

**THE GOVERNANCE OF
WOLVERHAMPTON, 1848-1888**

**Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
at the University of Leicester**

by

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For Diana

Abstract

The Governance of Wolverhampton, 1848-1888

John Butland Smith

The concept of governance is used to construct an urban biography of Wolverhampton between incorporation in 1848 and achievement of County Borough status in 1888. Intensive manufacturing is shown to have generated a sharp polarisation between eastern and western districts, which was accentuated by an explosive increase in population and limited availability of building land. The result was overcrowding with unhealthy slum areas in the centre and east of the town.

The council elected in 1848 was slow to address questions of public health. Until the mid-1860s governance was controlled by manufacturing interests and by the resistance of ratepayers to accept the cost of municipal improvement.

After the mid-1860s, the council became increasingly converted to the cause of municipal reform. This change was stimulated by civic pride, greatly enhanced by the visit of Queen Victoria in 1866. The idea of civic duty became influential, particularly among the powerful group of Nonconformist council members who initiated many cultural and recreational projects. However, leading Nonconformists came into conflict with the townspeople over their attempts to control public space.

The council is shown to have been permeable and open to influence from articulate individuals and from the increasing number of paid officials. Latterly, reform-minded local elites admitted to unease over the disparity in living conditions between east and west. Nevertheless, the council in 1848-88 had a record of municipal achievement which was creditable, not only on a national basis, but also in comparison with the paradigm of Birmingham.

The way in which this urban biography is assembled assuming that governance resulted from the interaction of variables, which were essentially economic, ideological, political, social and spatial, is proposed as a technique with general applicability. It provides a framework not only for study of individual towns but also for comparative evaluation of different urban genres.

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Finally, I should like to thank my wife Diana for her endless patience and encouragement. I hope that the affection which we share for our home town of Wolverhampton is apparent in this study.

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Note: The source of Map 1 is referenced. All other maps are from the collection held by Wolverhampton Archives and Local Studies.

Frontispiece - Some Members of the Wolverhampton Elite

Left to right

Row 1	Thomas Bantock	Rev C. A. Berry	Horatio Brevitt	Sidney Cartwright
Row 2	Samuel Dickinson	H. H. Fowler	Philip Horsman	Moses Ironmonger
Row 3	John Jones	Joseph Jones	William H. Jones	Rupert Kettle
Row 4	S. T. Mander	Sir John Morris	Edward Perry	A. C. Pratt
Row 5	G. B. Thorneycroft	G. L. Underhill	H. Underhill	James Walker



Structure of Thesis

This thesis uses the concept of governance to examine and analyse Victorian Wolverhampton. Governance in this context may be defined as 'a set of instructions, rules and procedures by which an area is governed'.¹ Within the conceptual framework of governance, the thesis is in summary an investigation of the urban structure, the institutions and the people, and of their mutual interactions which contributed to the major decisions shaping the town and its environment during the 40 years following incorporation in 1848. It is not intended to be simply a narrative history. It is essentially an attempt to construct an urban biography which defines and evaluates the motive factors of Wolverhampton during a period of intense urban change.

Chapter 1, the introduction, identifies the significant variables central to the study of urban governance. The chapter begins by reviewing the stages through which urban historical research has progressed. The first phase, from about 1960 until 1980, is shown to have been concerned primarily with the identification and categorisation of elites. At this stage, much work was predicated on the assumption that elites, principally drawn from the middle classes, attempted by various means to gain some measure of control over the working classes. However, work carried out from the 1980s onwards showed that this assumption was unrealistic. Two contrasting studies on mid-nineteenth century Manchester are discussed and contribute to the conclusion that the middle classes were much too diverse to have made a concerted bid for hegemony. Moreover it became apparent that the working classes had developed a robust and resistant culture of their own. Nevertheless, despite the above reservations, there is no doubt that urban elites were one of the most significant variables which affected the governance of the Victorian town.²

From the review of urban historical methods, there are considered to be six significant variables which contributed to the character of urban governance. These are: (i) geography and demography; (ii) economic structure; (iii) elites and local government; (iv) civic identity; (v) religious affiliation; and (vi) culture, education and association. The effects of these variables are connected and mutually inter-active. Comparing their influences in specific times and circumstances permits an evaluation to be made of their relative strengths. This is particularly helpful in enabling towns to be set in context, compared, and classified into urban genres.

¹ This simple definition of governance, which is used as the foundation of this thesis, is taken from M. Goldsmith's opening lecture 'Urban governance: a political science view' given on 2 April 1998 at the Urban History Group Conference at Leeds University. The conference is reviewed by C. Williams and T. Willis in *Urban History*, 25, 2 (1998) 240-43. For a wider discussion, see M. Goldsmith and J. Garrard, 'Urban Governance: some reflections' in R. J. Morris and R. H. Trainor (eds), *Urban Governance: Britain and Beyond since 1750* (Aldershot, 2000), 15-27.

² J. B. Smith, 'Urban elites c.1830-1930 and urban history', *Urban History*, 27, 2 (2000) is a review essay which contains much of the material used in Chapter 1 of this thesis.

The objective of Chapter 2 is to set the scene by describing how the geographical situation of the town related to its industrial development. The accelerating process of urbanisation is described together with its effects, the concentration of building and of people. Indeed the physical shape of the town is related both to constraints imposed by land ownership and industrialisation and to the influx of migrants attracted by rising prosperity throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. Such forces influenced the widening disparities in environmental conditions between districts and contributed to the migration of the more prosperous away from the unhealthy east and increasingly-congested centre towards the south and west of the town. The chapter ends with a summary of the acute social and environmental problems facing the first elected council in 1848.

The context for the environmental conditions described in Chapter 2 relies heavily on the nature of work in Wolverhampton. Accordingly, Chapter 3 opens with a brief description of the industrial history of the town during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The overwhelming importance of manufacturing industry is demonstrated, not only in providing employment and prosperity but also in thereby attracting inward migration. The consequent changes in population are related to the fluctuating fortunes of local industry. The effects of industrial power are considered with respect to their influence on the self-image of the town, its civic identity, and also on the environment. Objections to the severe pollution experienced are shown to be vulnerable to the paramount demands of manufacturing and trade.

The relationships between owners/employers and their employees are found to have been mediated by a measure of deference and by some mutuality of interest between the two sides. The nature of these relationships varied between different trades and is shown to be closer in the more skilled activities. Some masters displayed a paradoxical blend of ruthlessness and concern towards their workpeople. The failure of Chartism to gain as strong a foothold in Wolverhampton as in neighbouring districts is considered, together with examples of landmark disputes in local trades. The rise of organised labour and the decline of deference are related to the climate of change which became apparent in the 1880s and the later years of the Great Depression. However, the consistent and recurrent theme of Chapter 3 is that of the overwhelming importance of manufacturing as a main factor in the governance of Wolverhampton.

Chapter 4 concerns the identity and characteristics of those who participated in the government of Wolverhampton before and after incorporation in 1848 and up to the change to county borough status in 1888. In examining the process by which the commissioners eventually transferred responsibility to the elected town council in 1848, attention is paid to the arguments for and against incorporation. The fear of excessive rating is discussed. The remarkable disavowal of party politics by the new council is commented upon and continuities are identified between commissioners and councillors. The

allocation of electoral wards between east and west is significant and is shown to be a source of political tension in later years.

In analysing the details of all council members between 1848 and 1888, attention is paid to a wide range of characteristics including occupation, religion, political allegiance, relationships, length of service, wards of residence and representation. The results show a council in which the initially strong contingent from the shopocracy is overtaken by the dominant group from manufacturing with some inclusion of professionals in later decades. These professionals, who frequently gained early advancement to high office including that of mayor, benefited from the permeability of a council which was somewhat deficient in quality and confidence and thus became vulnerable to external influence. The council acquired a poor reputation which tended to discourage capable local men from standing for election. Even the mayoralty sometimes proved difficult to fill because of the level of commitment and personal expense involved. There were less demanding ways of achieving respect and influence in Wolverhampton and the ranking order of esteem is identified with county magistracy at the zenith. The criteria by which candidates for the magistracy were judged emphasise the cultural differences which separated town and gentry society.

Chapter 5 sets out to analyse the attitudes of the town with respect to public health. The intention is to use this issue to explore the motivation of the council and also that of other interested bodies and individuals who contributed to the debates and meetings which eventually led to remedial action being taken. The vital question of public health generated a series of situations in which it is feasible to compare the relative strength of the impulses which contributed to decisions affecting governance under crisis. The subjects examined relate principally to three major issues: water supply, sewerage, and the improvement scheme which included clearance of the central slums. The collision between social duty and rising rates is analysed. The effect of external reports is assessed, not only in their technical cogency but also in terms of their unstated appeal to a growing sense of civic consciousness. External criticism and unfavourable comparison with other towns is seen as an increasingly powerful influence.

Chapter 6 examines the ways in which the civic identity of Wolverhampton was constructed and how it evolved. Significant factors include traditional deference to the higher authority of the county and the crown, this deference being conditioned in the case of Wolverhampton by the absence of a local aristocracy. The difficult relationship with Birmingham, the near and potentially overwhelming neighbour, is considered in its multiple aspects. Adverse comparison with Birmingham encouraged the town to adopt a defensive attitude which had also been provoked by unfavourable external opinion placing Wolverhampton firmly and totally within the Black Country with its familiar ravaged landscape. However, increasing civic confidence emerged in the 1860s and the defining event was the

Royal Visit by Queen Victoria in 1866. This landmark event generated strong reactions both internally and externally and the effects of the visit are assessed in both the short and the long term.

The following three chapters under the general heading 'Structures of Control' consider the systems through which the elites of Wolverhampton sought to influence the attitudes and behaviour of the townspeople, particularly the working classes. This is shown to have been a highly significant but fluid area in which elite attitudes, particularly those of the council sometimes came into conflict with traditional popular beliefs and differences were resolved less by control than by bargaining.

