

# JOHN BERRIDGE AND EARLY EVANGELICAL FRIENDSHIP NETWORKS<sup>1</sup>

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One of the distinguishing characteristics of early evangelicalism was its development of informal clerical networks.<sup>2</sup> Unlike the second generation of evangelicals and Methodists which actively worked on forging formal domestic and transatlantic connections, early bonds were established primarily through a shared evangelical vision, a habitual exchange of pulpits, the regular use of the familiar letter to interact over news and ideas, and resulting friendships which only deepened over time and through shared experiences.<sup>3</sup>

Central figures of the Revival, though living and travelling at varying distances from each other, were remarkably well-acquainted with one another. Not surprisingly, those living in closer proximity had greater opportunity for regular connection and at times organized themselves into Clerical clubs with the goal of fanning into flame the sparks of revival witnessed in their neighbouring parishes.<sup>4</sup>

Through these informal networks, deep friendships were formed and it was through these friendships that much of the work of revival was carried out. More importantly, it was through the strength of these friendships that 'awakened' curates and vicars, often isolated in their pastoral work, were able to sustain their evangelical vision and pass this vision to the following generation.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper analyses the friendship network between John Berridge of Everton, Bedfordshire (1716–1793), John Newton of Olney (1725–1807) and Henry Venn of Yelling (1724–1797).

<sup>2</sup> See Bruce Hindmarsh, *John Newton and the English Evangelical Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 240–256.

<sup>3</sup> For a survey of Transatlantic Evangelicalism, see Richard Carwardine, *Transatlantic Revivalism: Popular Evangelicalism in Britain and America, 1790–1865* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 1978).

<sup>4</sup> In a letter from nonconformist minister, Pisdon Darracott to Henry Venn in 1754, Darracott makes reference to the emergence of such networks in the parish of noted evangelical, Samuel Walker of Truro. He writes, 'One day in a month is set apart for the meeting of neighbouring Clergymen, a scheme of our worthy Friend, which God has blessed to the awakening Ministers, who from careless, and formal Preachers are become livers, and preachers of the everlasting Gospel.' The purpose of these clerical networks, Darracott continues, was to 'strengthen each other's Hands in the work of ye Lord, and that the good Effects of it have already spread through their several Parishes, and seems likely to diffuse its influence yet much further amongst Clergy and Laity.' G.C.B. Davies, *The Early Cornish Evangelicals, 1735–60* (London: S.P.C.K., 1951), pp. 172–173.

Friendship mattered a great deal to John Berridge. As Berridge's evangelical convictions expanded so too did his network of friends, and it was this informal network of friends which helped sustain Berridge's evangelical vision throughout his ministry. This connection between friendship and vision was expressed in Berridge's increasing willingness to share his pulpit and his house with neighbouring evangelical clergy, visiting preachers, and itinerating lay evangelists. These invitations combined with his own visitations to other pulpits served to keep the evangelical emphasis of evangelism and conversion at the forefront in Berridge's life and ministry.

Of the visiting clergy, two of Berridge's closest friends, John Newton (1725–1807) and Henry Venn (1724–1797) loom large in the history of the evangelical movement.<sup>5</sup> Both men had pastorates within twenty miles of Everton with Newton pastoring in Olney and Venn in neighbouring Yelling.

Newton had made Berridge's acquaintance shortly after he arrived in Everton in 1758. During the winter that year, Newton wrote to his wife, Polly, 'I have some thought of calling upon Mr. Berridge in my way and spending Sunday with him.' One week later, Newton again wrote home, 'I reached Mr. Berridge on Sunday...and could not get away till Monday noon. I must be glad and thankful that Providence has permitted me to go there, though it has cost me two days more absence from you. He is a charming man and a wonderful work indeed is going on under his ministry, which I could never have rightly conceived of without examining upon the spot.'<sup>6</sup> Five years later, Newton left Liverpool and took up a curacy in Olney, Buckinghamshire. Berridge, already six years into his ministry at Everton welcomed the arrival of Newton to the region and a lively exchange of letters commenced, leading to an ever-deepening friendship between the two men.

