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A 'DIRTY AND SCANDALOUS' POEM

WILLIAM FOWLER OF  
WINTERTON

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## WILLIAM FOWLER OF WINTERTON

The immense works of William Fowler of Winterton in Lincolnshire – builder, antiquary, artist, engraver, born 1760 died 1832 – cannot be widely known, for his three vast volumes of hand-coloured etchings, issued as single prints, have been rare for more than a century. In the only existing publication about him, by Henry Ball of Barton-on-Humber, 1888, ‘one hundred and fifty copies printed’, the total tally for those three volumes is eighty-one plates: twenty-seven ‘coloured engravings’ in volume one, twenty-six in volume two or the first ‘Appendix’ as Fowler called it, twenty-six in volume three or the second ‘Appendix’; but as Ball pointed out, ‘correctly there are 81 Plates, there being three instances of two on one page’. Ball gives the dimensions as twenty-seven inches by twenty, but several plates fold out from bound volumes.

‘Fowler’s Mosaic Pavements’, its common title, was generally known as one volume or two. Of the third volume (second ‘Appendix’) Ball wrote in 1888 that it ‘seems to be quite unknown, no mention of it having ever appeared in print, to the writer’s knowledge. This can only be accounted for on the supposition that the number of copies completed was so extremely small that a perfect set of the three volumes has never yet been offered for sale’.

I first encountered Fowler at Ben Weinreb’s shop, a splendid huge folio in red ‘levant morocco’, the Northwick Park copy, more than thirty years ago; for three decades it has rested in Paul Getty’s library, prominent in the lower shelves at Wormsley now, and I have regretted losing it. ‘Mosaic Pavements’ we now call Roman Mosaics; Roman villas were appearing all over the place in late eighteenth century and early nineteenth; they were also disappearing. Henry Ball again:

The Roman pavement at Scampton, of which Mr. Fowler published an engraving, had at one time a shed purposely erected over it for its preservation, and great care was taken of it. When the next occupier, a severe utilitarian, took possession, he converted the place into a cattle shed, and the animals trod the beautiful pavement under foot and completely ruined it.

And that was nothing unusual. Fowler, and his more opulent rival

Samuel Lysons, were recording an aspect of endangered heritage. Those two crossed swords at Horkstow, in Fowler's county, but Lysons is most often remembered for his work at Woodchester in Gloucestershire, his home ground. Woodchester has a covering of earth again now, a lovingly made facsimile in mosaic exists. No such protective rules from English Heritage two centuries ago.

So they were revealing – those two giants, Lysons and Fowler – in their giant books, and recording. They saved for us much art, which was about to be destroyed. One imagines the irritation of farmers, against meddlesome antiquaries and their trail of curious visitors.

But most sites did not suffer the fate of Scampton. Civilized country gentry, great landowners, were delighted by discoveries beneath familiar fields, revealed in the course of estate management. Roman Britain, for an educated society acquainted with the idea of Rome, was an exciting new subject. William Fowler, builder, of Winterton wrote with some astonishment to his wife about his warm reception in great houses of the mighty – at Castle Howard, Clumber, Bishop Auckland, and most memorably at Windsor. For he was a self-taught artist of high ability, whose drawings and prints found favour with Princess Elizabeth especially, and the Queen. Sir Joseph Banks, to whom each of his three volumes has an engraved page of dedication, had arranged this introduction, and Fowler had no idea how to behave with royalty. 'Be yourself' was Banks's sensible advice.

Fowler did not limit himself to mosaic; early stained glass interested him equally, and wandering through those published collections a fine contrast establishes itself between minutely recorded tesserae in mosaic and areas of splendid colour in the windows. His friend Stillingfleet of Lincoln College Oxford suggested he should group his subjects and categorize but I am grateful for the pleasure of straying from one to another. An antiquary with the range and curiosity of those less specialized days, he focussed upon what struck him as suitable from recommendation and his own observation. Ball gives the statistics:

25 Mosaic Pavements, 39 Stained Glass, 5 Brasses and Tombs, 4 Fonts and 8 Miscellaneous.

Among 'Miscellaneous' are maximal full-page views of the gothic Southwell Arch at Nottingham, which he considered his best work, and (in the third volume) equally splendid views of Saint Nicholas church in Newcastle upon which as a builder he was engaged in work of restora-

tion, and the 'Remains of Guisbrough Priory, Yorkshire'. About this last Ball had a pleasant story:

When our author was making the drawing of Guisborough Priory he required a chair, and asked an old woman living near to the ruins if she would lend him one. She would only do so on condition that she was introduced in the Drawing. He good-naturedly complied, and the old lady is to be seen near the arch in the engraving.

Well, it never rains but it pours. The chance came to buy John Piper's two volumes of Fowler, of particular interest because Piper more than any artist since William Morris in England, Chagall in France, was responsible for a new use of stained glass in churches. Fowler must have fascinated him. It turned out that the Northwick Park/Wormsley set also consisted of those first two volumes. And then, absurdly – guardian angel of books – the whole work in three volumes appeared in Brighton and so, through a lame excuse of my wife's interest in mosaic, that also lives here now. It belonged until recently to the Newcastle Public Library, a good provenance because William Fowler worked upon the restoration of Saint Nicholas Church in Newcastle and made his splendid engraving of it. His grandson, in touch with the Library a century ago, provided a few of the small privately issued plates Ball had such difficulty in assembling, a couple of autograph examples, Ball's pamphlet from 1888, all mounted now on blank leaves at the end, and the portrait. I agree with Ball that this elusive last volume 'is the most varied and interesting of the three'.

How rare is that which had seemed unfindable in 1888? Fowler's own set passed through a Phillips book auction a few years ago, unknown to me, an irritant; unregarded in the auction, in bad condition I am told, a poor thing but his own. There is also a recent auction record of the third volume, 'second Appendix', alone without the first two. Anyway here they are now, in some strength, difficult to hoist, a threat to one's back. The great collection historically was in the Earl of Crawford's Library, no longer there. Someone's scrupulous manuscript list of it, on four pages with useful red ink comments, is also mounted at the end of my third volume. No record exists in Newcastle's Public Library of when they received this set, or whether by gift or purchase. I am grateful to the Librarian for troubling to search.

Fowler lives for us in a stout octavo volume of his correspondence; but not for many of us, because his grandson Joseph arranged for just

fifty copies to be privately printed in 1907. Copy No. 1 he gave to the London Library. From this assembly of family material one sees the shape of his life and work. He deserves an appreciative biography, the material exists. Somebody more industrious than I am should write it.

'Mosaic Pavements' is an impoverished phrase for brilliant, deliberately random variety across the three great volumes. As his reputation grew through journeys to the Universities and Cathedral cities we follow a provincial builder-turned-artist, self-taught, making his way in that civilized world where social origins have never been a help or hindrance. Passed from one to another with letters of commendation, Banks was his most helpful patron and Stillingfleet his frequent attentive critic. With Lincoln College he kept an especially close connection, welcomed there as a Lincolnshire man.

All Fowler's many prints except the first two were drawn and engraved – etched, aquatinted – by him, coloured by him and his family. 'Is it too much my dear brother to ask you to spare me a few of a work which, in the early part of my life I was engaged in colouring . . .' his sister Ann asks in 1831, the year before he died.<sup>1</sup> We learn about the inks, colours, paper, as he orders materials during his travels and mixes one professional career with the growth and blossoming of another. If we judge from correspondence the intoxicating success of commendation and orders, with a rise to social levels which formed no part of the family business, provided his greatest stimulus. Membership of the Society of Antiquaries, the Windsor visit, at ease in Oxford and Cambridge, his guileless absorption in a fashionable subject and brilliance in reproducing it fill the letters of his middle years and seem to have occupied his time; yet his work continued and thrived, as builder and architect at Winterton. As an older man more of the letters – to his son and partner Joseph especially – are concerned with that professional part of his life.

In the brief DNB notice of Fowler, Ball wrote that his work was 'distinguished by a strict fidelity especially remarkable at the time', and quoted Sir Joseph Banks as saying: 'Others have shown us what they thought these remains ought to have been, but Fowler has shown us what they are, and that is what we want'. It had all begun with the discovery of a Roman mosaic floor locally at Winterton, of which his

<sup>1</sup> Ann Taylor to W.F., Jany. 11<sup>th</sup> 1831, p. 639.

drawings were so admired that he was persuaded to take them to London where his brother-in-law John Hill could inform him about engraving and publication. Winterton was followed by another local discovery, at Horkstow, and his records of that site also were engraved by Hill – after which he did the prodigious work of engraving and etching those large plates himself, travelling the country to show and sell them.

