside testimony to the early history of Salendine Nook Chapel. Clearly, if perhaps only on special occasions, though such is not indicated, a sizeable congregation, greatly in excess of membership, could be collected in this sparsely populated area: twenty years later the membership was still only twenty. Harrison bears clear witness to the quality of the preaching (at a date too early for Henry Clayton); possibly the preacher was Thomas Greenwood, who had pastoral oversight of Salendine Nook and who presumably preached there on occasions, though normally undertaking duty at Rodhill End and Stoneslack). The choice of a text from Matthew concerning the need for prayer and fasting is also of interest.

For
Mr. Richard Wedgwood
Liveing att Burslem near
the redLyon at his fathers
house
- Staffordshire
present
These

Dated att Great Bretton Sep^{r}
16 - 1723

friend Richard

to tell you sheets are very scarce In this town they allowing But one for a bed - or to say sheets of paper are as hard to come by as Linnen sheets is not a reasonable Excuse therefore I plead Guilty - I am sorry that you never heard from me nay at present I cannot forgive my self for my ungratefull carrage - tho I know not what I could have written which would have paid the charge of reading - it was agreat trouble to me to Leave Staffordshire a great while after I cam here But those thoughts Begin to wear off-onely the thoughts of my friends oft slide Into my head of which I rank your self as chife - But not to say any more to this purpose Least I seem womanish - I like yorkshire very well my health is pretty good this countrey is agreeable Enough and very much Like our own - tho there is a wide Difference between the people there speech is meer nonsens and unacountably foolish - But now I pretty well understand them which a stranger cannot for there words are so hard I Defie any Dictionary to find out the meaning nay which is more they cannot be spelled till such times as there is a new alphabet of Letters Invented - I suppose you hear we got on well with our Business and have good sale for our pots - we have great numbers come Daily to se us make pots and very much admire our Art In the poting trade they have very odd notions concerning it - I think one holyday we had three or four score the greater part were of the fair sex - I am not Engaged with any sweet heart at present tho several women In Effect have offered them selves willingly and are filled with wonder to se me not much Inclined that way any say I court such a one and such a one persons to whome I never moved my hat or opened my Lips -