In Chapter 7 there is an examination of the extent to which organised religion was a significant influence on the governance of Wolverhampton. The unusually high attendance figures for worship derived from the 1851 Census are broken down to show the relative strengths of the various denominations, particularly those of the Church of England and the Congregationalists, and support for each denomination is analysed in terms of class and occupation and their relative strengths on the town council are estimated. It is shown how the presumption that the Anglican St Peter's was the principal church for the whole town was challenged by prominent dissenters. The position of the Roman Catholic community, which consisted primarily of the impoverished Irish, is considered and the ways in which that community was treated are discussed and related to local preoccupations. The leading figures in local government are analysed according to their denominations and places of worship where possible. The Congregationalists are shown to have been generally associated with Liberalism and with manufacturing and the wide gulf between the views of 'Old Dissent' Congregationalists and others is explored. The obligation which Congregationalists expressed to promote and to undertake civic office is considered. Finally the School Board elections of 1870 are shown to have constituted a major battleground on which governance was fiercely contested and on which political and religious allegiances of council members were formally revealed for the first time since incorporation in 1848.

Chapter 8 examines the development of those institutions which exerted what might be termed 'cultural power', particularly related to education, culture, recreation and association and thus influenced the climate of opinion in which the governance of Wolverhampton was formulated. Arising from the earlier analysis of denominational strengths, the prominent role of Congregationalism in promoting awareness of the need for civic enlightenment is analysed in relation to education where religious and class differences continued to generate tension. The new phenomenon of adult education is considered and illustrates the dichotomy between education for its own sake and education as a necessary aid to manufacturing, an enduring influence in Wolverhampton.

The campaign for a free library demonstrates the new priority which was given to the general education of all classes. Above all, however, this campaign illustrates in its overwhelming success the dominant influence which could be achieved by one eloquent and resourceful man. The power of the articulate individual was a notable feature of what is shown to have been an open society in which governance was subject to manipulation and in which the council was very conscious of external opinion. The establishment of the new library is shown to have been a departure point for working class participation in the affairs of the town, albeit at a modest level in the beginning.

The movement which resulted in construction of the public parks is analysed and interpreted in terms of a growing conscience regarding the severe environmental problems in much of the town but also conditioned by civic consciousness and a keen regard for property values in the west. The park is shown to have been essentially 'the West End Park' for the elite; the later construction of the 'East End Park' is described to emphasise the different treatment which the town council gave to east and west. The construction of the new public baths in two classes is used to demonstrate the continued tension between the provision of communal facilities and the desire to retain a degree of social exclusivity and decorum, especially in the west.

A short study of societies and associations serves to confirm that society in Wolverhampton was increasingly separated, not only geographically, but also culturally; activities connected with the arts received formal support but they were often perceived as the province of the educated minority, teachers and church ministers. By contrast, the working classes developed a powerful enthusiasm for education, both as a means of self-improvement and for its own sake.

The ill-fated attempt in 1876 to abolish the Fair is shown to have brought about a serious conflict between the council's desire for urban respectability, which was strongly supported by Nonconformist members, and the people's defence of their rights of assembly for carnival upon traditional public space.

Chapter 9 is concerned primarily with the ways in which the nature of governance changed with time. The period 1848-88 is examined in two stages; the first, from 1848 to the late 1860s, is dominated by debates on sanitation. In the second stage, from the late 1860s onwards, issues of civilisation come to the fore driven by new imperatives of civic duty. Governance is shown to have become an increasingly pluralistic phenomenon with a widening range of determinants. There is shown to have been a sustained rise in the influence of professionals, particularly in the role of paid municipal officers. There was a growing concern for the common weal, the welfare of all the people and not only those living in the west.

In Chapter 10, the conclusions regarding the unique nature of governance in Wolverhampton are brought together, analysed and discussed. The significant motivating factors are defined and compared in terms of their relative importance at various stages throughout the period under study. In order to judge the performance of the council, Wolverhampton is considered in general context by comparison with other dynamic urban centres of the period. The ultimate comparison, which the councillors of Wolverhampton made on many occasions, is that with Birmingham. This comparison is used to show that the much-criticised Wolverhampton council in fact performed very creditably and their record of achievement can be compared favourably with that of the paradigm, Birmingham.

Finally, under the heading of 'Further Study', the investigative method used in this thesis is summarised as the construction of an urban biography in which a group of defined variables is evaluated in terms of their individual and combined influence upon governance. This technique, in which towns are considered as total entities, is proposed as being of general application to the comparative study of specific towns and of urban genres.

Chapter 1 - Introduction: Urban Elites and Structures of Control

The study of nineteenth century urban history has undergone a continuous process of development since the mid-1960s when H. J. Dyos 'established urban history as a new sub-discipline'.¹ The fundamental change in investigational methods has been the progressive transfer of emphasis from descriptive to interactional studies. These two methods have been identified and discussed by Richard Rodger.² The descriptive studies, which are generally the earlier work, are mainly directed towards demonstrating the characteristics of a specific town, one unique urban locus. These studies provide what Rodger terms 'urban biography' and operate by addressing particular towns in an essentially narrative way. Although descriptive studies deliver a basis for analysis they do not in general engage in extended analysis. They do not consider how elite influence and inter-class negotiation operated in their multi-faceted aspects, formal and informal, overt and covert etc. Moreover, descriptive studies do not usually extend into generalisation or inter-urban comparison. It can be argued that descriptive studies represent the groundwork of urban history, essential but unsystematised. In order to make progress in establishing a general framework for studying urban history, it is necessary to proceed to the second type of approach identified by Rodger which is the interactional study, systemic as opposed to narrative.

Interactional study is much more analytical and concerns itself with elucidating the process of historical change, its social and spatial causes and consequences. The interactional approach is not new; it was endorsed by Dyos and many historians have followed a mixed method containing elements from both approaches. However, interactional studies have been more in evidence in relatively recent work, perhaps from about 1980 onwards. The overwhelming advantage of this approach is that through examination of the mechanisms by which urban governance operates, a direct route opens up into generalisation. 'Systems of Cities' may be compared in terms of their diverse experience and explanations may be sought. These explanations may be related to a multiplicity of differences - political, social, occupational, religious, geographical etc. or most likely an inter-related combination of these factors. Many possibilities of constructing comparative frameworks become available. The importance of the town itself has gone beyond that of simply providing an arena in which events unfold. Indeed the town with its individual human and material structures becomes a participant in the drama.

¹ D. Cannadine, *The Pleasures of the Past* (Harmondsworth, 1997) 133; also 'Urban history in the United Kingdom: the "Dyos phenomenon" and after' in D. Cannadine and D. Reeder (eds), *Exploring the urban past: Essays in urban history* (Cambridge, 1982), 203-21.

² Alternative labels suggested for 'descriptive' and 'interactional' are respectively 'annalists' and 'analysts' or 'narrative' and 'systemic'. See R. Rodger, 'Theory, practice and European urban history. Prospect and retrospect' in R. Rodger (ed.), *European urban history: Prospect and retrospect* (Leicester, 1993), 1.

This emphasis on the influence of the town itself was germane to several early studies in urban history. The work of Briggs on Birmingham, Leeds and Manchester concerned the period immediately before incorporation of towns, but nevertheless represented an important point of departure for later studies.³ Briggs showed that the social histories of particular cities were likely to be different because they were affected by local problems, especially those concerned with employment. Birmingham was a city of small workshops in which social mobility tended to soften class distinction. There were regular economic fluctuations but notably “Distress did not divide masters and men in Birmingham; it brought them together by producing a common statement of grievances”.⁴ There was in short a substantial feeling of industrial, political and social unity. In contrast, Manchester was ‘a city of cleavages, of social separation and often of open class antagonism’.⁵ The main employment unit was the factory, often very large and owned by men who were separated from their workers by massive differences in prosperity. Adverse trade conditions produced open hostility between workers and masters. To Engels writing in 1845 Manchester was the ultimate example of class conflict, ‘the battle of all against all’.⁶ Leeds experienced some of the antagonism between middle class factory owners and working class employees but the working classes in this case were more conservative and less inclined to confrontation than their counterparts in Manchester. The principal industrial disputes in Leeds concerned mechanisation; the arguments were generally local to specific factories.

Thus, the work of Briggs supported the argument that relations between workers and their masters (the nominal elites) would be powerfully conditioned by the occupational structure of the workplace. This contention has a strong resonance with the findings of later work, particularly that of E. P. Hennock in which Birmingham was compared with Leeds, and to an even greater extent with that of Dennis Smith in which Birmingham was compared with Sheffield. Both of these seminal studies were based on the elucidation of class structure and the identification of elites.

Hennock’s study of the ‘Fit and Proper Persons’ who were the council members of Birmingham and Leeds between 1835 and 1914 is much wider in scope than the title might suggest. The book was described as ‘the first to probe systematically the social composition and leadership of town councils in this country’.⁷ Not only did Hennock identify and categorise the councillors but he also set their activities in the wider context of contemporary municipal life. Having listed council members in terms of their identity, occupation and socio-political standing, Hennock presented a comparative

³ A. Briggs, ‘The background of the parliamentary reform movement in three English cities (1830-2)’, *Historical Journal*, 10 (1952), 293-317.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 298.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 302.

⁶ F. Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (Oxford, 1993), 87.

⁷ E. P. Hennock, *Fit and Proper Persons: ideal and reality in nineteenth century urban government* (London, 1973).

discussion on the significance of these factors in relation to the nineteenth century urban government of Birmingham and Leeds. There were great similarities between the two cities but the time scales involved were significantly different. In each city local government sought men of substantial position, especially in manufacturing, to serve on the council; municipal profits were used for improvements, thus holding down the rates. Insanitary areas were cleared and public health became a major preoccupation. In Leeds the principal measures of municipal reform occurred after 1890 but in Birmingham the movement was well under way by 1870 and was described by Hennock as 'something fresh, a new vision of the role that representative local authorities could perform in civilising England'.⁸ It is the ideological element which was novel and in that sense, Leeds in the 1890s was following where Birmingham led twenty years earlier.