In 1771, Henry Venn, suffering from poor health, moved from the large parish of Huddersfield, Yorkshire to the quieter living in Yelling near Cambridge. Berridge's relationship with Venn extended back to his days at Cambridge and so it was no surprise that he was delighted to hear the news of his friend's arrival to his region. In fact, when Berridge wrote Newton in June inviting him to pay a visit to Everton, he also encouraged him to drop in on Venn on his way home to welcome him to the area. '[Y]ou might ride over, if you thought proper, to Mr. Venn,

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<sup>5</sup> For an excellent biography on John Newton, see Jonathan Aitken, *John Newton: From Disgrace to Amazing Grace* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007). For Henry Venn, see Bill Reimer, 'The Spirituality of Henry Venn,' in *Churchman* (114/4), 2000.

<sup>6</sup> John Newton to his wife, 28 December 1758 and 3 January 1759 in Marilyn Rouse, *Quotes: John Newton on John Berridge* (unpublished).

who is expected this week at Yelling, which is only nine measured miles from Everton.<sup>7</sup>

One of the ways that the friendship between Berridge, Newton, and Venn served to sustain an evangelical vision was through the regular exchange of ideas, books, and writings. Newton often sent Berridge writing projects that both he and his friend and poet, William Cowper (1731–1800) had been working on. In doing so, Newton humbly solicited Berridge's comments and critiques. In March, 1771, Berridge wrote to Newton thanking him for sending a collection of sermons (which he had already possessed) and his *Ecclesiastical History* that Newton had recently completed. Berridge comments:

I like your Ecclesiastical History much; but am rather sorry you have undertaken to carry it through; sorry for your sake, not the readers. I fear it will chill your spirit and deaden your soul. Much writing is pernicious. Besides, you must read over many dry and barren histories; you must bring to light many controversies, foolish or noxious, which had better lie buried fifty fathoms deep...<sup>8</sup>

When Newton and Cowper published their Olney hymns in 1779, Berridge was delighted to receive a copy of his friends' labour.<sup>9</sup> In a letter to John Thornton, Berridge gave the work his stamp of approval expressing special appreciation towards the accessible style of the hymns with 'language intelligible to all believers; and the sense sufficiently closing at the end of each line.'<sup>10</sup>

When Newton published his first set of letters as 'Omicron' Berridge was not fooled by the pseudonym, but recognized the penmanship of his good friend. In 1775, Berridge wrote to Thornton exposing the hidden identity as he waited for an impending visit from both 'Omicron' and Venn. 'I suppose by the matter and style that shame-faced Omicron is Mr. Newton. He wears a mask, but cannot hide his face. Pithiness and candour will betray the Curate of Olney, notwithstanding his veil of

<sup>7</sup> 'Letter to John Newton, 10 June 1771' in John Berridge, *The Whole Works of the Rev. John Berridge, A.M., with a Memoir of his life by the Rev. Richard Whittingham* (London: Paternoster Row, 1864), p. 366.

<sup>8</sup> 'Letter to John Newton, 13 March 1771' in Berridge, *Works*, pp. 363–364. It is ironic that Berridge wrote this right in the midst of the Calvinist Controversy in which he would become embroiled.

<sup>9</sup> Berridge himself had written his hymn book in 1774, but did not publish it until 1785.

<sup>10</sup> 'Letter to John Thornton, 27 July 1775' in Berridge, *Works*, p. 395. There seems to be an error in the dating of this letter. It reads '1775,' but it is placed in the chronological sequence of '1779.' Given that the Olney Hymns were published in 1779, this date makes more sense.

a Greek signature. I expect him at Everton to-day, and a convey from Yelling Rectory.<sup>11</sup>

At times, honest feedback and too much forthrightness got Berridge in trouble with his friends. For example, in reviewing William Cowper's works, Berridge suggested that 'a grain of insanity' ran through Cowper's poems with some lines being difficult to read and certain words as puzzling to the mind as a 'Hebrew root.'<sup>12</sup> Not surprisingly, Cowper was less than appreciative of the review and apparently indicated to Berridge as much. Realizing that he had perhaps been a bit too frank in his comments, Berridge backtracked and sought to make amends. In a letter to Newton, Berridge wrote, 'I did not expect a reply from Mr. Cowper, but came off as well as I could expect. It is beneath a good poet to heed the vituperation of a crazy old Vicar.'<sup>13</sup> From that point, Berridge was largely complimentary to Cowper indicating in a letter in 1785 that his poems 'were excellent' but had 'too much gospel for the world, and too little for most believers.'<sup>14</sup>

