

BLACKBURN NONCONFORMITY: AN EARLIER EPISODE

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A recent article discussed the internal politics of Chapel Street Independent chapel at Blackburn during a ministry which terminated tragically in 1883.¹ Attention was drawn to similarities with the circumstances which led to the retirement of the previous minister in 1863. A source unknown to Mrs Grace Shrouder, the collector of the material used in the article, refers to the retirement of an even earlier minister, Luke Foster, who served the chapel from 1824 to 1832 and resigned under circumstances which again have similarities with the episodes of 1863 and 1883: in brief, congregational pressures on the minister and disagreements between himself and the deacons. I am indebted to Mrs Dorothy A. Canham for showing me the extract published below from the notebook (in her possession) of her great-great-grandfather William Hindle Ashburn (1802–67), a deacon of the chapel; and for permitting the extract to be published.

Aug 5 [1832]

The Revd. Luke Forster (the Minister for about [blank, should be 7] years at the Independent Chapel, Chapel St.) preached his last sermon from Rom. 14 c & 12 v. He stated that his reasons for confining his last discourse to the young were—that his labours had been most successful

1 Grace Shrouder and P. E. H. Hair, 'Death of a minister: an episode of Victorian nonconformity in the North-West', *T.H.S.L.C.*, CLXIV (1995), pp. 153–80.

amongst them—that from them he had received the greatest marks of kindness and esteem—that he had never preached a sermon to the young which had not been followed by one or more conversion—of the older part of his hearers on the contrary he regretted that his ministry did not appear to have been attended with anything gratifying.

He betrayed symptoms of chagrin and disappointment that he was under the necessity [*sic*] of leaving—he stated that he did not leave them because he was unwilling to minister to them. He talked of the doors being closed against him—of persons having prejudiced the minds of the young against the minister—He seemed to regard any indications of disapprobation of his ministry as originating in the worst feelings of the heart and uniformly treated them as unworthy of common courtesy—He left Blackburn on the 9th inst. His friends were not numerous but such as he had were greatly attached to him and his pastoral care was almost exclusively confined to them, but he would never go out of his way to conciliate were [*sic*] there was disaffection which may account for the tender affection of some and the virulent opposition of others.

Some of the circumstances attending his removal are the following—Some time since Mr. W. Eccles received a letter from a person at Saffron Walden in Essex that Mr Forster was carrying on a correspondence with the Church there with respect to his supplying as a candidate—No intimation of such correspondence having been received by the Church here, Mr. Eccles wrote him a letter enclosing the one he had received requesting to be informed if the facts stated in the letter were correct to which he received one in reply that such was the case—By and by he set out to the above place to supply as a candidate for 2 Sabbaths—Two or three weeks after his return he sent a communication to the deacons here that he had received a pressing call from the said Church and that he was incompetent from bodily weakness to perform the duties which he was here called upon to fulfil—The communication was immediately made known to the a [*sic*] meeting of the Church convened for that purpose and in reference to the subjects of that letter it was discussed whether for the sake of securing Mr. F. continuance it would be advisable to raise the Pew Rents to raise a salary for a Lecturer [as assistant minister]—whether it would be proper to discontinue one of the services or whether it would be prudent to raise a subscription for the support of a Lecturer but none of these modes was determined upon—The principal feeling was decidedly against them—The meeting deputed Mr. W. Eccles and the Deacons to wait upon Mr. F. for the purpose of a conference & to ascertain his wishes as to what course should be pursued.

Mr. F. declined a conference by stating that he had no wish in consequence of what had passed at the meeting to enter into the subject. That they left him no alternative—meaning that he should leave—Another meeting was called to lay before them the result of the interview when after mutual ex[h]ortations to forbearance and Christian goodwill Mr. Biggar again recommended the Deacons to wait upon Mr. F. but it turned out that Mr. B. was mistaken and nothing satisfactory was elicited. It was asserted by Mr. F. that a majority of the congregation was favourable to the adoption of measures to secure his stay amongst them but the contrary was contended

by all the Deacons except Mr. Biggar to be the fact. The Deacons then determined as far as they were concerned to let the matter rest till Mr. F. should make up his mind on the subject. A few days after (25th June) another meeting was called when Mr Hauge (?) the pastor of Ebenezer Chapel, Darwen, read Mr. F.'s resignation. Mr. Biggar was called to the chair and contrary to the general rule on such occasions moved a resolution which was overruled by an amendment proposed by Mr. G. Wardlow—That the meeting regretted the existence of the circumstances which rendered it necessary for the Church to accept the resignation of Mr. F. which was then read.²

2 According to Mrs Shrouder's dissertation, Forster (Foster) was aged 25 when he took up his first ministry at Chapel Street chapel; while in Blackburn three of his four children died and his health deteriorated; and after leaving he died at the age of 40.