Colouring, done with fearless brilliance throughout his work, was shared with members of the family at home. Banks at first thought it too strong. 'Sir Joseph Banks is now in town, and approves of the work in every respect except he thinks them too highly coloured for the pavement' Hill reported of the first Horkstow trials.

Hill, in addition to this vital early introduction, provided technical advice and suggested Fowler invite subscriptions for the Horkstow engraving.

Banks admired his accuracy: as one aspect of accuracy, Fowler is remembered as the first to record in detail that puzzling and inadequately investigated subject, lead lines in stained glass windows. These great areas of glass have a common structural support of metal bars in H form, called Calme lines, pronounced Came, as is always explained. Lead lines occasionally mark the edges of limbs or drapery, but seem generally random and often intrusive. A sympathetic arrangement of lead lines in the necessary jigsaw must always have formed part of the glass-maker's art – or that of the cutter whose job was to clip the flattened pieces and join them to create the artist's image. From Chartres to Chagall, the problem existed. Fowler recognised it, better or worse, for the eye as an aspect of design. Many of these apparently random lead lines were simply repairs to damage.

Accuracy in the engraving and colouring of mosaic needed incredible patience, and it was at that early moment of his work (1797) that he encountered some critical rivalry from Samuel Lysons who had travelled from Gloucestershire to record the pavement on Admiral Shirley's land at Horkstow. Fowler made the mistake in his first drawings at Horkstow, of inventing the completion of a damaged and fragmented area. 'I received yours', Hill tell him, 'and find the work so very different (and as in all probability Mr. Lysons will hereafter publish a correct print of it) it will be best to alter the plate to the form of the pavement in the erroneous parts . . .'<sup>2</sup> A shared site was no more likely to make for

<sup>2</sup> Hill to W.F., 18 Oct. 1797, p. 18.

harmony between Fowler and Lysons at Horkstow, than between Scott and Amundsen at the South Pole. Lysons was a menace on the landscape for Fowler and his brother-in-law. 'He is engraving a very extensive work of the kind . . .', Hill wrote, 'and I believe he possesses very great merit as a gentleman artist.' Moreover, 'I believe he is a Barrister-at-Law, and a Fellow of the Antiquarian Society'.<sup>3</sup>

It was the only time they collided. A letter from Lysons to Banks earlier in the month (October 1797) showed similar irritation: the large Horkstow pavement is 'infinitely more curious than I had any idea of its being from Fowler's drawing, which is a very feeble representation of it: he is going however to publish it as soon as possible, which I believe he had no intention of doing till I went'. Hill told his brother-in-law to publish the Horkstow drawing despite this fracas. 'As to Mr. Lysons wishing you to suppress it, I do not wonder, as he wishes to have the gratification of producing it to the Antiquaries without interference is not a matter to be doubted'.<sup>4</sup>

All very human and understandable, never repeated. They followed different routes to success in their admirable artistic lives. Horkstow, apparently the only site recorded by both of these two artist-antiquaries, provides an interesting chance to compare ways and styles. Lysons has the academic and leisured approach: charmingly devised title page, hand-coloured, a panel within mosaic ropework borders; two handsome Bensley leaves of text, in the same large type used for the Macklin Bible; a delightful aquatint 'View from Horkstow Hall, Showing the Situation of the Mosaic Pavements' – boats and sea in the distance, three workmen labouring at the site (one with a large pick which would not find favour in such circumstances these days), a fourth leaning on his spade listening to directions from the elegantly dressed artist; followed by a local map (also coloured) and five double-page illustrations of the villa floor scrupulously showing the missing areas; followed by two double-page reconstructions commissioned from Smirke, of the full pavement as it might have been; and one single-page reproduction of a fragment. It was an impressive performance, which opens his magnificent *Reliquiae Britannico-Romanae*, arguably – I would argue it – among the half dozen most majestic volumes in that period of splendid book production in England.

<sup>3</sup> Hill to W.F., 18 Oct. 1797, p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> Hill to W.F., 24 Nov. 1797, p. 19.

Fowler had no such ambition, no time for a considered work of that sort, but he was the first to arrive at Admiral Shirley's place and needed to claim it for his own. He knew at that moment no high influential friends, with the important exception of Banks to whom Hill had shown his drawing of Horkstow. It became customary for Fowler to issue a short descriptive fly-sheet, which might also take the form of a prospectus, for many of his plates; local jobbing printing and attractive as examples in their kind, of no dignity or distinction, and incongruously one finds them bound into these mighty volumes, each following the subject it describes. A far distance from Bensley's pages of text, in classic harmony with Lysons.

These provincial differences have their place in the story. Fowler, I would say, cared not a fig for the fly-sheets, though Ball praises his engraved lettering. In my Newcastle copy the Horkstow plate is followed by its prospectus - "This day was published by subscription, price one guinea in colours, half a guinea plain, half to be paid at the time of subscribing, and the remainder on delivery; a Copper-Plate Engraving, patronised by Sir Joseph Banks, Bart., F.R.S., and executed in London, which represents a most Elegant Pavement. . . . Surprising, the language and form of a sale; printed by Daniel Greenwood, Bookseller, Book-binder, and Stationer, Market-Place, Barton. The Piper copy has a different, slightly more chaste flysheet printed by W. Rawson, Printer of the Hull Advertiser.

Well, Fowler at the start of his absorption in the subject needed to be the Winterton advertiser. Lysons opens his text by mentioning the Horkstow pavement as 'accidentally discovered in the year 1796, in a close adjoining to the garden of Horkstow-hall, by labourers employed in making a Kitchen-garden'. Fowler wants none of that: it was 'lately discovered thro' the industry of William Fowler, of the Town of Winterton, in the Garden of the Honourable Thomas Shirley . . . In the Year of our Lord MDCCXCVII'.

He soon mellowed, surprised by success in a series of carpet-bagging journeys through England and into Scotland, with long absences from home and unimaginable industry. He became through a working life his own salesman, travelling to the universities and following helpful introductions to great houses; and though the letters bear witness, especially in older age, to industry and activity in his house-building and church-restoring profession, the excitement though not the purpose of these early journeys seems to have been print-selling. John Ogden at



Magdalene in Cambridge was an early advocate, writing to him in December 1800:

Some of my friends in Cambridge having seen the engraving of your drawing of the Roman Pavement, which I discovered in Mr. Lawrence's Estate, wished me to procure them several of them . . . I have order for  $\frac{1}{2}$  a dozen, if you have so many left, or if not, as many as you have, to be coloured, and sent as soon as possible, as some of my friends, and perhaps myself, will be leaving Cambridge in 3 or 4 weeks.<sup>5</sup>

At that date he could only take orders for two or three prints – Winterton, Horkstow, Roxby perhaps – but they were enough as cornerstones of his reputation. Here was a new man, of rare talent, in a subject of cultural, historic, artistic enthusiasm. Three months later Gretton the Vice-Chancellor is writing from Magdalene, recommending him 'to the notice and regards of all who are admirers of the antiquities of this country; as a man of exquisite industry in his researches, of great ingenuity in the execution of the various specimens of tessellated pavements, which he has drawn and engraved with the greatest fidelity and accuracy, and of the most becoming modesty of conduct and behaviour'.<sup>6</sup>

It was the kind of letter Fowler easily inspired, which paved and tessellated his path to continuing success. In a period of exclusion and aristocracy this provincial builder was commonly welcomed as artist with every privilege of a guest. From Oundle in 1801 he writes home to his wife about his reception at the house of 'one Esquire Hanbury . . . a gentleman of very great fortune', who has bought his prints. 'They request me to retire to their house as my home during my stay in this neighbourhood. I have slept at this great house one night and met with the greatest civility from all the domestics of the family.'

Though such travels relate – one cannot now know how often – to his business as builder and architect, pleasure in a steady rise in recognition as artist and antiquary occupies his letters home. One evening with clients in Birmingham 'a gentleman came while I was at supper, much desiring my Roman Pavements, he would recommend me to the Duke of Marlborough'.

At Oxford he enjoyed a startling progress, though he could only have shown three or four prints during the spring of 1802. At Lincoln College

5 Ogden to W.F., 30 Dec. 1800, p. 39.

6 Gretton, 20 March 1801, p. 41. William Gretton (1736–1813) master of Magdalene, was Vice-Chancellor of the university in 1800–1801.

he met, as has been mentioned, E. W. Stillingfleet, who became a friend and somewhat pedantic critic through all the rest of his artistic life.