Dennis Smith, in his work on Birmingham and Sheffield 1830-1914, discussed council membership in similar terms to those of Hennock and extended the argument into a comparative analysis of the occupational structure of the two cities.⁹ Smith argued that much of the difference in class structure between Birmingham and Sheffield was closely related to their diverse and distinctive patterns of occupation. Birmingham generated a wide range of manufactured products and had a very intricate division of labour into relatively small groups with close contact between workers and employers. Sheffield by contrast had a much narrower spread of products with large groups of workers having much less proximate contact with their employers. Furthermore, Birmingham was closely linked with the surrounding region whereas Sheffield was more isolated both regionally and industrially. Sheffield was much more reliant on large scale industry and had a much lower proportion of commercial, mercantile and professional activity than Birmingham. To these differences, which conditioned the relationships between labour and owners/employers, Smith attributed the contrasting labour relations of the two cities; Birmingham was relatively quiescent whilst Sheffield was frequently tense and confrontational. These studies demonstrated *inter alia* that the nature of employment was a critical factor in conditioning the urban environment. Towns with small employment units generally had more stable labour relations than towns where the factory system predominated.

The owners of large factories ranked among local elites by virtue of their position as major employers of labour and, in many cases, they reinforced their status by election to borough councils. The role of such nominal elites was usually regarded as very powerful in early studies of urban history.

John Garrard, in his study on municipal politics in Bolton, Rochdale and Salford 1830-80, accepted the importance and effectiveness of local elites but offered a salutary note of caution in pointing out

⁸ *Ibid.*, 288.

⁹ D. Smith, *Conflict and Compromise: Class Formation in English Society 1830-1914: a comparative study of Birmingham and Sheffield* (London, 1982).

that the power of such elites was 'often limited and of unpredictable quality'.¹⁰ Although the concept of elite power provided a useful working model, it was always circumscribed in urban politics by many other factors often 'flowing from the very economic and occupational circumstances which gave (municipal elites) such political advantage'. These factors included the growing complexity of municipal business, the advent of the paid official, the influence of parliamentary legislation, the effects of landownership and many others. Elite power was also vulnerable to changes wrought by time. The elite model was seen by Garrard as 'no more than partly enlightening'. Together with the 'associated idea of the nineteenth century industrial town as a paternalistic hierarchy, based upon all-embracing deference and dependency', the elite model was a considerable over-simplification.¹¹ The gradations and groupings of urban society were able to negotiate their inter-relationships in a very wide variety of ways. Garrard's comments provide a bridge between the early essentially descriptive studies and the more recent and primarily interactional studies. These latter have concentrated on inter-class relationships and the ways in which urban elites, principally drawn from the middle classes, attempted to gain hegemony over the working classes.

The class struggle for hegemony in the Victorian city is the central theme of three important works: Morris on Leeds, Trainor on the Black Country, and Koditschek on Bradford. These books exemplify the interactional approach adopted during the period from the 1980s through to the early 1990s.

R. J. Morris, in his work on Leeds 1820-50, saw the middle class as a plurality of groups, i.e. the middle classes, which were certainly not unified either politically or socially.¹² They were divided into a variety of sub-groupings and sects which were frequently mutually hostile. Therefore, although the middle class in general could be construed as having a common set of social values, the class was never sufficiently united to be able to impose these values by concerted influence. Hegemony was never achieved, nor was it likely to have been.

In so far as there was any factor which united the diverse sub-groups of the middle class, it was the possession of property and the associated interest in urban order and social stability. The methods by which the middle class sought to promote a degree of order among the citizens of Leeds and to instil their own values included as a prominent contributor the activity of voluntary societies. These societies were very flexible and could accommodate a wide spectrum of sometimes conflicting viewpoints. As Morris wrote, 'only the voluntary society as a social form allowed that variety of patterns of association, participation and action which was essential if a fractured and divided socio-

¹⁰ J. Garrard, *Leadership and Power in Victorian Industrial Towns 1830-80* (Manchester, 1983), 222.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 223.

¹² R. J. Morris, *Class, Sect and Party. The Making of the British Middle Class, Leeds 1820-1850* (Manchester, 1990).

economic group was to act as a class, and act as a class it must if the privileges of property and power were to be stabilised, defended and extended'. Moreover, 'the search for order and stability was the most important imperative of all'.¹³

In the case of Leeds, Morris described a middle class which was not predominantly drawn from manufacturing but included a high proportion of families with mercantile and financial interests and also had strong roots in the professions. In fact the high status section of the middle class was dominated by men who were detached from the wage-labour nexus but nevertheless had a strong vested interest in maintaining its stability. Morris showed that this type of structure, in which the commercial and professional middle class predominated, was generally characteristic of large urban centres, e.g. Birmingham, Glasgow and Manchester. In medium-sized towns and in small industrial centres, e.g. the towns of Lancashire and of the Black Country, manufacturers played a greater part in public life.

Morris concluded by demonstrating how the expanding middle class and the landed aristocracy and gentry found that they had vested interests in common. Landowners joined in as patrons of voluntary societies. Morris suggested that increasingly the aristocracy 'danced to the tune of an organised, hierarchical, responsible, family-based, property-owning middle class'.¹⁴ From the mid-century onwards, the middle class was presented as the dominant power. However, Richard Trainor, in his wide-ranging study of Black Country elites 1830-1900, reached a somewhat different conclusion in arguing that one of the most remarkable features of British social relations up to 1914 was 'the extent to which economic, social and political powers remained in aristocratic and wealthy middle class hands'. The Black Country was seen as typical in this respect.¹⁵

Trainor defined urban elites as 'those individuals, from whatever class or stratum, who held leadership posts in the major institutions of the district or one of its towns'. The study concentrated on three particular towns (Bilston, Dudley and West Bromwich) and took into consideration all of the urban institutions ranging from local government through poor law administration, religious bodies, public order, industrial relations, philanthropy, political parties and societies. Trainor showed how, during the 60 years between 1830 and 1890, local elites achieved and maintained a dominant position in politics, industry and social life. Black Country elites were judged to have demonstrated skills in negotiation and compromise which defused local conflict.¹⁶ Industrial relations were clearly of

¹³ *Ibid.*, 321.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 331.

¹⁵ R. H. Trainor, *Black Country Elites: The Exercise of Authority in an Industrialised Area* (Oxford, 1993), 377.

¹⁶ Earlier, in the Chartist period around 1840, there was considerable unrest among industrial workers. See G. J. Barnsby, *The Working Class Movement in the Black Country 1750-1867* (Wolverhampton,

paramount importance. Local employers generally had the upper hand and unions were moderate by the later stages of the nineteenth century. Wealthy employers often remained in close contact with their workers and frequently became very popular figures especially when they supported local philanthropy.¹⁷ Trainor sensed that a feeling of civic unity helped to draw classes together. Some 'respectable' members of the lower middle and working classes were encouraged to participate in the process of local control and influence as poor law guardians and as deacons of churches and chapels, even as councillors latterly and to a limited extent.

Both Morris and Trainor argued that tension between urban classes was relieved by various forms of negotiation.¹⁸ Neither writer considered that class conflict was inevitable which was the premise on which Theodore Koditschek based his study of Bradford between 1750 and 1850.¹⁹ Koditschek described in detail the developing struggle between traditional landed Toryism, the *laissez-faire* philosophy of competitive industrial entrepreneurs of the 1830s and 1840s and a working class fighting to maintain living standards and traditions. In the late 1830s and 1840s the bourgeoisie were seen as being forced to accept, if only for self-preservation, the establishment of elected municipal government to enable the industrial structure of Bradford to survive.²⁰

The underlying theme of Koditschek's work was that in nineteenth century Britain, particularly in industrial towns like Bradford, there arose the first occasion in history when a fully capitalist society was compelled to confront its own contradictions and to find ways of forestalling what Marx described as 'the mutual ruin of the contending classes'. Koditschek appeared to accept that for a time and whatever the motives, there was a genuine desire to bring Bradford's classes together in a form of social unity, even the workers and the bourgeoisie. However, the advent of the 'Great Depression' in the last quarter of the nineteenth century was seen as threatening to undermine any hard-earned progress towards class unity. Class tension resurfaced but Koditschek concluded, perhaps surprisingly in view of the Marxist framework of his book, that by the mid 1870s, Bradfordians were too deeply committed to consensus for there to be any danger of serious civil unrest. Bradford's elite thereafter continued to generate a 'pragmatic mixture of social welfare provision, organised political negotiation and class compromise'.²¹ The motives of the elite were perhaps more altruistic than Koditschek would concede, but their actions were certainly intended to promote a social order consistent with their own customs and values, and so to achieve and maintain a stable society. Thus, Koditschek's work was

1977), *Chartism in the Black Country* (Wolverhampton, 1980), and *Socialism in Birmingham and the Black Country 1850-1939* (Wolverhampton, 1998).

¹⁷ R. H. Trainor, *Black Country Elites*, 355.

¹⁸ R. J. Morris, Review of *Black Country Elites* in *Urban History*, 25, (1998), 128-9.

¹⁹ T. Koditschek, *Class Formation and Urban Industrial Society, Bradford 1750-1850* (Cambridge, 1990).

²⁰ As an overall guide to the socio-economic dynamics of the mid-Victorian period, Koditschek acknowledged E. J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital 1848-1875* (London, 1975).

²¹ T. Koditschek, *Class Formation*, 581.

clearly set in the context of the attempt by the Bradford middle class to gain hegemony over the working class. However, this campaign was not notably successful and moreover the tensions, which it might have been expected to generate, were defused. Bradford, in common with many other industrial towns, experienced the transition from potential instability in the 1830s to the evolution of socio-political stability in the 1860s.

John Seed's 1993 review of Koditschek's work criticised the restrictions imposed by envisaging Bradford as locked in a rigid and codified framework of class struggle. Bradford, as Seed reminded us, 'was not Paris even in 1848'.²² The situation in Bradford, as indeed in different ways in all towns, was much more complex. In particular the participating classes were far more diverse structurally than Koditschek's work would suggest. There were profound divisions in all kinds of directions - industrial, political, religious, social, etc. As Morris demonstrated in the case of Leeds, the bourgeoisie was never a single unified class.