Even as late as 1788, Berridge still regularly offered feedback and constructive criticisms of the written publications of his friends. In fact, that year Berridge undertook the task of editing and adding commentary to a project that his good friend, John Thornton was working on: the revision of the daily devotional, Bogatzky's *Golden Treasury*. In a letter that year, Berridge assured his friend that he would devote his 'leisure hours' to the work at hand, but warned Thornton that his itinerant preaching schedule would restrict how much time he could spare in the project. In the end though, Berridge committed to do his best and hoped for his 'favourable acceptance of it.'<sup>15</sup>

Living in close proximity with one another offered numerous opportunities not only for visits, but also to preach in one another's pulpits. Throughout the correspondence between Newton, Venn, and Berridge are numerous references to pulpit exchanges. Over the years, Berridge and Venn entered each other's respective pulpits with regularity. On 22 November 1771, Venn wrote, 'Last Wednesday Mr. Berridge was here, and gave us a most excellent sermon. He is a blessed man—a true Calvinist; not hot in doctrine, nor wise above what is written, but practical and experimental.'<sup>16</sup> Again on 7 December 1773, 'Dear Mr. Berridge preaches for me every month; happy am I in having such a loving, fervent minister of Christ.'<sup>17</sup>

<sup>11</sup> 'Letter to John Thornton, 10 August 1774' in Berridge, *Works*, p. 385.

<sup>12</sup> 'Letter to John Newton, 13 April 1782' in Berridge, *Works*, p. 406.

<sup>13</sup> 'Letter to John Newton, 17 September 1782' in Berridge, *Works*, p. 408.

<sup>14</sup> 'Letter to John Newton, 12 November 1785' in Berridge, *Works*, p. 417.

<sup>15</sup> 'Letter to John Thornton, 21 September 1788,' in Berridge, *Works*, p. 521.

<sup>16</sup> 'Letter to the Rev James Stillingfleet, 22 November 1771' in Henry Venn, *The Letters of Henry Venn* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1993), p. 191.

<sup>17</sup> 'Letter to Miss Wheler, 7 December 1773' in Venn, *Letters*, p. 206.

To Berridge, the habitual exchange of pulpits was a healthy exercise for pastors to undertake not simply for evangelistic reasons, but also for promoting the personal growth of a minister. In 1771, thanking Newton for making the journey to Everton that summer, Berridge promises to return the favour and then reflects on the practice, 'I trust your labour of love is not in vain. Removing from camp to camp is of use to a Christian soldier, and more especially to a Christian sergeant. It shakes dust from our clothes, and rust from our joint, and promotes activity, the true spirit of a soldier. Without excursions we are apt to grow timid, and to settle on our lees.'<sup>18</sup>

Pulpit exchange was not always an easy endeavour. Rural roads were sometimes made impassable because of inclement weather thus making travel—even short distances—difficult. Adding to the logistical challenges was the opposition that was frequently shown towards evangelicals such as Berridge in various towns. In the autumn of 1773, Berridge wrote to Newton hoping that his 'dear neighbour, Mr. Venn' would take the letter to Olney. Early that year, Berridge had planned to send another letter to Newton only to discover that Newton was already planning to make another visit to Everton. Desiring to return the favour, Berridge informed Newton that he longed to make a journey to Olney but his controversial work, *Christian World Unmasked* had stirred up trouble in Bedford, his mid-way travel point from Everton to Olney thus preventing him from making the journey. Berridge meekly concludes his letter by writing, 'I hope Mr. Venn's visit will provoke a returning visit from you this autumn, and I entreat you not to pass by Everton without warming a bed and a pulpit. If the Lord gives me strength, I will pay off all my debts; but if I am forced to be insolvent, do you act like a generous Christian, and continue your loans.'<sup>19</sup>

Through their visitation and correspondence, Berridge, Newton, and Venn often kept watch for 'newly enlightened' or potential young preachers in the area that they could encourage and mentor. In 1780, Berridge wrote to Newton that he was planning to preach at a parish church in Ickleford where 'Mr. Peers...is newly enlightened to preach Jesus, and desires help from evangelical brethren. Sixteen years ago I preached in one of his neighbouring barns, and now am invited to preach in his church.'<sup>20</sup> Berridge then notes of another 'gospel curate' in the neighbouring town of Royston and remarks that 'Christ is opening many doors to spread the gospel.'<sup>21</sup>

Emerging alongside the 'newly enlightened' gospel preachers in the region were certain young men who had evangelical inclinations and were

<sup>18</sup> 'Letter to John Newton, 18 October 1771' in Berridge, *Works*, p. 367.