This young gentleman address me in the most polite and friendly manner possible, and told me so far as he could be of service to me by recommendations, etc., it would be his greatest pleasure. I drank tea with him at his own room in the College last night, and today, agreeable to his request, I have had the pleasure to wait upon him a second time to inform him of my success, namely, the agreeable introduction I have had to the President of Trinity College, and his subscription; likewise the Rev. Mr. Moulding (Tri. Coll.) who likewise subscribed and gave me a recommendation to the notice of the Vice-Chancellor at St. John's Coll., which they have no doubt will be of the greatest service to me during my stay in this University.<sup>7</sup>

Keeping in mind the modest portfolio of his large prints available at that time, which could not have added greatly to his income, there can be no doubt that these social and cultural connections were agreeable footnotes to business travel; yet they provide the substance of his letters home. 'Tell Abraham he must not wedge any of the doors or window shutters of the house at Hattington' he writes in the same letter, 'as I think they may shrink something before they be put to use'.

But the greatest help came from Sir Joseph Banks, whom he had met in April 1797 through his brother-in-law John Hill. 'My countryman', Banks had said, (they were both from Lincolnshire) 'I will undertake your business for you, and make the best inquiry I can to procure you a good engraver, and one that will forward the work as speedily as possible, that no time may be lost'. This might have seemed a little absent-minded, as Hill who had introduced them was the engraver. 'Sir Joseph has made choice of an engraver', Fowler's letter continues, so perhaps the reference was to a copyist who would engrave written text. Later Fowler did his own engraved lettering, to better effect Ball thought.

Five years on, it was easy to call on him. 'On Tuesday I waited upon Sir Joseph Banks and was kindly received. He has likewise honoured me with the liberty to dedicate my work to him, which I am told will be of great advantage to me, and by his desire must wait on Sir Joseph again on Friday morning'. Letters of introduction follow, 'I take the liberty of introducing to you our Lincolnshire Antiquarian'. Fowler has arrived.

In private life and morality he leaned strongly towards the Methodists.

<sup>7</sup> W.F. to his wife, 27 March 1802, pp. 44-5.

His father and a friend called Thomas Ramsey had a reputation for singing amusing songs and telling amusing stories, but one day 'they told each other their misgivings on their way from a harvest supper at Roxby; they thought they were pleasing the people with their songs and tales, but that they were not pleasing God. They both knelt down and prayed by a certain bush, in the darkness of the night, until they got some hopeful impressions in their minds . . . Henceforth the singing of songs was changed into that of Psalms and Hymns, the Bible was read in the family, the Church was regularly attended by parents and children, and an earnest endeavour was made to set a good example in all things'.<sup>8</sup>

Unimaginable now, that moment 'by a certain bush in the darkness of night'; we could wish they had continued their habit of songs and tales; but thus Methodism entered the family of old Joseph Fowler, and William his eldest son. The father had been a great bell-ringer, but forsook that art for fear of bad company. 'In advanced life, the blundering performances of hand ringers would still inflict tortures on the old man, shewn by involuntary shrugs of shoulders and arms, and odd, not to say laughable, contortions of visage'. He sounds an endearing eccentric.

His son's life as builder and antiquary, successful, incredibly productive, must have been a source of pride to him. Its religious strain (suitably ambiguous word) could only have pleased him. Long communications from Methodist preachers take space in William Fowler's letter book. Success brought worry. In 1802 he was to meet the Bishop of Bangor, who had heard about his prints. 'O my dear' he wrote to his wife, anticipating this, 'don't neglect to pray for me that I may be kept through the Almighty power of Divine grace whilst I am thus exposed to such a great weight of temptation'. And in a rare escape into humour his grandson adds his footnote: 'This reads curiously in connexion with an introduction to the Lord Bishop of Bangor, but the good man was evidently in fear of the snare of pride'.

Religion became sometimes the currency of their language. A friend in Preston wanted to give as a present one of Fowler's most beautiful prints, of the ruined Gothic arch at Southwell:

The Archway engraving, I must tell you, has been and is much admired. I did not, however, present it to my partner, as I spoke of doing when at Liverpool, but to a religious and dear friend, who had, I afterwards thought, a fairer claim

<sup>8</sup> *Correspondence*, Introduction, p. 4.

to it, on account of his having been an instrument in God's hands of instructing me better in the way of Christ.

So his partner had to be content with another of Fowler's finest prints, the stained-glass portrait of Bishop King in a window of Christ Church Cathedral.

One may also be surprised by the language of religious consolation. When their daughter Rebecca dies while William Fowler is away from home, in the summer of 1814, this is what he writes to his wife:

The idea of seeing my dear lovely child no more in time distresses my feelings, but upon cool reflection, I consider it my duty to bear this cross as well as all other things that may in the course of Divine Providence come against me, to bear up against them with all the Christian fortitude that I am possessed of, being well assured that nothing of this sort happens unto us but by the permission of our Great and Good God.<sup>9</sup>

'Distresses my feelings', and no thought of a word for his wife's.

More interesting no doubt is the rising graph of his success as artist and antiquary.

As early as 1802 Nott of All Souls 'recommended me to set some limits to the number of Tessellated Pavements I intended to publish', and Fowler thought twenty might be appropriate. Stained glass and any object beautifully designed, especially if it were ecclesiastical, entered his orbit at Castle Howard where he was royally received.

I am likely to be most successful in this my journey. Have got a very pleasant introduction into this great family by the Chaplain the Rev. Mr. Forth. He has presented my works to the Lord of Carlisle, and his Lordship was very much pleased, and I have delivered him one of the port-folios for which I've received twelve guineas. His Lordship has likewise express'd a desire for me to make drawings from some of his Mosaics, etc., at the Castle, and has offered me a handsome room to myself and bed and fire and every convenience my work requires, and my board in the steward's room. The Chaplain gave me to understand this was a great favour from his Lordship. As such it would please my Lord if I made choice of some subjects for drawings. [There is] a mosaic marble table in the silver bedroom. I have got a drawing from it; it served me till 12 o'clock last night to finish it. On Monday morning it is proposed for me to take a drawing

<sup>9</sup> W.F. to his wife, 12 July 1814, p. 314.

of a most beautiful window in the Chapel. The subject is the Death of St. Catherine, executed in stained glass.<sup>10</sup>

This was written on November 11, 1804. To his brother thirteen days later, still at Castle Howard, he writes a happy long letter. 'It is very flattering to me that his lordship has offered me the privilege to take drawings from any of the antiques throughout his valuable collection, when I please and what I please, and to publish whatever I think proper'. He can't believe his luck in living as an honoured guest at Castle Howard. From his room he sees

a most beautiful variety of the finest scenery. I add to this, my room I mentioned before with a bed and every convenience that heart can wish for, two servants, one who makes my fire, which is kept in night and day when I choose, and supplies me regularly with coals and water and towels, and makes my bed in the evening; another maid servant furnishes my table with a pair of candles and snuffers, etc., that are wanted for the evening, many of which things just mentioned are more than I even once thought of. Add to this, I have my breakfast every morning (with the first domestic of the family) regularly at 9 o'clock, fine light cakes and tea, etc., at one o'clock our lunch (in the steward's room) in the general five or six hot dishes of the finest meat, exclusive of cold, and sauces to do. At 6 o'clock we dine about 20 and sometimes 22 of us in number. The moment I first entered the dining room I was struck with a sort of surprise. A very large table surrounded with chairs placed at a proper distance to sit down upon, six large lighted candles in a straight line down the centre of the table, and upwards of 18 or 19 different dishes with costly sauces. Ale and beer and two waiters to attend. After dinner the dessert and wine, after this tea and coffee, then at eleven o'clock a hot supper in the same room. Shall I add to this my privilege of gratifying my curiosity when I please in viewing all the beautiful architecture that surrounds and adorns these buildings and the magnificent rooms and galleries so well furnished with the most costly paintings and adorned with the richest marbles. Upon cool reflection my situation certainly calls loudly for thankfulness, and, my dear brother, I am thankful and very grateful for those kind favours.

All in great contrast with a recent adventure at Robin Hood's Bay on the Yorkshire coast, a picturesque haven for contemporary artists, described in the same letter:

... sliding down the mountain as loose earth carried me not knowing whither it was going, it was at this very alarming distressing moment a kind hand that was

<sup>10</sup> W.F. to his wife, 11 November 1804, p. 58.