Seed suggested that the study of relations between urban classes and the achievement of consensual stability could best be advanced by further study on a range of selected towns. The necessary detailed interactional approach is exemplified by two studies on Manchester: these are by Martin Hewitt covering the years 1832-67 and by Simon Gunn on 1850-80.

Victorian Manchester is an outstanding example of the dual influence of industrialisation and urbanisation. Hewitt set out to examine what he regarded as the relatively undisturbed ground of the post-Chartist period with the time frame set to cover the years between the two Reform Acts of 1832 and 1867. The overall objective of the book, as laid out in the preface, was 'to unravel the conundrum of the collapse of Chartism and radicalism and to explain the evolution of social and political forms which appeared to preclude the maintenance of radical challenges to the *status quo*, choked the growth of Marxism or socialism, and buttressed the power of traditional elites'.²³ Hewitt was not satisfied with the argument that a mass working class (or at least an artisan working class) formed itself as described *inter alia* by E. P. Thompson and was then in some way defeated or at least collapsed and faded away under the overwhelming pressure of social control exerted by the rising middle class.

Hewitt set out to demonstrate that, in the case of Manchester 1832-67, the middle class was never able to construct a sufficiently powerful influence to overcome or at least to subsume the forces of working class consciousness. The argument was sustained on two fronts: (i) the demonstration that the middle class was never sufficiently united that it could have brought concerted pressure to bear on the working class, and (ii) that the working class came to realise that any form of revolt or direct action as

²² J. Seed, 'Capital and class formation in early industrial England', *Social History*, 18 (1993), 24.

²³ M. Hewitt, *The Emergence of Stability in the Industrial City, Manchester 1832-67* (Aldershot, 1996).

a means of redressing perceived social injustice would be neither feasible nor effective and that therefore an accommodation with the *force majeure* of elected government was necessary. However, an important corollary of this accommodation and a salient feature of Hewitt's position was that the working class continued to develop its own unique activities and to maintain its moral traditions quite independent of middle class influence. Thus Hewitt's book was about the comparative failure of the middle class on the one hand, and the robust and adaptive survival of the working class on the other.

Hewitt considered the diverse forms of organisation and association which evolved as industrial/commercial activity, population and prosperity increased. These included firstly the civil necessities of the state and the law, for example magistracy, police, poor law guardians, and secondly the myriad of social and voluntary groupings which were of endless variety but which differed widely in power and influence, for example religious bodies, educational/cultural organisations, trade unions, provident/benefit societies and sport/recreational associations. Attention was drawn to the basic observation that the provision of facilities for the working classes (however motivated), including libraries, parks and baths, did not of itself guarantee that the working class would adopt the middle class lifestyles and attitudes of their benefactors. Furthermore the provision of such facilities would not necessarily promote or enhance amicable or deferential relationships between classes. The working class were seen to be drawing benefit from these facilities but still developing in their own way and retaining their own loyalties, traditions and codes of conduct.

Widening the scope of his Manchester study, Hewitt set out to investigate the nature of the total urban environment, what he referred to as 'the intellectual morphology'. This phenomenon is divided into three subsidiary areas: media, institution, and site. Although Manchester is often regarded primarily as a textile town, Hewitt demonstrates that this was by no means exclusively so. The occupational structure was much more heterogeneous than either textiles *per se* or even manufacturing in general. There was a great amount of professional, commercial and service activity which increased and diversified as the period progressed. The general framework of employment and social structure was taken by Hewitt as his starting point.

Manchester 1832-67 was shown to have been a heterogeneous economy, much more diverse than had previously been accepted. Cotton was strong but not completely dominant. The ancillary industries of the textile trade, such as dyeing and finishing, were well represented together with much general engineering. Increasing prosperity, particularly evident during the third quarter of the nineteenth century, was accompanied by a rapid rise in professional and commercial employment. Trade and retail activity boomed in what was a remarkably stable economic climate. Along with this diversity and to some extent because of it, the middle and working classes were multi-layered and complex with some intermingling. Both classes had extensive gradations. However, there was always a residual

working class existing under the harsh and uncertain conditions of life as described by Engels and others. Within this arena of potential conflict, Hewitt recognised a middle class which, although divided by political and religious strife, set up a wide range of associations and institutions designed to propagate and support the shared values of middle class respectability. These organisations, particularly those concerned with philanthropic and religious matters, were seen as a form of 'moral imperialism' aimed at social control.

The religious section of the campaign was shown to have been rejected by the working classes. This was attributed to the alien and unwelcoming face presented by Church and Chapel with their complicated rituals and sometimes insufficient free accommodation. The working class were judged to have resisted inclusion in what was effectively middle class dominated and institutionalised religion. Nevertheless the working class in many areas retained their own individual religiosity, a mixture of 'common sense morality' and 'the simple religion of Christ'.²⁴

Not only religion but also education was given very limited and conditional support by the working classes. Mechanics Institutes often collapsed despite middle class financial support. Moreover, internal middle class rivalries diluted the applied effort and generated an excessive number of weak organisations prone to early failure. The unstable nature of working class employment militated against committed membership when even a modest subscription was involved. Frequent changes of address made it difficult for the working class to attend local meetings despite their remarkable and commendable hunger for education. Hewitt concluded that educational and cultural associations set up by the middle class were not generally successful in promoting harmony between classes but served merely to propagate and develop the views of their founders. Working class culture had not been neutralised.

Hewitt demonstrated that working class culture not only survived unchanged but positively flourished in such characteristic areas as mutual provident societies, burial clubs, music halls, fairs and various types of rough sport. As often as not the public house was a convenient and congenial centre for these activities with the inevitable association of drunkenness. Hewitt demonstrated effectively that a fundamental working class consciousness persisted through the period 1832-67 quite unaffected by such major external events as the defeat of Chartism and the improving economic and social environment. The working class had not changed in any material respect but had realistically adapted a traditional culture to new circumstances. The failure of Chartism was attributed to its foundation in a fragmented type of radicalism which failed to effectively mobilise the working class into a national consciousness. The Chartist movement was then absorbed into the general structure of working class

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 92-122.

politics operating by democratic pressure and consensus. Hewitt identified how the particular circumstances of Manchester accelerated the decline of local Chartism by increased coercion applied both to assembly and to intellectual freedom.

In his epilogue Hewitt included the caveat that his analysis was based on a city which was far from typical, neither artisanal nor factory dominated, and having a very diverse occupational structure. This led on to the statement that 'the search for a single explanation of mid-Victorian stability is undoubtedly misguided'. This must indeed be true and it is particularly apposite to compare Hewitt's approach with that of Gunn in his work, 'The "failure" of the Victorian middle class: a critique', which dealt mainly with Manchester 1850-80.²⁵

Gunn de-emphasised the view that the middle class 'failed' to gain hegemony over the working class as being not only simplistic but also as imposing unhelpful conceptual limitations on studies of the role of the middle class in Manchester. Moreover, Gunn was particularly critical of two proponents of views associated with what might be termed the 'failure theory' - Martin Wiener and W. D. Rubinstein. Wiener²⁶ suggested that the urban industrial middle class, having prospered, were influenced by an anti-trade ethos and sought social advancement by educating their sons through classically-dominated public schools into professional non-industrial occupations. Thus, Wiener claimed, businesses collapsed and the momentum of the industrial revolution was lost. This is in many ways an attractive hypothesis which provided an excuse, or at least a reason, for the continuous relative decline of British industry. Rubinstein identified a polarisation of the national middle class into two groups - the manufacturing elite of the industrial North and a commercial/financial elite centred on London. Thus appeared the familiar North-South divide in which northern industrial interests and capital were isolated from the national power structure.²⁷

Gunn demonstrated that Victorian Manchester could not be classified in such simplistic terms. As early as the 1840s, Manchester was less a centre of manufacturing production than a provincial, commercial and retailing capital. Commerce and distribution were easily predominant over manufacturing, as was also demonstrated by Hewitt. Within Manchester there was a very wide spectrum of organisation and activity. In addition to secular diversity there was what Gunn described as 'the cleavage between Liberal dissent and Tory Anglicanism ... profound and enduring in the politics and society of many urban areas'.²⁸

²⁵ S. Gunn, 'The "failure" of the Victorian middle class: a critique' in J. Wolff and J. Seed (eds), *The Culture of Capital: Art, power and the nineteenth century middle class* (Manchester 1988), 17-43.

²⁶ M. Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit 1850-1980* (Cambridge, 1981)

²⁷ W. D. Rubinstein, 'Wealth, elites and the class structure of modern Britain', *Past & Present*, 76 (1977), 99-126; *idem*, *Men of Property* (London, 1981).

²⁸ S. Gunn, 'The "failure"', 24.

In order to counter Wiener's argument of a withdrawal of the prosperous middle class whose fortunes arose from manufacturing but who then adopted an anti-industrial, anti-trade stance and strategy, Gunn investigated the history of the Manchester middle class from 1850 to 1880. He showed that in general the Manchester bourgeoisie neither acquired landed estates nor educated their sons at prestigious public schools. Even when, from about 1870, there was some tendency for the wealthier manufacturers to educate their sons through the public school/Oxbridge route, there was still a high rate of re-entry into the family business.

Gunn demonstrated that the Manchester bourgeoisie were able to reconcile a complex and wide-ranging life style in which a number of apparently discordant elements came together. For example, despite acquiring much more living space, despite achieving the social sanction of magistracy, and despite major cultural involvement as patrons of the arts, they nevertheless retained close contact with their roots by continuous direct involvement in trade and industry. Land and estates were sometimes acquired but usually as an investment rather than as a diversion route into country pastimes. The Manchester bourgeoisie thus obtained some of the trappings of Victorian high life but were not seduced away from manufacturing and trade. They were simultaneously disciples of Smiles, and of Ruskin, and were easily able to lead what Wiener would have regarded as contradictory life styles.