<sup>19</sup> 'Letter to John Newton, 20 September 1773' in Berridge, *Works*, pp. 376–377.

<sup>20</sup> 'Letter to John Newton, 12 December 1780' in Berridge, *Works*, p. 402.

<sup>21</sup> 'Letter to John Thornton, 17 September 1782' in Berridge, *Works*, p. 407.

seeking entry into the pastorate. It was these men that Berridge regularly sought out and actively mentored. One such young man was Henry Venn's son, John Venn (1759–1813). Berridge was extremely fond of the young Venn and wrote as much to John Thornton in 1781 expressing his admiration of not only John but all of Venn's family, 'Jacky is the top branch of the tree, highest and humblest. His abilities seem equal to anything he undertakes, and his modesty is pleasing to all that behold him.'<sup>22</sup> From all indications, Berridge remained connected to John Venn, often writing letters of spiritual counsel and encouragement, until his dying days.

Another remarkable young man that caught the attention of Berridge, Newton, and Venn was a young Charles Simeon (1758–1836).<sup>23</sup> When Simeon was only twenty-four, he served as Curate of St. Edward's in Cambridge and though young and inexperienced, his preaching was powerful and effective. Word of his success reached Berridge's ears and he wrote to his friend, John Thornton, 'Mr. Simeon, a young Fellow of King's College, in Cambridge, has just made his appearance in the Christian hemisphere, and attracts much notice. He preaches at a church in the town, which is crowded like a theatre on the first night of a new play.'

Venn and Berridge recognized the potential in young Simeon and as years progressed, both men had an almost competing interest in shaping the trajectory of this young pastor's career. Recognizing Simeon's evangelistic gifts, Berridge openly encouraged him to follow in his footsteps and engage in itinerant preaching. Venn, however, disagreed with this course of action. Knowing that such a practice would severely hurt Simeon's chances of being ordained in the Church of England, Venn sought to dissuade Simeon from itinerating and criticized him for his early attempts.

Needless to say, the 'gospel pedlar' John Berridge was not impressed with Venn's influence over the young man and in a letter to Thornton in 1785, he lamented the control that 'the Archdeacon of Yelling' (as he referred to Venn in this case) seemed to have over Simeon. In the letter, Berridge referred to Simeon as a 'brave christian sergeant' who had 'the true spirit of an evangelist' but who was being restrained by Venn. In the end, Berridge exhorted Thornton to speak to Venn about this, '[L]ay your cane soundly on the Archdeacon's back, when you see him, and brush off

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<sup>22</sup> 'Letter to John Thornton, 24 November 1781' in Berridge, *Works*, p. 404. Berridge's evaluation was prescient, for John Venn went on to become a major evangelical Anglican clergyman and key founder of the Christian Missionary Society. See Don Lewis, ed., *Dictionary of Evangelical Biography, 1730–1860* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing, 2004), pp. 1140–1141.

<sup>23</sup> See James Houston, ed., *Evangelical Preaching: An Anthology of Sermons by Charles Simeon* (Vancouver, BC: Regent Publishing, 1986), pp. xv–xxv.

his heathen grief else it may spoil a christian sergeant.<sup>24</sup> Despite Berridge's efforts, Venn's influence won the day and Simeon never itinerated again.

One young man on whose life Berridge did succeed in having a lasting influence was Rowland Hill (1744–1833).<sup>25</sup> Converted through the influence of his brother Richard, young 'Rowly' soon gained the reputation as a fearless evangelist. In 1764, news of this young man reached Berridge and the vicar wrote to Hill and invited him to pay a visit:

I am now at Grandchester, a mile from you, where I preached last night and this morning, and where I shall abide till three in the afternoon—will you take a walk over? The weather is frosty, which makes it pleasant under foot.<sup>26</sup>

Hill did in fact 'take a walk over' to visit Berridge and that encounter marked the beginning of a lifelong mentorship between the two men. Following this meeting, Hill met with Berridge on a weekly basis visiting Everton each Sunday before returning to St John's College in Cambridge. Through Berridge's influence, Hill organized his own 'holy club' at the university, carrying out works of charity and prison visitation while itinerating throughout the region.