Divine directed me to steer my way in the dark near a most dreadful precipice, I happily steered my way between, and found the lighted hut, in entering which my heart rejoiced in expectation of taking up my lodging there. A poor lame man was sitting with his foot upon a stool by the fire which was upon the hearth, made of bags. I asked him for a night's lodgings, and he told me he did not know what they could do for me. I related to him my situation, the road I had come, and the difficulties I had met with. This affected his feelings and he told me I was very fortunate that I had not got into any of three large pits of water which I must have passed very narrowly. I might have dropt into those, and never been heard of more. On this he called a little boy to take off my boots, my feet being swelled with so much walking and fatigue. It was with the greatest difficulty that we got them off. I gave the boy 6d. for this job, which pleased the old man and boy so well that they began to be very familiar with me, and said that they would do the best they could for me. The boy got down from the lattice which was nailed to the under side of the joists a piece of hard dry skate fish, so hard that a knife would scarce cut it till beaten with a hammer. The boy ate part of this raw when beaten, but to treat me he told his father he would broil a piece in the fire for me, which would make it very good. When ready, the boy gave me a part of the broiled fish, which was salt and very dry. After this the old man's wife came in, and, pitying my situation, told me she would roast a potato in the ashes, and bake a bit of mutton, which she hopped up in the same ashes. I had a very good supper this night and took my food with thankfulness and went to my little cabin, which was a sort of close bed taken off one side of the room, much within the ground and at the feet a part of the wall cut under, there being not a sufficient length to lie straight unless it was in this situation. I lay me down to sleep, but before I closed my eyes, whilst contemplating on the goodness of God and my late preservation, it was at this moment I could praise the God of Providence for all his mercies. After a sweet night's rest I awoke in the morning early, much refreshed. Whilst just awaking those words were applied to my mind with such power as only belongs to God: 'Praise the Lord who hath saved thy life from destruction and crowned thee with loving kindness and tender mercy.' My dear brother, it was at this moment that tears of gratitude flowed from my eyes, and I have great reason to believe no one knows the happiness I felt in this my situation but those who have been exposed to similar dangers and experienced similar deliverances. My situation in this little [hut] hath afforded me greater heartfelt pleasure that will never be forgotten, yes, more I say than all my great enjoyments together that I have met with at Castle Howard.<sup>11</sup>

He has a success at Brasenose College in 1806, where 'six young gentlemen . . . subscribed for all I publish'.

<sup>11</sup> W.F. to Joseph Fowler of Hull, 24 Nov. 1804, pp. 61-3.

At Brazen Nose I dined in the great hall at the first table, placed on the right hand of the Vice President and the Dean of Chester. After dinner was requested to follow the Vice President with the Dean of Chester, etc., etc., that followed after in form through the hall as an honour they wished to confer upon me. From the Hall I was to follow the President to another large spacious room in the College where there were wines and dessert, fruits etc., etc. I was placed in the arm chair by the fire by the President, being an honour they wished to confer upon me.<sup>12</sup>

Difficult to cherish his humility under such conditions, but this was very forgiveable in a letter to his wife.

From the same letter – written on 'Saturday Evening 9 o'clock, 1806' at Aston, we learn how random and organic was the spread of subjects he drew for engraving:

My undertaking has been very great here. The subjects I have been drawing have taken me very near a fortnight. I should never have undertaken those figures and arms in the windows of the Hall (of Mr. Legg's house, Aston) but by the request and under the patronage of the Most Noble the Marquess of Buckingham and the Dean of Chester. I informed you in my last of the favour and great attention the Marquess paid to me when at Stow, and the Dean of Chester has subscribed for all I have done and all I may publish in future, and has requested me to copy the Norman Earls of Chester in the windows of the Hall here at Aston, which I consider myself under the greatest obligation to do, as he will pay me for the drawings, or, if I think proper to publish them, will recommend my works to Lord Grosvenor [heir to the Earls of Chester], who, he assures me, will be much interested in them, and will be sure to become a subscriber to all I publish.<sup>13</sup>

Those nine Earls of Chester, prominent in his second collection, were not appreciated by everyone. The Marquess of Buckingham at Stow had suggested them, bought all his works, paid for them 'and told me that the Norman Earls of Chester which the Dean of Chester had recommended me to take drawings from, he thought well deserved my notice, and would recommend me to engrave them as soon as possible'. Advice not lightly to be ignored. He travelled to Aston Hall to make the drawings: 'These have been attended with a great deal of labour; they will furnish 18 plates if I publish the whole of what I have drawn'. In fact he made nine, plus the genealogy and an engraved leaf of dedication to Heneage Legge of Aston Hall who owned them. Thomas Heber of Brasenose had provided a genealogy for the earls – duly engraved and

<sup>12</sup> W.F. to his wife, 27 Dec. 1806, p. 86.

<sup>13</sup> W.F. to his wife, 27 Dec. 1806, p. 86.

included. Strickland Standish of Standish Hall, Wigan, was not amused. His letter is summarised in the volume of Fowler correspondence: 'Duly received package containing Tesselated Pavements, etc., but is disappointed to find so little in the Tesselated way amongst latter works; pedigree of Earls of Chester etc., is little interesting to him and he would be glad to have them taken off his hands . . .'. Them must mean the earls, along with their pedigree.

Not all his admirers could be expected to cross the gap from mosaic, by which he became known, to ancient church glass, Gothic monuments, engraved church brass, but Fowler expected it. His friends placed standing orders for all his work; some was returned to him, from surprising people.

Sir Richard Colt Hoare had seemed to want everything and more; ordered the whole assembly and wished 'also to know from what design you took the Littlecot pavements . . . also if you have any other designs of mosaics *besides* the list you have laid before the public'. Hoare became rather dictatorial. 'I wish them to be printed on a sheet of thick folio paper and not *mounted* on a double paper'. One sees the point, for ease of binding, but Fowler had established a valid treatment for his large plates, which were not necessarily to be bound as books. 'I wish also the line round them or *border* not to be wider than this [indicating a double ruled border of fine and thicker lines] as your *wide* black line quite *overpowers* the drawings and injures the effect, and I would recommend to you this alteration in your own future drawings'. His criticism of the wide borders was accepted.

More than twenty years later we find Hoare keeping some drawings from 'a large portfolio' he had received, but returning others. He would like anything to do with mosaic pavements, 'as I collect all I can find, and have some very beautiful drawings of those in Hants and Dorset'. He was about to publish (typically in an edition of fifty copies) his own account of *The Pitney Pavement, discovered by Samuel Hasell Esq. Of Littleton*, with a few indifferent engravings. Fowler as a younger man would perhaps have been invited to do something of a more splendid kind.

Success continued to attend him: with the Archbishop of York, at Edinburgh, with the Duke of Newcastle. Dawson Turner collects him:

I very much admire what you have sent me, and assure you I saw nothing at all equal to them in France, where it remains both in architecture and painted glass far exceed what we have in England, but unfortunately there is no artist like you to publish them.



Banks 'told me he thought I had done him a very great honour' in dedicating each volume to him, and ordered two more sets.

For a summit of delight and mutual appreciation we might look to his reception at Bishop Auckland in October 1817:

I had many questions put to me before the porter at the outer iron gates at Bishop Auckland would admit me within the wall of the Castle, but it was happy for me that I had got a most respectable letter from Mr. Bouyer one of the prebends of Durham to deliver to the Bishop. After I entered the palace and requested one of the Bishop's servants to deliver the letter and mention me in waiting, he very soon came back, saying that his Lordship the Bishop would see me, and I might take my Engravings with me. After passing thro' a set of rooms, the servant, pointing my way, says, there you will see the Bishop in waiting, and I never saw so fine a looking venerable old gentleman, 86 years of age. He bowed and told me he was glad to see me and said, I feel myself very happy to have the opportunity to encourage such a Genius, and much obliged by your waiting upon me with what I have been a stranger to. You will take refreshment and see the Chapel and Castle, and I wish to see you again before you leave. And I am happy to inform you he subscribed to my two Portfolios and some other engravings, thirty eight pounds, fourteen shillings and six pence, which he paid me with his own hand in bank notes.<sup>14</sup>

Not everyone behaved immaculately as Shute Barrington the Bishop of Durham: problems in extracting payment, even from the most exalted quarters, were not rare. It seems the Duke of Northumberland had employed an unsatisfactory Steward, and perhaps dismissed him for that reason. 'I should not have got my money of the Duke', Fowler tells his family in 1824, 'if I had not seen him. His Steward had left, and the Duke told me he believed I was paid. I told the Duke I was not paid, and when I asked the Steward for the money he told me that the Duke had ordered the books and he might pay for them'. A glimpse of bloody-mindedness at a great house in 1824. The Duke arranged for things to be settled by 'his draft upon his banker', a less direct settlement than the Bishop of Durham's surprising clutch of bank notes.