The Manchester bourgeoisie, whilst remaining true to their commercial roots, were perfectly able to reconcile their working background with a full participation in such highly cultural events as the Hallé concerts. In this way they engaged in what Gunn described as a 'visible demonstration of order and decorum in the heart of the city at night'.²⁹ They were seen to be displaying civic pride within their own social group and also emphasising the contrast between their elevated culture and its vulgar counterpart in the working class culture of the music hall. Through participation in such cultural activities as the Hallé concerts, the Manchester middle class were showing what M. E. Rose has described as 'a fierce pride in the place',³⁰ whilst at the same time giving expression to a belief that through philanthropy and culture, the harsh economic and social realities of working class life might be ameliorated.

When the actual effects of the middle class philanthropic and cultural influence on the working class were measured, they appear to have been very limited. However, Gunn did not regard the alleged failure of the middle class to gain hegemony over the working class as a useful hypothesis. Instead, he

²⁹ S. Gunn, 'The sublime and the vulgar: the Hallé concerts and the constitution of "high culture" in Manchester c.1850-1880', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 2.2 (1997), 224.

³⁰ M. E. Rose, 'Culture, philanthropy and the Manchester middle classes' in A. J. Kidd and K. W. Roberts (eds), *City, Class and Culture: Studies of social policy and cultural production in Victorian Manchester* (Manchester, 1985), 104.

observed a middle class in Manchester which was not suited to strive for hegemony because it was much too divided. Not only were there major divisions and tensions based on 'Liberal dissent against Tory Anglicanism, old wealth against new, and shopocracy against elite', but the Manchester bourgeoisie was also divided into a plethora of disparate organisations and activities.

The Manchester middle class was further sub-divided by great disparities of individual wealth. The manufacturing and commercial life of Manchester was dominated by cotton and was subject to all the very unpredictable cycles of that trade. The stigma of bankruptcy was always a threat even to large mill owners, and the average size of firm was indeed large. Those major employers who achieved lasting prosperity often withdrew from participation in local government and thus weakened the ability of the middle class to carry out concerted social campaigns. Indeed the Manchester middle class was a very variable and fluid group. When prosperity rose, much inward migration occurred. Manchester exemplifies well the Victorian arena in which the 'middling sort' of people were continually 'splintering into a number of quite different strata and quite divergent individual fates'.³¹

In addition to the above work, Gunn has written specifically on the role of religion in a paper entitled 'The ministry, the middle class and the "civilising mission" in Manchester 1850-80'.³² Gunn took as his starting point the Engels claim that 'by investing in the "civilising mission" of the churches (the middle class) had helped to retard the development of socialism in England'. Gunn identified religious attendance as 'a principal social activity of the middle class' and reached the same conclusion as Hewitt, i.e. that the working classes were not drawn into middle class forms of religion but retained their own characteristic types of religiosity.

The reluctance of the working class to become involved in organised (principally middle class) worship was understandable on several levels. Not only were churches and their congregations often unwelcoming, but also the service rituals were frequently complex, often incomprehensible, and must have conveyed the impression of having been designed to exclude. Furthermore 'Sunday best' clothes may not have been good enough. Although in a few cases, e.g. a Baptist chapel in Manchester, Gunn reported a mixing of classes, in general the classes remained physically separated either in spaces within church or in living areas. As the nineteenth century progressed, suburbanisation encouraged the withdrawal of the middle classes from central Manchester so that the sites of worship became increasingly separated and class-specific.

³¹ J. Seed, 'From "middling sort" to middle class in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century England' in M. L. Bush (ed.), *Social Orders and Social Classes in Europe since 1500: Studies in social stratification*, (London, 1992), 125.

³² S. Gunn, 'The ministry, the middle class and the civilizing mission in Manchester 1850-80', *Social History*, 21 (1996), 22-36.

These Manchester studies emphasised the limitations which ensued if urban history was considered as an elite-led phenomenon. The idea that elites, principally drawn from the middle classes, attempted to gain social control or hegemony over the working classes in order to produce a stable society, was increasingly viewed as simplistic and flawed. Hegemony was not achieved. The middle class or classes were never sufficiently united to operate a concerted campaign. The working class, on the other hand, were not in general seduced into copying middle class attitudes but responded pragmatically and maintained their own established traditions.

All of these negotiations were conducted against the background of a very fluid society, often vulnerable to economic upheaval. Nevertheless, civic consciousness and pride developed, often displayed through cultural activities. Meanwhile the increasing separation of towns into zoned areas housing groups of different classes and incomes raised further barriers to the mixing of classes and separate traditions continued to flourish.

Both Gunn and Hewitt established that the Manchester working class, abandoned to the inner city as a result of middle class movement to the suburbs in the late nineteenth century, increasingly tended to devise and consolidate their own traditions. This effect applied not only to religiosity but also to the whole range of socio-political, moral and leisure activities. In this increasingly polarised environment, it would become more likely that any substantial inter-class mixing would have resulted not from proximity but from the social openness of society, in effect from the willingness or otherwise of the middle classes to encourage and accept forms of contact with the working classes.

In this context the study by Hartmut Berghoff³³ comparing business biographies in Birmingham, Bristol and Manchester 1870-1914 is of particular interest. Although this study was mainly concerned with the possibility of moving upwards from the middle class, Berghoff identified Manchester and Birmingham as much more open societies, innovating and dynamic compared with Bristol which was seen as slow-growing and self-contained in comparison. Thus Bristol could be viewed as having an ossified and closed society, much less permeable either to the newcomer or to the aspiring inter-class traveller. The ancient guild structure of Bristol was cited as a probable contributor to the closed society.

As Berghoff pointed out, 'towns were and still are ranked by highly irrational criteria. Their names seem to evoke images and stereotypes that - no matter how wrong - are strong enough to act as self-fulfilling prophecies.' There were wide differences between towns, even among those of similar size and activity. Morris stated that 'the British towns of the industrial revolution were substantially the

³³ H. Berghoff, 'Regional variations in provincial business biography: the case of Birmingham, Bristol and Manchester, 1870-1914', *Business History*, 37 (1995), 64-85.

creation of the middle class, and in turn provided the theatre within which that middle class sought, extended, expressed and defended its power'.³⁴ Mike Savage brought these and other relevant views together and observed that 'architecturally the nineteenth century city was shaped by the bourgeoisie, so that working class districts were typically colonised by churches and voluntary schools which helped to pacify and control these areas, whilst the middle class areas allowed ready communication and conviviality'.³⁵ Even so, Savage did not see urban space as 'an inherently middle class locale' but saw it more as the residual battleground of the class struggle.

In terms of social geography, an important difference between towns was stressed by Savage who commented that although 'suburbanisation began early in the nineteenth century ... in many industrial cities leading employers and professionals continued to live in the heart of the city until the end of the century'. The factors governing residential location of classes within the Victorian city have been defined by David Ward³⁶ in work which Savage described as 'particularly important'.

Ward set out the zoning effects beginning with the early Victorian period when the richer classes lived in the centre of the city with the less prosperous classes living in layers proceeding outwards. Ward went on to account for the reversal of this situation in the later Victorian period when the rich moved out leaving the congested and polluted urban centres both geographically and (some would argue) politically to the working classes. Ward in fact gave a detailed review of the spatial arrangement of the Victorian city correlated with observations on a range of relevant parameters including the influence of land supply, the persistence of specific trade areas, etc. Throughout this work, Ward reminded the reader of the transitional character of the Victorian city which remained a fluid area of social mobility until very late in the nineteenth century when Ward identified sufficient stability for the description 'modern' to be acceptable when applied to such cities. By then the fluctuating waves of class movement had converted the city into the random appearance and sometimes apparent disorganisation which is familiar as 'the landscape of our confusions'.³⁷ Only by detailed study of the historical geography can these confusions be unravelled.

By the late nineteenth century local authorities had assumed a much more significant role in the control of urban space not only through the exercise of planning and building regulations but also

³⁴ R. J. Morris, 'The middle class and British towns and cities of the industrial revolution, 1780-1870' in D. Fraser and A. Sutcliffe (eds), *The Pursuit of Urban History* (London, 1983), 286.

³⁵ M. Savage, 'Urban history and social class: two paradigms', *Urban History*, 20 (1993), 61-77. Savage commends as an 'extremely pertinent ... identification of social mobility as a crucial feature of class formation': J. Goldthorpe, 'Women and class analysis: in defence of the conventional view', *Sociology*, 17, 4 (1983), 467.

³⁶ D. Ward, 'Victorian cities: how modern?', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 1 (1975), 135-51. See also R. Dennis and H. Clout, *A Social Geography of England and Wales* (Oxford, 1980), 82-3.

³⁷ T. Flanagan, 'A new scale' in K. Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), 119.

through their own provision of council housing. Moreover in the implementation of council policy the rapidly increasing group of paid officials had acquired considerable importance. These officials exerted appreciable influence not only through their numbers but also and particularly through their specific and often unique expertise, e.g. as gas or water engineers, etc. The office of Town Clerk became one of major importance, sometimes overwhelming the influence of the elected council. Some town clerks became dominant figures in urban society.³⁸

In summary, the late nineteenth century was a time of transition for urban society. Every town and city had its own unique morphology and the ways in which the population occupied this increasingly contested space had a significant effect on socio-political attitudes. In some cases, the relatively prosperous elites moved out of the town centre and often tended to withdraw from urban activity and influence. In other cases, elites either remained in the centre or, even if they became suburbanised and zoned outwards, they retained their municipal influence via political, religious and social connections. All of these effects were vulnerable to time and to the increasingly intricate sub-division of the social groups which constituted the class structure. Furthermore the power of local elites became diluted by the rising importance of the paid council official.

Conclusions

The historiography of urban history to date suggests that a study on the governance of Wolverhampton (or indeed of any other contemporary town) needs to take account of a group of variables which have been shown to have exerted significant influence on the urban environment. These variables may have acted either directly (for example through the composition of the elected council), or indirectly by affecting the matrices of communication or the climate of opinion within which local decisions were made (for example the importance of organised religion). It is important to note that these variables are by no means independent. They interact continuously to compose a blended influence and their individual significance is a function of time and circumstance.