However, Venn's warning to Simeon about the negative impact that itineration may have upon receiving Orders proved to be true in the case of Hill. After his graduation, no less than six bishops refused to ordain him, thus prompting the young man to experience a deepening anxiety. In 1770, Berridge wrote to Hill encouraging him to 'stand still and not to hurry.' He then continued, 'Be not anxious about orders; they will come as soon as wanted; nor be anxious about any thing but to know the Lord's will, and to do the Lord's work. One of your Master's titles is Counsellor, and a wonderful counsellor he is.'<sup>27</sup>

As Hill continued to itinerate, Berridge regularly sent him letters expressing his affection and offering encouragement towards the young man. In 1771, Berridge wrote a timely letter to his discouraged friend, 'Dear Rowly, My heart sends you some of its kindest love, and breathes its tenderest wishes for you. I feel my heart go out to you whilst I am writing, and can embrace you as my second self.' Berridge then encouraged Hill to continue in the Lord's work and not to give up.

I think your chief work for a season will be to break up fallow ground.

This suits the accent of your voice at present. God will give you other

<sup>24</sup> 'Letter to John Thornton, 12 July 1785' in Berridge, *Works*, p. 414.

<sup>25</sup> See Edwin Sidney, *The Life of Rowland Hill* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1835).

<sup>26</sup> Sidney, *Rowland Hill*, p. 34.

<sup>27</sup> Sidney, *Rowland Hill*, pp. 60–61.

tongues when they are wanted; but now he sends you out to thrash the mountains, and a glorious thrashing it is. Go forth, my dear Rowly, wherever you are invited into the devil's territories; carry the Redeemer's standard along with you; and blow the gospel-trumpet boldly fearing nothing but yourself.<sup>28</sup>

In 1773, Hill finally was ordained as deacon, but was prevented by the Archbishop of York from taking Priest's Orders. He remained deacon throughout his life 'wearing' as he would put it, 'only one ecclesiastical boot.'<sup>29</sup> Despite this, Hill went on to be a significant figure in the history of the evangelical movement. In retrospect, it is not difficult to see the wide-ranging impact that Berridge had upon his life. Like Berridge, Hill was an effective evangelist. Similarly, he was willing to operate within the Church of England, but was at the same time committed to itinerant ministry, embracing the gospel freedom to minister wherever and however he deemed necessary, yet always striving towards church unity.<sup>30</sup>

Berridge's influence was not lost on Hill. He recognized the lasting impact that his mentor had had upon his long ministry career. In a stirring tribute to his mentor, Hill wrote, '[M]any a mile have I rode, many a storm have I faced, many a snow have I gone through, to hear good old Mr. Berridge; for I felt his ministry, when in my troubles at Cambridge, a comfort and blessing to my soul. Dear affectionate old man, I loved him to my heart.'<sup>31</sup>

The effectiveness of evangelical ministers such as Simeon and Hill bears testimony to the commitment that the first generation of evangelicals had to invest in the lives of a new generation of evangelicals that were emerging on the scene. Despite the difference of opinion regarding itinerancy, the bonds of friendship between Berridge, Venn, and Newton never broke. And it was their friendship which served to sustain their evangelical vision throughout their ministry lives and which was passed on to the likes of Simeon and Hill.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Sidney, *Rowland Hill*, pp. 67–68.

<sup>29</sup> Lewis, ed., *Dictionary of Evangelical Biography*, p. 553.

<sup>30</sup> In 1771, Berridge reiterated his dislike for controversy by writing to Hill, 'The late contest at Bristol seems to turn upon this hinge, whether it shall be *Pope John* [referring to John Wesley] or *Pope Joan* [referring to Lady Huntingdon]. My dear friend, keep out of all controversy, and wage no war but with the devil.' Sidney, *Rowland Hill*, p. 398. Knowing that Berridge himself waded into the Calvinist Controversy two years later, Sidney noted that Berridge should have followed his own excellent counsel.

<sup>31</sup> Sidney, *Rowland Hill*, p. 169.

<sup>32</sup> All three men had significant influence on the next generation of evangelicals. For Venn, his primary influence was over his son, John and over Charles Simeon. As we have seen, Berridge's greatest influence was over Rowland Hill. Newton's influence was perhaps the greatest of the three—actively mentoring such young

It is worth noting that Berridge's friendship with Newton continued even after Newton left the region. In 1780, Newton left Olney and moved to London's St Mary Woolnoth. Despite the increased distance, Berridge continued to seek advice from his friend regarding potential pulpit suppliers. That very year, Berridge wrote to Newton about a pulpit supply reference that had been given to him and again demonstrated his concern for their mutual evangelical vision by asking 'Is he moral; is he also evangelical? Can he preach without notes; and will he condescend to visit some neighbouring country town once a week, and give a sermon or an exhortation in a barn or a house? Is he also a single man? A speedy answer to these queries will be esteemed a favour.'