More irritating in small ways was the petty meanness of those who should have behaved correctly - Dawson Turner, having received the prints, extracting a small discount in payment; Frances Mary Richardson Curren in Yorkshire, owner of a magnificent library, taking ten shillings from his bill. Against such stupidities from the rich he was

<sup>14</sup> W.F. to his wife, 22 Oct. 1817, p. 360.

defenceless, having sent the prints in good faith. 'I give up the 10/- as being desired by you to do so' - in 1829, three years before his death. In 1813 one Swainson of Liverpool wrote expecting a trade discount from the price of the prints he had ordered. Fowler sent a good reply:

You are very welcome to unpack them, only do it with care, and if after you have seen them and still think they are not worth what I have charged, you will be so good as to pack them with care and return them by the first conveyance.

All except the first two of Fowler's subjects (Winterton and Horkstow) he engraved himself, and as an engraver he was self-taught. It was not a major step from the draftsmanship which formed part of his work as builder and architect. His brother-in-law in London may have shown him a trick or two during his first visit, when the publication of those early mosaic drawings was discussed, for he seems to be following up such a discussion in a letter of April 1798:

I had the pleasure of seeing your small print, by my brother Thomas last night, which I think very well indeed for a first attempt.

I send you my own Roling [?] tool, as there is now no such thing to be bought. The Frenchman who made them, of the name of Galett, was apprehended for forging bank notes, and kill'd himself in prison. They were not made by any other person, but I think aquatinting the shade parts is a better method.

The method of using the tool is to turn it with one hand as occasion requires, and press upon it with the finger of the other to make a proper grain on the copper.

The method of aquatint is to stop all the plain parts, then sift fine powdered resin or gum sandarac all over the plate; warm it gently just to fix the gum without making it flow, then bite it in as usual.

The blue printing ink is only Prussian blue and white lead if required lighter, ground in strong burnt oil. I called once on Mr. Nattes but have not seen him. I shall take an opportunity of seeing him before it is long.<sup>15</sup>

This is an interesting letter, and fairly early days for aquatint. Fowler did indeed use aquatint, with no great subtlety but in perfect taste, to illustrate Norman tiles or 'pavers' in his first volume, during 1801 and 1802. Hill, on visiting terms with Nattes, was in a good position to advise. His bright idea that where blue occurred it could be printed was not followed; I see no evidence of anything but hand-colouring.

Stillingfleet of Lincoln College was always a good friend, and fussy

15 Hill to W.F., 18 April 1798, p. 22.

pedant, preferring black-and-white to the singularly beautiful water-colour of Southwell Arch, not forgetting 'to mention one thing which struck me. You term the arch of Southwell, in your list, "a specimen of the *early Gothic*". I have no doubt you have authority for this, otherwise (from what I recollect of it) I should have pronounced it of the *Florid Gothic* wch was about the middle age of that style of architecture. The early Gothic was very rarely, I believe, ornamented as is the Southwell arch. But I throw this out only as an hint'. In the same letter and with equal pedantry he suggests Fowler takes a look at 'the Saxon arches about Iphleigh Church'. This was too much even for Fowler's grandson editing the letters, who adds in square brackets 'pronounced Eflay'. It was and is spelt Ifley, and pronounced thus.

In 1813 Stillingfleet has another suggestion: 'that if you should judge proper to introduce an altar tomb into Archbp. Bowet's shrine, it ought not to be plain as the Percy shrine. It should have a quatrefoil ornament to be characteristic . . .' And this time the editor explodes in his footnote: 'It seems almost incredible that Mr. Stillingfleet should have suggested the introduction of an altar-tomb where there was not one in the shrine.'

For Fowler's intention was to record, rather than enter the current fashion for picturesque beauty. That he produced one of the most beautiful books in that period of abundant splendour, was almost a by-product of his accuracy. It leads to some consideration of book illustration, and its relation to text.

That is where it leads, because seldom in any comparable work was the contrast between those two, picture and text, so singular. The original issue of Thomas and William Daniell's *Oriental Scenery* had pamphlets or 'booklets' of text which are seldom seen, and quite out of scale with that enormous publication; yet there is a different form of eccentricity in Fowler, who advanced through his long series of coloured plates with no thought of cohesion or completion. When each seemed to have formed itself into a volume, he provided a list of contents.

Perhaps few people ever bothered to read the text of those volumes of 'Picturesque Views' which appeared abundantly in the first three decades of the nineteenth century. Ackermann had his hack, William Combe, who supplied what was needed or expected. *Ackermann's History of the University of Oxford* we read on the spine labels of its grey boards, with *One Hundred and Five Coloured Engravings, including Thirty-Three Portraits of the Founders*. Inside, the title is *A History of the University of Oxford, its Colleges, Halls and Public Buildings*. Combe's name is nowhere, his

diffident note in the Introduction reads sadly, 'that the office of the writer is distinct from that of the artists; and thus disconnected, it becomes him to resign to them the larger and undivided portion of approbation due to their talents'. A prophetic phrase, 'thus disconnected', but that is what very often happened. Nobody cares for Combe's donkey-work, except to observe that Harrison printed it with dignity.

For statistics in Fowler we look to Ball: 'The total number of printed Prospectuses issued descriptive of the Engravings is twenty-three', ranging in date from 1799 to 1826. Of those, nine were written by others, and 'the rest are merely explanatory of obvious forms or dimensions, with the exception of the account of the pavement at Leicester and one or two others, of which the authors are unknown'. Random, ephemeral in appearance, they were bound into each volume I have seen. The contrast between these bits of jobbing printing, and the large pages they always follow (rather than face) is a curiosity of each volume: the grandeur of each plate, and its workaday advertisement.

Born in 1761, Fowler was thirty-five when he issued his first engraving, a late rise towards the heights. Lysons learnt from Gainsborough, was part of the cultivated artistic world which carried him away from legal practice - Fowler at Winterton had no such advantage; not bibliophile or collector but a provincial builder, he possessed a taste for splendid ornament of several kinds and created it.

If success is measured by patronage, he achieved the heights: Universities, Bishops, several Dukes and an Earl, Sir Joseph Banks, Sir Walter Scott who so admired one of the engravings he had it made into a table top, and the royal family. His 'Memorandum Made at Windsor' on May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1814, too long to quote fully, should be recalled in his own words:

This morning at 11 o'clock, went to the castle to wait upon the Queen, Princess Augusta, Princess Elizabeth, Princess Mary, in Princess Mary's apartments. Had the honour of being upwards of one hour and  $\frac{1}{2}$  in their Royal presence. I was conducted through the apartments from the Porter's room by the Princess Elizabeth's Page, Mr. Hardy. As soon as he entered the room in Princess Mary's Apartments he bowed to me and said the Queen was coming. I was very much struck by the idea of Her Majesty being so near at hand, but he had no sooner spoken than I saw the door move to open on the other side of the room. At this signal he walked backwards, bowing, facing the other doorway till he got out of the room, shutting the Door very gently after him. At this moment, to my agreeable surprise, the Princess Elizabeth came in instead of the Queen, and addressed me in a most pleasing way, calling me by my name, and said I hope I see you very

well. Just at this time the Queen and Princess Augusta, and Princess Mary came in at the opposite door to the left. The Queen addressed me in a very pleasing way, calling me by my name, saying she was glad to see me, and asked me when I had seen Mrs. Goulton and if she was very well, etc. The Queen sat down to the Table in the middle of the room and requested I would be so good as to shew them my works. In opening them the Queen said they were very beautiful, indeed she had not seen anything of the kind that she so much admired. After turning the whole of what I had done carefully over and making very judicious remarks on every fresh subject, reading all the descriptive parts etc. Her Majesty observed that she thought Dr. Willis would be pleased to see the Lincolnshire pavements particularly, as he was a Lincolnshire Gentleman. Accordingly he was sent for, and Her Majesty turned to the pavements in the portfolio that were found in our part of the neighbourhood; the Doctor observing that they were very fine specimens of Roman Antiquities, the Queen answered, they are very pretty, beautiful indeed, they certainly do Mr. Fowler very great credit.<sup>16</sup>

After this formality of small-talk we may be relieved to find a little brotherly mockery from Thomas in America, writing to his cousin Joseph Rushing:

My very good Br. Wm. (who loves money dearly) is rambling from one end of the Island to the other. He was in London last fall and went from there to Edinboro'. I suppose he is not satisfied with an hour's conversation with the Queen Mother, but must also seek distinction from her son, but it's likely enough, for Billy is as much at home among the Nobility as I am with the innocents (hum) in the vale of Muskinakunk! I have got two or three of his prints from England and when you and I meet again we will criticise this clever Br. of ours!<sup>17</sup>

Joseph was the ne'er-do-well, asking help from time to time, not always successfully, hence the phrase about William 'who loves money dearly'.