This minimum group of variables which must be studied provides themes for the chapters of this thesis. The variables are as follows:

- (i) urban geography and demography
- (ii) economic structure: the nature and organisation of work
- (iii) elites and local government
- (iv) the construction of civic identity
- (v) religion

³⁸ An excellent example of the dominant town clerk was Sir James D. Marwick as described in I. Maver, 'Glasgow's civic government' in W. H. Fraser and I. Maver (eds), *Glasgow, Vol.II, 1830 to 1912* (Manchester 1996), 441-85. On a smaller scale but holding great local authority was Sir Horatio Brevitt, town clerk of Wolverhampton 1882-1919, as described in Chapter 9 of this thesis.

- (vi) education, culture, leisure and association
- (vii) late nineteenth century change: civic duty, the role of the paid official and the widening of participation in governance.

Variables (v)-(vii) are in effect the structures of control. Without being directly involved in formal local government, they nevertheless set the climate of opinion and the rules of behaviour which so clearly affected the course of governance.

The variables identified above are not regarded as an exhaustive list although they do appear to be the main factors in deciding the course of events. Garrard has rightly emphasised the danger of drawing conclusions regarding municipal politics from limited work on individual variables pointing out for example that 'municipal politics were far more complicated than a simple analysis of the political resources of the elites ... might suggest; more complicated also than the theory that legitimised their rule.'³⁹ However, by considering a range of several main variables and analysing events in terms not only of the variables themselves but also in terms of the interaction between them, it should be possible to make an assessment of the motive forces operating within a Victorian town with benefits in understanding the individuality of towns and in approaching the classification of urban genres.

In making this synthesis it has to be remembered that H. J. Dyos in his 1973 inaugural lecture stressed that urban history was 'a field of knowledge ... in which many disciplines converge'.⁴⁰ At that time S. G. Checkland had suggested that the main thematic headings under which urban history might be addressed would be: 'economic, social, spatial, ideological and political'.⁴¹ Checkland argued that this thematic approach was capable of generating what amounted to an urban biography, 'a synoptic view of a single city'. He further contended that the thematic method was unique in its ability to facilitate comparative history and that it could lead on to the idea of a general theory of city formation and behaviour.

When Checkland's five themes are juxtaposed against the seven variables which were identified from historiography above, there are obviously some direct connections which can be made. For example, 'economic' relates to work and 'political' relates to local government.

However, it could equally be claimed that many alternative and additional connections could be made. For example, 'work', although principally related to 'economic', could also be related to the other four

³⁹ J. Garrard, *Leadership and power*, 222.

⁴⁰ H. J. Dyos, *Exploring the urban past*, 31.

⁴¹ S. G. Checkland, 'Toward a definition in urban history' in H. J. Dyos (ed.), *The study of urban history* (London, 1968), 351. In a later paper Checkland re-named two of the headings ('ideological' and 'political') as 'perceptual' and 'governmental' respectively: see 'An urban history horoscope' in D. Fraser and A. Sutcliffe (eds.), *The Pursuit of Urban History* (London, 1983), 450.

of Checkland's variables, 'social, spatial, ideological and political'. The complex matrix of connections which can be constructed serves to emphasise the intricate inter-dependence of these relationships. Cities are, as Checkland pointed out, 'systems of total interaction' and it is therefore essential that thematic variables should be studied both individually and in the inter-active sense.

The framework within which to carry out this approach is provided by the concept of 'governance' which may conveniently be defined as 'a set of institutions, rules and procedures by which an area is governed'.⁴² In other words, governance as a theme extends beyond formal local government into the entire social and commercial structure of the town. It involves the negotiation of public and private space. It relates to both regional and national authority. Governance recognises that local government *per se* is only one of a matrix of inter-connected elements which condition urban history. Thus the idea of governance has helped to liberate current discourse from the outdated framework of a class-based model in which social control is imposed by elites and centred in the formality of local government. The concept of governance empowers the urban historian to take a wider view.

⁴² M. Goldsmith and J. Garrard, 'Urban governance: some reflections' in R. J. Morris and R. H. Trainor (eds), *Urban Governance. Britain and Beyond since 1750* (Aldershot, 2000), 15.

Chapter 2 - 'Theatre and Laboratory' - The Geography and Demography of Wolverhampton

'What I think can be recognised ... is the role of the Victorian city as both theatre and laboratory, a place literally for demonstration, as it has remained.'

H. J. Dyos¹

'The self-evident products of the urban process, the massing of physical structures and the social massing of the people.'

D. Reeder²

Wolverhampton is situated 13 miles north west of Birmingham on the western edge of the Black Country (Map 1). Although Wolverhampton was not created by the industrial revolution, it nevertheless expanded rapidly and was changed greatly by it, being transformed from a market town into a manufacturing and distribution centre for a wide variety of metal wares. From 1820 to 1860 the town was very successful in manufacturing a range of heavy iron products, cast and wrought iron household goods and decorative japanned tinplate articles. These manufactures were founded on the plentiful minerals of the surrounding region, particularly coal, ironstone and limestone (the coal deposit was remarkable in having a seam 10 yards thick). Wolverhampton had good trading communications: there was a complex of canals connecting with Birmingham and elsewhere, and by 1850, there were two competing railway lines to London.

As the prosperity of the district rose, there was much inward migration and the population rose very quickly. The figures shown in Table 2.1 illustrate the particularly rapid increase in population which took place during the first half of the nineteenth century. Between 1821-41 and 1831-51 the population doubled in 20 years. The rate of increase between 1831 and 1851 was exceptionally high, exceeding the corresponding figures for Birmingham, Glasgow, Leeds and Sheffield as shown in Figure 2.1.³ Between 1831 and 1841 the decennial rate of increase (47.1%) even exceeded that of Manchester which never reached 45 per cent at any time during the nineteenth century.⁴ Although the population increase rates of some neighbouring Black Country towns with broadly similar industries e.g. Bilston and Dudley fell back after the mid-century, the population of Wolverhampton continued to

¹ H. J. Dyos made this comment in his inaugural lecture, 'Urbanity and suburbanity', given at Leicester University on 1 May 1973. See D. Cannadine and D. Reeder (eds), (*Exploring the Urban Past: Essays in Urban History by H. J. Dyos*, Cambridge, 1982), 27.

² D. Reeder, *Exploring the Urban Past*, xv.

³ Adna Ferrin Weber drew particular attention to the rapid growth of Wolverhampton at this time in *The Growth of Cities in the Nineteenth Century: A Study in Statistics* (New York, 1963, originally published 1899), 40-57. Weber pointed out that only London, Wolverhampton and Portsmouth of his 'seventeen great cities' attained a higher rate of growth in 1841-51 than in 1821-31. In the case of Wolverhampton, Weber attributed the continued expansion to 'the opening of railways, with the concomitant development of the iron industry'. This explosion of population raised the parliamentary borough of Wolverhampton, which was roughly twice the size of the town, to a position in 1851 where it ranked as high as seventh by population among English boroughs, exceeded only by Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds, Bristol and Sheffield. See J. Lawrence, *Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England, 1867-1914* (Cambridge, 1998), 73.

