

The Episcopal Congregation of Charlotte Chapel, Edinburgh 1792-1818

SLIDE 1

This is a brief overview of my methodology, questions, and some findings so far.

SLIDE 2

I don't like history jargon much but for my methodology I've found two of the longest I could.

Microhistory: I'm looking in detail at one chapel over a short period of time, 25 years, in the hope that this will be like a small torch which sheds light on a big historical theme, British society and culture at the turn of the 19thC.

Edinburgh was something of a cultural capital in Britain at this period:

Most professionalised city in Britain (I believe it still is)

Literary leader: Edinburgh Review, Walter Scott

Thanks to Henry Dundas, the sons of Edinburgh were leaders in India

Tourist destination following the closure of Europe in the Napoleonic Wars

And Charlotte Chapel was, for most of this period, the only place of worship at the west end of the New Town, where most the protagonists in this story lived.

SLIDE 3

My other long word is prosopography. The registers of baptisms, weddings and funerals, plus a few others, have given me the names of 416 people. Prosopography means 'collective biography', so the main part of my research is finding out as much as possible about each of them. Here are a few of them.

SLIDE 4

While I would not consider my PhD to be 'ecclesiastical history', I want to examine whether the congregation of Charlotte Chapel shared beliefs and values, so religion in a broad sense.

The clergyman who founded the chapel and was rector throughout this period was Daniel Sandford. He is generally forgotten in the Episcopal Church, but quite a lot of his sermons and letters are available and his son wrote a biography of him.

He was deeply religious -- after his death someone described him as 'a true saint'. His sympathies were with both evangelicals and non-juring Episcopalians, at a time when this sort of deep piety was not necessarily expected or valued in episcopal clergy. As he was preaching to the people who were shaping British culture, he perhaps helped to create the 19thC culture of piety.

He was a younger son of the Sandfords of Sandford Hall, Shropshire, who came over with the Conqueror, and he had a quiet but very deep reverence for family. When he needed to recruit an assistant minister he chose Rev Charles Lane, a younger son of the Lanes of Kings Bromley, who also came over with the Conqueror.

He was a scholar: his first job when he moved to Edinburgh was teaching Greek, and he encouraged the teaching of Hebrew to ordinands. His sermons are full of biblical exegesis. He didn't dumb down.

He was a peacemaker: he was active in reuniting the divided Episcopal Church and became the first bishop of the new diocese of Edinburgh in 1806.

He kept at least two controversies which threatened to split the Episcopal Church under control: his letters about them show what a good diplomat he was, seeing the good in both sides and keeping his own opinions very quiet. Both controversies flared up and split the church after his

death. I suspect that this is why he has been forgotten by Episcopal historians: during his tenure, nothing happened.

SLIDE 5

Who was in Sandford's congregation? The Scottish Episcopal church was known as a church of the elite, often described as exclusive or uppish, and Charlotte Chapel has been assumed to be similar.

This chart shows the members of the congregation by social status: the red ones are what contemporaries called 'polite society', the green ones are what James Craig described on his new town plan as 'shopkeepers and others', The blue ones are people I haven't identified, but who are probably not 'polite society'. So it was a high status congregation, but it wasn't exclusive: it was a real social mixture. Did this social mixture affect the attitudes and culture of the congregation?

SLIDE 6

I've been looking at where members of the congregation came from, or owned estates.

One myth this has dispelled is that Charlotte Chapel was opened for 'English families residing in Edinburgh' as Daniel Sandford's biography stated and which has been quoted ever since. Only about five per cent of the congregation appear to have come from England: most were Scots.

SLIDE 7

Many had connections with the Scottish Episcopal heartlands in the north.

SLIDE 8

I'm also looking at connections between the chapel and the Empire.

SLIDE 9

I'm probably more of an intellectual and cultural historian than anything else: I'm really interested in what they thought and believed.

One part of this is finding out who was Whig and who was Tory, which was the famous bipolar split in Edinburgh society at the time. Charlotte Chapel was not a partisan church: both sides were well represented.

But what is more interesting is an idea I'm pursuing that Charlotte Chapel was at the centre of an idealistic and subversive coalition in Edinburgh which was changing the culture of the city. I'm joining the dots between various events:

The controversy over the election of John Leslie to the chair of Mathematics in 1805

The foundation of Lancastrian schools for the poor in 1812

And the founding of the Edinburgh Academy in 1823.

What these events have in common is that Episcopalians and evangelical presbyterians, or in the case of the Edinburgh Academy Whigs and Tories connected with Charlotte Chapel, collaborated on a project which effectively undermined the stranglehold which the Kirk and the Town Council attempted to maintain on civic life.

While it might seem obvious that allegiances in Edinburgh were more complicated than a two-party split, the complexities are not particularly well studied: historians have usually been interested either in Whigs and Tories, or in Evangelicals and Moderates, or in the history of one institution like the Edinburgh Academy or Scottish Episcopal Church.

So unexpectedly, my microhistory approach has allowed me to take a broader view and join up some of these dots, and hopefully provide some new insights.

SLIDE 10

The final area I want to look at is the people's private life. Here are just two rather sad stories from the wonderful collection I am building, as examples.

John Hall was a publican who lived at 34 Castle Street: Here's his house: I think it's that wee thin bit. His children Margaret, James, Jane and Charlotte were baptised in Charlotte Chapel between 1811 and 1815, but John died of typhus in 1816: it is almost the only time a cause of death was recorded in the funeral register. His wife Ellen, with her four little children, carried on the pub for a year: she is listed in the Post Office Directory, but then she disappears. It would be nice to think she remarried, but I don't know.

Adelaide Falconar, on the other hand, was a daughter of Andrew Falconar, who had made an enormous fortune as Chief Secretary to the Governor of Madras. She lived in this wonderful mansion on a big estate in Morningside, two miles south of Edinburgh, which Falconar had purchased, renamed Falcon Hall, and extended with this classical portico. The sight of Adelaide and her four sisters, attended by two footmen, driving in their yellow carriage into Edinburgh to go to Charlotte Chapel was one of the great sights of Morningside. But despite his wealth, three of Andrew's daughters died before him, as did three of his infant grandchildren. In 1875 the surviving unmarried sister paid for the chancel of the new Episcopal Church in Morningside. Perhaps she had found consolation for so much family tragedy in the piety of Bishop Daniel Sandford.