William had his own problems of that sort. 'As I have not received an answer to the two letters which I have addressed to you', he wrote to one Reverend William Wilson in 1816, 'I take the liberty of saying a third time, you will much oblige me by sending fifty pounds for which I have your note.' This happened to be in connection with his work as builder. Wilson's answer next month was a midwinter irritant, January 1817: 'I have received all your letters, Mr. Fowler, and the reason the first application was not answered immediately was my wish if possible to have paid the money: - that, however, the times have rendered out of the question for the present.'

<sup>16</sup> *Correspondence*, pp. 296-7.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Fowler to Joseph Rushing, 17 May 1822, p. 436.

Not much less annoying had been a letter two years earlier from James Wyatt, Carver and Gilder, High Street, Oxford, with news that 'The Revd. Dr. Bandinell the keeper of the Bodleian Library call'd on me yesterday to say he had lost your letter, and the Bill on the Library, and requested me to write to inform you'. Bandinell, more zealous in buying than paying, 'would pay it to me for you *if he had the Bill*, which he offered to do, but could not say what the amount was of the Bill deliver'd'.

Fowler's three volumes were made across three decades of work. In character they are remarkably consistent, opening on a high note and staying there; the early Winterton prints from the close of the eighteenth century no less splendid in their scope, colouring, detail, engraving – and mounting, and general presentation – than the latest. Time brought variety in the subjects chosen. Occasional luxury of a different sort was attempted. The sixth and seventh plates of volume three are from church brasses at Rotherfield Greys near Henley, and in Queen's College Oxford. In my copy they are printed on satin, very beautifully. As the price in the prospectus is given as seven shillings and sixpence for one, three shillings and sixpence for the other, I suppose these impressions on satin to have been specially ordered. For the marble below the brass of one, and the texture of vestments in the other – the marble especially – aquatint was used in a clever and original way. Printing on silk (or satin) is something it seems he chose on special occasions to do at about this time (1812, 1814). In a letter to Stillingfleet he mentions 'the impression on silk from Archbishop Bowet's shrine' which he hopes will be accepted 'as a token of gratitude for the great pains you have taken in writing the description of the Percy shrine . . .'

In truth Stillingfleet had taken such pains as a bookseller might in writing his description of the volume in front of him; fortunate friend, to receive an impression of the Bowet shrine on silk. It appears in the third volume, just after the Percy shrine he had described. Stillingfleet quoted from Leland, Camden, Gough, Dugdale, the obvious sources, and a contributor to the well-indexed *Gentleman's Magazine*.

The bound-in prospectuses, descriptions, are wayward curiosities, absurdities, like cattle-auction broadsheets interleaving volumes of art and scholarship. Though Fowler produced admirable engraved lettering as captions to most of his images, he lacked the smallest sensitivity to letterpress. Describing years ago the copy which is now at Wormsley I

called them, rather kindly, 'interesting examples of provincial jobbing printing at the turn of that century'. Recalling the excellence of text pages in Ackermann, Lysons, or any comparable work, one can only be amazed by this blind spot, while recognizing that few will be tempted to read so much as a sentence in either place.

It is all very strange. Bartlett of Oxford was engaged as printer for the first general Prospectus, a large affair – the size of the prints – mounted in the covers of both my sets: 'This day were published, by subscription, Engravings of the principal Mosaic Pavements, Which have been discovered in the course of the last and present centuries, in various parts of Great Britain. Also, Engravings of several subjects in Stained Glass . . .'. Lists of the engravings follow, for volumes one and two, 'The Money to be Paid on Delivery'. The Oxford printer performed quite well, using an impressive range of types, given the nature of his task. 'This expensive and inconceivably laborious undertaking hath already been favoured with the liberal patronage, and unqualified admiration, of several of the most distinguished literary and scientific characters in the Kingdom . . .'. And, as my smallest granddaughter would put it, bla bla bla. A later version, three pages on two leaves, printed by Storr of Grantham (binder to the Thorold family at Syston Park), has variant spellings for several names (of places and people) and announces the third volume or second appendix. Though each of my three-volume set opens with the engraved dedication to Sir Joseph Banks, according to this prospectus volume three was dedicated to 'the Right Hon. John Earl Brownlow, F.R.S., F.S.A., Lord Lieutenant of the County of Lincoln'.

It is time for the indulgent pleasure of a quick look at all three. His earliest offerings, of the mosaic floors uncovered at Winterton and Horkstow, are large and fine as any; no wonder a reputation was quickly established. The Horkstow plate is a magnificent example, though Lysons found it inaccurate. I cannot judge how true were the colours, which in the nature of hand-colouring varied a little from copy to copy, but the effect is glorious and as ever in books it survives unfaded. This was followed by mosaics at Roxby, Lincoln, Winterton again, and on the estate of the Duke of Newcastle – the last two simpler, smaller. As the overall impression in all three volumes is of coloured engravings on a vast scale, and all are mounted on the same paper known as elephant folio, it comes as a surprise in the first volume especially that half a dozen plates are of quite modest size.

This flurry of mosaic is interrupted by a pattern of Roman floor tiles, a neighbour subject, at Fountains Abbey, in which he experiments for the first time with fine-grain aquatint (in the areas of grey); then geometric mosaics at Denton near Grantham which had interested Stukeley a few years earlier, and a delightful figurative mosaic (of Diana and Actaeon it was thought) 'taken and coloured upon the spot' says the small prospectus, 'by W. Fowler from the Mosaic Pavement at Mr. Worthington's, Leicester'.

The next four illustrations, each in its quiet way a fine performance, show Roman tiles or 'pavers' from 'Prior Crawden's Beautiful Chapel at Ely', from York Minster, a Northamptonshire church, and a private collector or simply a private house ('in the Possession of H. Rooke, Esq., F.A.S.'). Tiles were taking their place in his interest, alongside mosaic. Aquatint is again very ably used, in uncoloured (grey) reproduction of areas of tile which follow examples of each pattern given in colour.

'Tessellated' enters his vocabulary, a variant from mosaic; we have four Tessellated pavements, one a large fragment 'in the Villas near Mansfield Woodhouse' - discovered by Rooke, owner of tiles we have seen; then a beautiful Urn device found at Cotterstock near Oundle, used now as their emblem by the Association for the Preservation of Roman Mosaics; followed by a small mosaic pattern from 'an Ancient Bath at Nants in the South of France' (copied of course, from someone's drawing, Fowler never travelled overseas) and a rather similar 'Representation of the Roman Tesselated [spelling never worried Fowler] Floor discovered in 1793 at the Lea near Shrewsbury'.

These small reproductions precede two of the mightiest, which perilously fold down and commonly tear at the stress, of mosaic floors at Littlecote, on the Wiltshire-Berkshire border, and Stonesfield near Blenheim. Both these are especially fine, intricate and partly figurative.

One cannot always know when Fowler is accurately recording, and when reconstructing. At Stonesfield it was, very convincingly, the latter: 'W.F. having been desired to engrave the above Pavement, opened the ground in March 1802, and found part of it in good preservation, from which, and some Fragments now in *Ashmole's Museum*, (where is also an original Drawing) he has been enabled to execute it on a plate 2 feet, 6 inches, by 1 foot 6.' The Stonesfield mosaic had been discovered nearly a century earlier.

Those two folding engravings of mosaic seem deliberately to be closing a chapter; for this first volume concludes with six illustrations of



Fowler's next absorption, stained glass. Throughout, these receive least by way of letterpress description – only one of the six gets its small prospectus.