Figure 2.1 - Rate of Increase - Urban Populations, 1801-1901

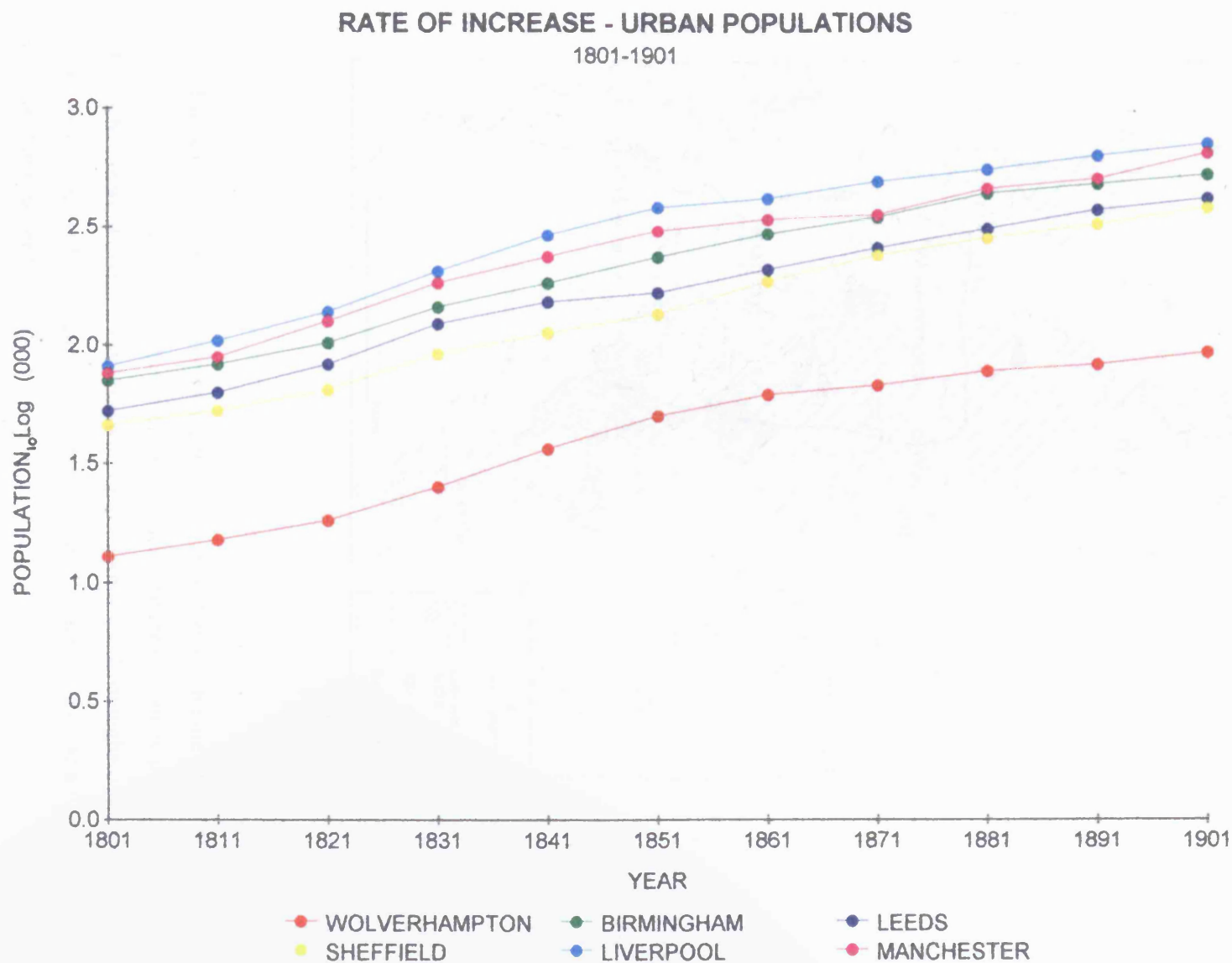
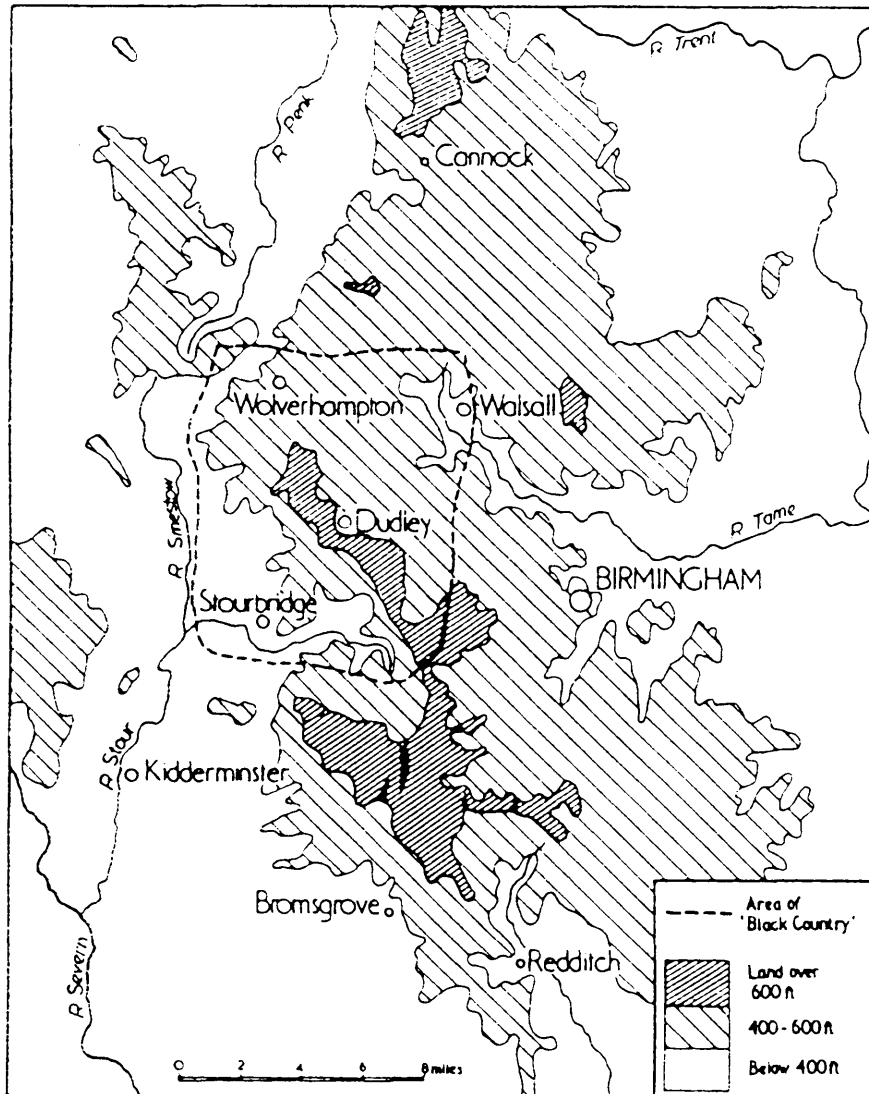


Fig 2.1

SOURCE: B R Mitchell - British Historical Statistics (Cambridge 1988) p24-27

Map 1: The Black Country

Source: T. J. Raybould, *Midland History*, 11 (1984)



The Black Country is not a precise region and its boundaries continue to be debated. However it can be defined with a reasonable chance of agreement as the area shown within the quadrilateral enclosing Wolverhampton, Walsall, West Bromwich and Stourbridge. Birmingham is not in the Black Country. The position of Wolverhampton with regard to the Black Country has always been questionable, as discussed in Chapter 6.

increase.⁵ There was some slowing down in Wolverhampton after 1861 but the rate recovered and accelerated again after 1891. From 1870 manufacturing had adapted successfully to a new range of economic circumstances (principally exhaustion of the coal and iron seams and the growth of external competition). The concentration on heavy iron products had reduced and the new emphasis was on manufacturing lighter finished metal ware e.g. edge tools, hollow-ware and brassware.

Table 2.1 - Population of Wolverhampton

	Population	Decennial rate of growth %
1801	12,565	-
1811	14,836	18.1
1821	18,380	23.9
1831	24,732	34.6
1841	36,382	47.1
1851	49,985	37.4
1861	60,860	21.8
1871	68,291	12.2
1881	75,766	10.9
1891	82,662	9.1
1901	94,187	13.9

Source: *Victoria County History of Staffordshire* and *Census* results

During the second half of the nineteenth century there was much spatial change in Wolverhampton and what had previously been a compact community expanded outwards, particularly to the south and west. New industries mainly concerned with metal work and engineering were established. Municipal projects were initiated and civic building flourished. The so-called 'unhealthy area' of slums in the town centre was cleared. A sense of civic consciousness and pride was evident in the town. From 1900 onwards, the pace of development slowed but by then the town was well established as an important manufacturing centre, not rivalling Birmingham specifically, but having a different and unique industrial basis.⁶

⁵ R. H. Trainor in *Black Country Elites. The exercise of Authority in an Industrialized Area 1830-1900* (Oxford, 1993), 30-31, illustrated the decline in the rates of population increase for Bilston and Dudley after the mid-century but also showed that the population of West Bromwich continued to increase at a rate similar to that of the Black Country as a whole. The population of Wolverhampton, however, rose between 1841 and 1891 by 127% which exceeded the corresponding rate of 110% for the Black Country in general.

⁶ The economic history of Wolverhampton is described concisely by G. W. Jones in *Borough Politics. A Study of the Wolverhampton Borough Council 1888-1964* (London, 1969), 19-23. For a general history of the town including descriptions of local industry, see C. Upton, *A History of Wolverhampton* (Chichester, 1998).

Before 1848 town government had been in the hands of appointed commissioners. When incorporation was achieved in 1848, many of the commissioners were elected to the new council. This municipal borough government remained unchanged until 1888 when Wolverhampton became one of the original county boroughs. The 40 years between 1848 and 1888 was a dramatic period in which a rapidly expanding town encountered alternating cycles of prosperity and recession and surmounted its difficulties with considerable success. The industrial basis of the town was transformed and what had begun in 1848 as a relatively prosperous but somewhat insular town had become by 1888 a changed but revitalised town with civic pride in abundance. It is the process of governance through which these changes occurred that is the subject of this study.

In 1750, in the early stages of the industrial revolution, the map of Wolverhampton drawn by Isaac Taylor showed a town which had a confined structure orientated in the approximate direction of the north-south axis (Map 2). Building was concentrated around the centre with limited outward development mainly to the north and south. In 1750 the average population density was 5.2 persons per inhabited house. At the time of the 1841 census the population density was unchanged from the 1750 figure. Therefore, numerically at least, housing provision appeared to have kept pace with the massive increase of population by a factor of nearly five between 1750 and 1841. Nevertheless, the quality of the new housing was very questionable. Much of the housing built during the late eighteenth century was provided in infilling the space between existing houses to create congested courts. George Barnsby commented that 'very few back-to-back houses were built, but the absence of building regulations meant that houses round a central courtyard were built to the highest possible density'.⁷ Moreover, the only completely new area of housing developed in the late eighteenth century was on low-lying land adjacent to the canal and this development, together with the infilled courts, soon degenerated into an unhealthy slum.⁸

⁷ G. J. Barnsby, *A History of Housing in Wolverhampton 1750-1975* (Wolverhampton, no date), 6.
⁸ This development can be seen on 'A Plan for the Township of Wolverhampton in the County of Stafford taken in the year 1788 by Godsons of Brailes, Warwickshire', of which there is an indistinct copy in Wolverhampton Archives and Local Studies Collection.