Later, in the same letter, Berridge brought Newton up to date about their mutual friend, Mr Venn who 'has been traversing the mountains of Yorkshire for ten weeks, and is returning home this week full of power, I hear, stout in body, and vigorous in spirit.' Referring to Newton's new pastoral situation, Berridge expressed his hope that Newton would find his new London parish an opportunity for a great evangelistic work. 'I hope you find some refreshing seasons in your new barn floor, and some grain beating out of the straw.' Berridge then concludes his letter with a touching sentiment, 'Present my very kind christian respects to Mrs. Newton; and if you could peep into my bosom, you might see how much you are loved and esteemed by J.B.'<sup>33</sup>

Throughout the 1780s, the three friends endured the travails of old age and challenges of travel in order to visit one another.<sup>34</sup> In 1782, Venn noted in a letter to James Stillingfleet that Berridge had preached to his people in Yelling. He then wrote, 'I think his voice grows weaker. He is sixty-eight in February—a great age for one who has laboured so much.'<sup>35</sup> In 1788, Venn wrote to his son, John and shared with him that he had paid John's mentor and his friend a visit in Everton where the two men again shared pulpits. On the Sunday, he and Berridge both preached—Berridge in the morning and Venn in the afternoon. The experience prompted Venn

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evangelicals as John Ryland Jr. (1753–1825), Richard Cecil, William Jay (who was also influenced by Rowland Hill) and most importantly, William Wilberforce. For an excellent exploration of Newton's mentorship of John Ryland Jr., see Grant Gordon, ed., *Wise Counsel: John Newton's Letters to John Ryland Jr.* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2009).

<sup>33</sup> 'Letter to John Newton, 12 December 1780' in Berridge, *Works*, p. 402.

<sup>34</sup> On one occasion, both Newton and Venn travelled to Everton together in a chaise. As they left Everton and journeyed to neighbouring Potton, the chaise overturned causing injury to both men. 'Letter to John Thornton, 27 October 1787' in Berridge, *Works*, p. 425. Fortunately, neither Newton nor Venn were seriously injured. Venn wrote in December that year, 'I feel not the least hurt from my late accident.' 'Letter to Mr. Elliot, 7 December 1787' in Venn, *Letters*, p. 458.

<sup>35</sup> 'Letter to the Rev. James Stillingfleet, 24 December 1782' in Venn, *Letters*, pp. 354–355.

to reflect on the impact that the passing years had had upon their lives. 'Four years have passed since we heard each other. We both perceived how our voices were weakened; but had a sweet interview, while we talked together of the pity and tender love of our adorable Master towards all His aged ministers, when they are almost past the service of their office.'<sup>36</sup>

By 1791, all three men were experiencing the effects of old age. In two years, Berridge would die; four years later, Venn too would pass away. Newton would outlive both men, not dying until 1807. However, the impact that the friendship between Newton, Venn, and Berridge had upon the early evangelical movement is inestimable. Through their friendship, each pastor was able to sustain his evangelical vision for evangelism, seeking the conversion of lost souls, preaching the Word of God, and living a cruciform life. Through their friendship, this evangelical vision did not fade upon their death, but was passed on to the next generation of young evangelicals whose impact both locally and globally would outpace their mentors' influence.

One figure who perhaps understood the impact of this friendship network clearest was writer and poet, William Cowper. Though he had to endure Berridge's criticism of his poetry, Cowper nevertheless recognized the wide-spread influence that Newton, Venn, and Berridge were having on the lives of so many. In a letter to Newton in 1791, Cowper knew that the labours of Newton, Venn, and Berridge were coming to an end and expressed his appreciation towards the three friends, 'I am sorry that Mr. Venn's labours below are so near to a conclusion...Were I capable of *envying*, in the strict sense of the word, a good man, I should envy him and Mr. Berridge and yourself, who have spent, and, while they last, will continue to spend, your lives in the service of the only Master worth serving; labouring always for the souls of men.'<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> 'Letter to the Rev. John Venn, 19 June 1788' in Venn, *Letters*, p. 462.

<sup>37</sup> Venn, *Letters*, p. 148.