The new venture starts with a bang not a whimper, by the recumbent figure of Jesse in a window of St. Mary's, Shrewsbury – brilliant yellow, blue, red, green, with attention to lead-lines which he was the first to reproduce. These areas of bright colour provide striking contrast to the small exactness of mosaic, an artistic by-product of his varied interests. Jesse, a taste of pleasures to come, is the only maximal subject among these six but stained glass takes centre stage in volume two. We have arrived at the summer of 1804.

The second volume (first Appendix) is a great mix, dominated by stained glass which included those nine large reproductions of windows at Aston with their seven Earls of Chester, and genealogy of the Earls of Chester, and engraved page of dedication to Heneage Legge the owner of Aston Hall where Fowler had enjoyed agreeable hospitality. Sixteen subjects are listed in the prospectus, which counts the eleven Aston prints as one, so the true number becomes twenty-five, plus genealogy and engraved dedications. Of those, stained glass occupies twenty. Mosaic appears only twice, from an 'ancient marble table' at Castle Howard and a fine geometric pattern at Becket's shrine in Canterbury. The murder of Becket is also reproduced, from a window in the Cathedral (Christ Church) at Oxford.

Any possible tedium from the sight of so many Earls of Chester is balanced by two large plates, Fowler's favourites: of Robert King, 'last Abbot of Osney, and first Bishop of Oxford', very handsomely painted from a window in the Cathedral at Oxford; and, first among four great paintings – coloured engravings one should say, but they have all the character of water-colour drawings – of Gothic-architectural subjects, the Southwell Arch. This was much admired. Rastall quoted an Archbishop of York as saying, of the arch itself, 'that there was nothing equal to it in this Country, nor in any other he had seen, except Italy'. Indeed we have all heard such claims, for buildings or hills or a line of coast, but Fowler's drawing of this subject, and his family's colouring, is very splendid, the perspective of a great building handsomely conveyed. The other three comparable subjects came in his third volume.

Gothic design, or ornament, has arrived as a major interest, prompted probably by Stillingfleet who had proposed the other example in this

book, the font at Godmundham in Yorkshire near his home. Stillingfleet wrote the prospectus, naturally (printed this time by Hamilton of Hull) taking the occasion to draw attention to another place in his own garden, which may have been used earlier at Godmundham and is attended by a crop of hopeful conjecture:

But whether this plain Font may be the original one, in which Paulinus 'baptised the High Priest, Coif'; or whether any authority may be allowed to Dr. Plot's conjecture, respecting the Font of Edward the Confessor, removed from the Chapel at Islip; or whether the originality of this Font receive a more certain support from that at Wimpole in Cambridgeshire, which Mr. Gough supposes to be 'of the earliest antiquity'; upon these points let abler antiquarians decide.

One knows the mood of optimism. He got Fowler to etch a little vignette of his garden font, for the foot of the prospectus.

So this first Appendix volume is marked by great splendour, some eccentricity, and – as before – a clever use of aquatint: at the base of the font in shadowy areas of its stone; most impressively, as varied texture in the stone arch surrounding Bishop King's window.

It must have seemed to Fowler that stained glass needed less explaining than mosaic. In this volume there are only two prospectuses apart from Stillingfleet's puff for his font. They describe very properly the two mighty subjects, Bishop King and the Southwell Arch.

Prices of individual prints have risen slightly, though not above one pound, eleven shillings and sixpence (one and a half guineas) which a subscriber would have paid for the magnificent folding plates of mosaic at Littlecote and at Stonesfield in volume one. That was the going rate for such major work as the Southwell Arch, and Bishop King, and two great windows (two for the price of one) at Lincoln College, Oxford, and more surprisingly for the mosaic at Becket's shrine. At the other end of the scale his first large stained glass subject, the recumbent Jesse, looks like a bargain at fifteen shillings and several small engravings in volume one a snip at two shillings and sixpence. Cheapest in volume two was seven shillings for the mosaic table at Castle Howard.

We arrive at the final volume, which Ball judged correctly 'the most varied and interesting of the three': stained glass, mosaic, Gothic stonework, large architectural views, all are there. Church brasses enter as a new interest, two of them in my copy as has been mentioned printed on satin. With the help of his grandson this volume, once in the Newcastle Public Library, has also sixteen of Fowler's smaller plates privately

issued. Of these, four are mounted formally and provided with his customary thick black borders, as if belonging to the collation; and of those four, three are fully coloured details from the 'East Window in York Cathedral' [sic] and a rather beautiful Madonna and Child from 'one of the South Windows in St. Nicholas Church Newcastle upon Tyne'. The fourth, in uncoloured outline, is of a church brass 'in the Chancel of Redburn Church'.

Part of the variety in volume three comes from a recognition that colour may not always produce the most faithful result. Satin serves very well instead of colour for those two Oxfordshire church brasses; a third, from Lincolnshire, has a flat chaste yellowy imitation of brass and serves quite well. For a more ambitious print, 'the Monumental Brass of Alan Flemying in Newark Church', an even paler flat gives a background to the whole picture. As the list price for this was ten shillings and sixpence, it could never have been coloured.

The other example of such new-found chastity was in his large print of 'the Restored Altar Screen in Beverley Minster', plain for half a guinea, coloured a guinea. This is indeed the coloured version, but the colour of stone. Fowler, more enthusiastic than we should now be about the effect of restoration, explains in his prospectus for one of his last completed works, September 23<sup>rd</sup> 1826:

On taking off the old plaster work, it was discovered that the Screen had been painted and gilded in the gorgeous style of the earlier ages. This splendid colouring is of course omitted in the 'Restored Screen', [i.e., in his print] . . . for nothing can surpass the delicate colour of the clean stone, and the chaste appearance of the whole, intermingling as it does, a softness and richness of light and shadow truly pleasing.

Innocent comment from one who was involved professionally in the work of church restoration.

A couple of modest Lancashire fonts, and the large print of another 'dug out of the Ruins of Kirkham Priory', complete this report of chastity; though perhaps one should add, as to colouring, two major works of Gothic design near the beginning of this volume, Archbishop Bowet's Shrine in York Minster, of which Stillingfleet was so fortunate as to receive an example printed on silk, and the Percy Shrine in Beverley Minster, both very elaborate and much admired.

For the rest, the variety which Ball admired is enhanced by those three very large scenes, having the appearance of water-colour drawings with

engraved captions: 'View of the Steeple of the Church of Saint Nicholas Newcastle upon Tyne'; 'West View of the Remains of the Monastery of Thornton upon Humber, Lincolnshire'; 'The East View of the Remains of Guisbrough Priory, Yorkshire'. His son Joseph drew the first two, for William to engrave. At Guisbrough, where he asked at a nearby cottage to borrow a chair, and the old lady agreed if he would put her into his picture, she is centre stage in blue and red, hand on hip, her smallness giving scale to the vast stone Gothic arch. Anyone looking through the three volumes might choose these three prints for the walls of his room. They have very little to do with 'Fowler's Mosaic Pavements' – nor have the bright and leaded windows, the fonts, shrines and brasses. Fowler had established himself as artist-antiquary, with freely wandering taste.

This final collection, the second Appendix, has a large plate of fragments, attractively arranged, including mosaic and tiles and pots and heating system, recently discovered (1818) at Haceby near Grantham, on land owned by Earl Brownlow to whom the volume is dedicated. Two smallish mosaics are also shown, from another recent find, at Storton in Lincolnshire, and among the best of all his mosaic reproductions a large engraving, geometric and figurative, 'A Roman Tessellated Pavement Discovered in April 1814, adjoining the Rampart within Micklegate Bar, York'. So far from abandoning his first interest, here he attempts to show accurately the small tesserae which composed his central subjects and their backgrounds. Strange that such a major work has no explanatory broadsheet, of which this volume has eight from the usual mix of printers. Their presence or absence seems unrelated to the importance of the print or its subject.

Nine representations of church glass are among his finest. If all those Earls of Chester were reckoned by some, despite their size, a touch monotonous, the same cannot be said of six handsome and varied examples in this volume, given without explanation, from the east window of Selby Abbey in Yorkshire. They show his mature work in this kind, with deep colour and surrounding detail. The large portrait of John of Gaunt from a window in the church at Long Sutton, Lincolnshire, has clever aquatint in his armoured tunic. Perhaps the two masterpieces reproducing stained glass, four if you count the number of subjects, apart from his own favourite Bishop King, are a pair of prophets (Zephaniah and Jeremiah) from the amazing set of ancient windows at Fairford in Gloucestershire, with which this volume opens, and the plate which ends

it, described in his List as 'Two Splendid Subjects in Ancient Stained Glass, from the East Windows in Southwell Minster; one representing Jesus raising Lazarus; and the other, His passing through Jericho'. They form an enormous single subject with surrounding arches and crowded composition, a fitting close, his view of them expressed in the highest price he had ever charged, two and a half guineas.

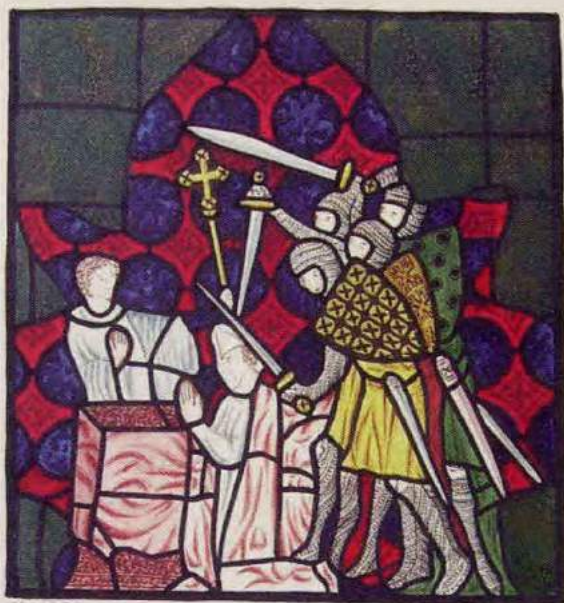
All these prices were slightly misleading, for a note at the end of the general prospectus makes clear that half a crown must be added for mounting. I have never seen them unmounted.

Fowler was never one to ignore compliments about his work. His grandson printed in the volume of correspondence the following 'Memorandum in the Writing of W.F.', undated:

Mr. Millar the Glass Stainer observed to the Archdeacon, Revd. Mr. Eyre, I must see Mr. Fowler, is it the great Mr. Fowler whose works are considered so superior in the higher circles? I am possessed of part of Mr. Fowler's works. They are the most accurate and the best facsimiles ever published. Mr Lysons and even Stothard who draws so beautifully is not to be compared with Mr. Fowler for truth and accuracy; his is the most valuable. I wish Mr. Fowler was a young man, that we might flatter ourselves with hopes of seeing most of the principal subjects in ancient stained glass copied by him. You little know how well you are known amongst Artists, how superior your work is considered by the first Characters of the Day. Archdeacon Eyre says, Mr. Fowler, you are the king of Facsimilists, you excel so much.<sup>18</sup>

Though one hears the tone of flattery there was truth with knowledge in those comments reported by Mr Millar the glass stainer. William Fowler of Winterton deserves more attention than he has received. As the librarian of the Society of Antiquaries confirmed to me recently, 'It is a long time since anyone has written on him'. This paper travels only a short distance by way of tribute to the creator of some of the finest English colour prints in that ample period, and a pioneer artist-antiquary across the two unrelated themes of Roman mosaic and stained glass.

<sup>18</sup> *Correspondence*, p. 666.

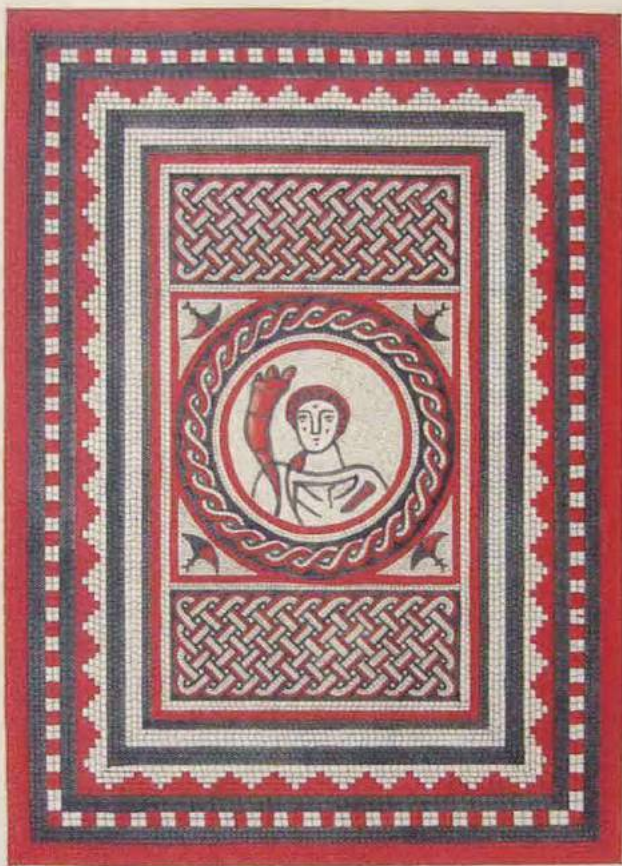


## Murder of Thomas à Becket.

*Drawn & Coloured from the original and Lawrence's Painted Glass in the Principal Window of the North Aisle of Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford.*

*The four Knights represented are WILLIAM DE TRAIL, REGINALD FITZ-URSY, HUGH DE MOREVILLE, & RICH<sup>d</sup> BRITO. Behind the Altar stands EDWARD GRIMMERE, with the Episcopal Cross in his Hand, and FITZ-URSY is the Knight who is plunging his Sword into the Prelate's Breast.*

PLATE I 'A correct copy of a beautiful specimen of stained glass, representing the murder of Thomas à Becket, drawn and coloured from the original, in the principal window of the north aisle of Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford.' (18 × 17 cm)



*A tessellated Pavement discovered in the Year 1797 upon the estate of Mr. de Lawrance in the field of Winterton in Lincolnshire about three Miles from the River Humber.*

PLATE 2 'A Roman tessellated Pavement discovered in the year 1797 . . . in the field of Winterton in Lincolnshire about three Miles from the River Humber.' (25 x 18 cm)

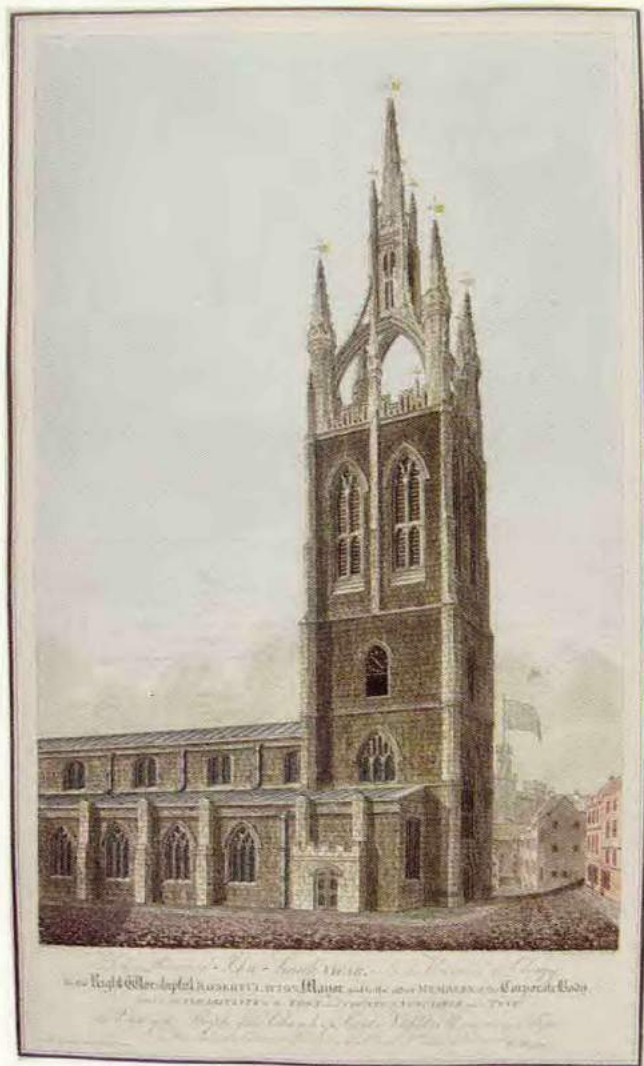


PLATE 3 'North West View of the Steeple of St. Nicholas' Church,  
Newcastle.' (53 × 34.5 cm)





PLATE 4 'Mr. William Fowler of Winterton, near Brigg Lincolnshire.'  
 Engraved by W. Bond, from a picture painted by G. F. Joseph. (19 × 15 cm)