Table 2.2 - Population Density of Housing in Nineteenth Century Wolverhampton

	Population	Persons per inhabited house
1801	12,565	5.3
1811	14,836	5.2
1821	18,380	5.4
1831	24,732	5.0
1841	36,382	5.2
1851	49,985	5.4
1861	60,860	5.4
1871	68,291	5.2
1881	75,766	5.2
1891	82,662	5.1
1901	94,187	4.9

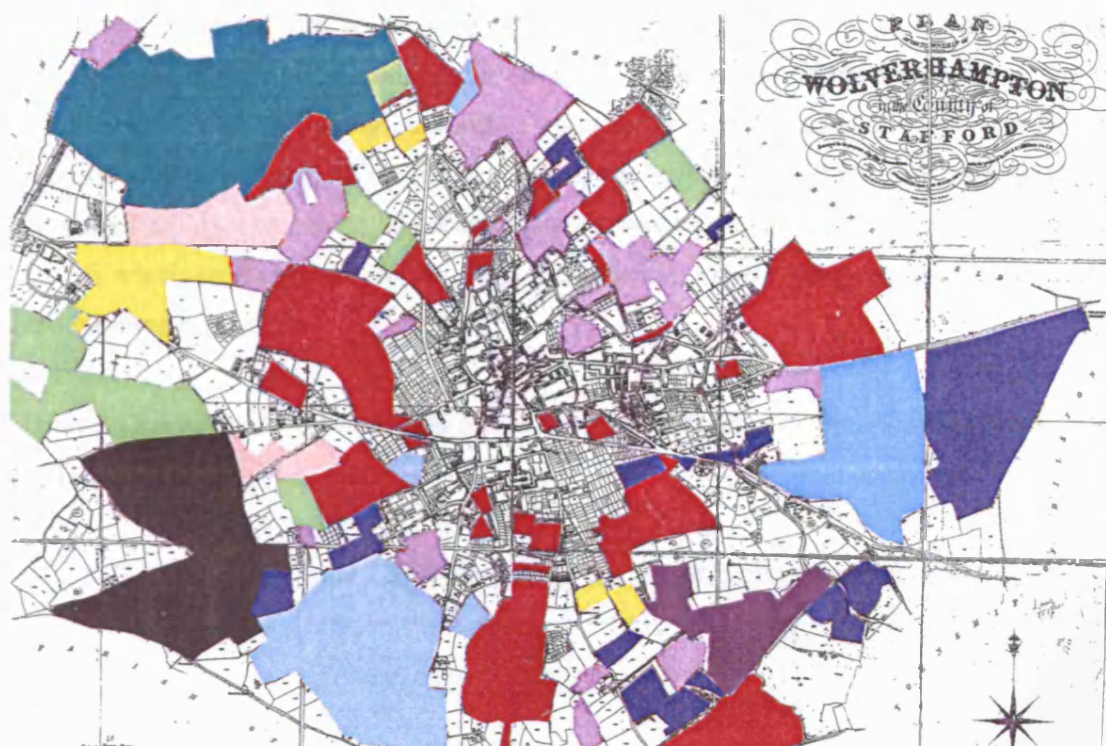
Source: G. J. Barnsby, *A History of Housing in Wolverhampton 1750-1975* (Wolverhampton, no date), 8.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, when the rate of population increase was at its greatest, the process of infill continued and the quality of most of the new housing was very poor. Huffer has claimed that in 1834 'half of the total houses in Wolverhampton at that time were deliberately built to squalid specifications' and furthermore stated that whereas the old established streets had drainage, the new streets did not.⁹












The tithe map of 1842 (Map 3) showed a town in which the earlier north-south structure was beginning to spread to the east and west. The eastern outskirts extended towards the Birmingham canal and the edge of the coalfield. There was also expansion in the west, principally along the line of the new street (Darlington Street) driven through in 1823 to improve the road and trade linkage to Shrewsbury and Wales. This western development contained high quality housing in what was becoming the most fashionable area of the town where the roads to Tettenhall and Compton led into open country. By contrast, the housing built to the east of the town centre in the area of Horseley Fields was a function of necessity rather than fashion. Its advantage lay in proximity to the canal wharves and the coalfield. The quality of this housing was generally poor. The area became congested and together with the infilled central areas such as Stafford Street and Caribee Island, it contained slums of higher than average population density.

⁹ D.B.M. Huffer, 'The Growth of the Township of Wolverhampton to 1850', *West Midlands Studies*, 7 (1974), 10.

Map 3 - The Tithe Map of 1842



Key to ownership

	Acres
	Duke of Cumberland 447
	Henry Hordern 223
	Duke of Sutherland 198
	Louis Hayes Petit 178
	Thomas Perry 173
	John Lewis Petit 165
	John Gough 162
	George Jones 111
	John Corser 70
	John Stokes 63
	John Dixon 57

The feasibility of satisfactory housing development in this eastern area was always limited by the close approach of the coalfield and the associated industries. Not only was ground required for manufacturing purposes but also pollution and subsidence frequently rendered it quite unsuitable for habitation. Such building as occurred on the coalfield at Bilston, 3 miles from Wolverhampton town centre, was of very poor quality. In 1848, a local solicitor wrote that Bilston was 'a scene of desolation, except for mining purposes ... eight tenths of the land is covered with heaps of mineral rubbish and five-sixths of the houses are of the poorest description.'¹⁰ Although the coalfield presented an obvious barrier to housing development eastwards, there were more important limiting factors which applied to the whole of Wolverhampton. These were concerned with land availability and building economics.

Details accompanying the tithe map of 1842 show that the land of Wolverhampton was rated as shown in Table 2.3 below.

Table 2.3 - Tithe Rating of Land in Wolverhampton, 1842

	Acres
Tithe exempt	311
Arable	1545
Meadow or pasture	515
Gardens	150
Spoil from collieries	471
Canals	16
Total	3,008

Ten owners held 66 per cent of the titheable land, the largest holdings being those of the Dukes of Cleveland (447 acres) and Sutherland (198 acres) and the banker Henry Hordern (223 acres). At that time, all owners were very reluctant either to sell freeholds or to grant long leases. The coal bearing land to the east of the town was a particularly desirable holding because of the associated mineral rights and was a prominent feature of the Sutherland estates.¹¹

Much of the town centre and the western suburbs were on church land, the precise ownership and leasing arrangements of which had degenerated into complexity and obscurity.¹² The net effect was that by 1830 most church property was dilapidated and deteriorating. A contemporary writer

¹⁰ G. J. Barnsby, *A History of Housing*, 9-10.

¹¹ For a general discussion on this subject, see T. Raybould, 'Aristocratic Landowners and the Industrial Revolution: The Black Country Experience c.1760-1840', *Midland History*, 9 (1984), 59-86.

¹² It was not only church land for which ownership was difficult to trace. In 'Reconciling Social and Physical Space: Wolverhampton 1871', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 4 (1979) 192-213, Mark Shaw confirmed that for nineteenth century Wolverhampton 'Mapping of land

described the houses of the church estates as being 'with a few exceptions, of the poorest description ... a reproach to the architecture, the commerce and the industry of the town'.¹³ Cooke's Directory of 1830 noted that 'the town does not increase in buildings like Birmingham as it is for the most part church land and consequently, the tenure is not sufficient to encourage people to lay out their money upon it'.¹⁴ Later in 1855, it was written that despite the rapid progress of Wolverhampton

its ground plan, however, still exhibits an extraordinary proportion of vacant spaces lying waste amidst improvements, disfiguring the town and retarding reforms ... Were they simply void this tendency might be sanatory [sic]; but appropriated to nuisances or encumbered with squalid and dilapidated buildings they have become as noxious as they are unsightly. By these marks may most of the property yet or lately belonging to the Collegiate Church ... be known.¹⁵

House building was limited not only by availability of land but also by the high and rising cost of the building process. By 1820 the cost of building materials nationally had risen sharply largely as a result of increased duties imposed by the government and the difficulties were increased because house building was usually in the hands of small builders of modest means who were said to use cheap materials and to employ semi-skilled apprentices. The result was intermittent building of low quality houses.¹⁶ In Wolverhampton, there was some building by land societies (often having connections with Chartism) as described by Barnsby but typically the rentals required could not be afforded except by skilled artisans in regular employment.¹⁷ The net effect of these restrictions was that in 1850 the map of Wolverhampton (Map 4) was similar in appearance to that drawn by Isaac Taylor 100 years previously and shown as Map 2.

After 1851, however, the pressure on housing in Wolverhampton began to reduce. The rate at which land was sold began to increase, even under freehold conditions. Building plots were advertised in the local press and residential expansion occurred. House property in Wolverhampton was almost entirely freehold in contrast to nearby Walsall which was largely leasehold. There was always a distrust of leasehold in Wolverhampton and a disinclination to buy on that basis.¹⁸ Major land owners such as the Duke of Cleveland could not dispose of leases and were therefore compelled to sell freehold.

ownership – at least in any meaningful sense – proved impossible'. Within these accepted limitations, Shaw's paper provided a very helpful and informative analysis of residential patterns and movements.

¹³ D.B.M. Huffer, *The Growth of the Township*, 13.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Wolverhampton was not in any way unusual in this respect. National difficulties with land availability, rising costs of building, the prevalence of small builders and the unsatisfactory quality of much of the resultant housing were described by R. Rodger in *Housing in Urban Britain 1780-1914: Class, Capitalism and Construction* (Basingstoke, 1989) 13-27.

¹⁷ G. J. Barnsby, *A History of Housing*, 10-11.

¹⁸ The town clerk, Horatio Brevitt, confirmed the preference for freehold in Wolverhampton which was in contrast to Walsall and to Birmingham where leasehold was common. Brevitt regarded freehold as the more desirable system because it encouraged owners to be thrifty and to keep their property in good repair. See British Parliamentary Papers, 'Urban Areas', 5 (1887), 944; 6 (1888), 766; and 7 (1889) 487.

Map 4 - Wolverhampton in 1850



The Lea

St John's Church

Wolverhampton

There was also a noticeable absence of speculative building in Wolverhampton. Much of the land was sold to small owners, who built their own houses financed either through building societies or by loans arranged privately with solicitors.

The patterns of residential expansion after 1851 have been studied by Mark Shaw who identified a widening separation of social classes in this period. Shaw described the decade 1851-61 as 'one of transition'. Development in the town centre was declining rapidly: most of the new building was in the western suburbs, 'the area of highest status' which housed the prosperous middle classes. The lower middle and skilled working classes tended to move to the north western suburbs where land was sold freehold by the banker Henry Hordern to form the large development, shown on Map 5 and named Whitmore Reans.¹⁹

In the second half of the nineteenth century the pressure for housing was relieved by a marked reduction in the rate of population increase. The coal and iron seams had become exhausted or otherwise unworkable by the 1860s and the so-called 'Great Depression' of 1873 caused a further suppression of economic activity with the result that employment levels and incomes fell and outward migration occurred. The decennial population increase rate, which had peaked at 48 per cent in 1841, fell sharply to 12 per cent in 1871, 11 per cent in 1881 and 9 per cent in 1891 before recovering somewhat to 14 per cent in 1901 by which time the manufacturing basis of the town had been re-organised.

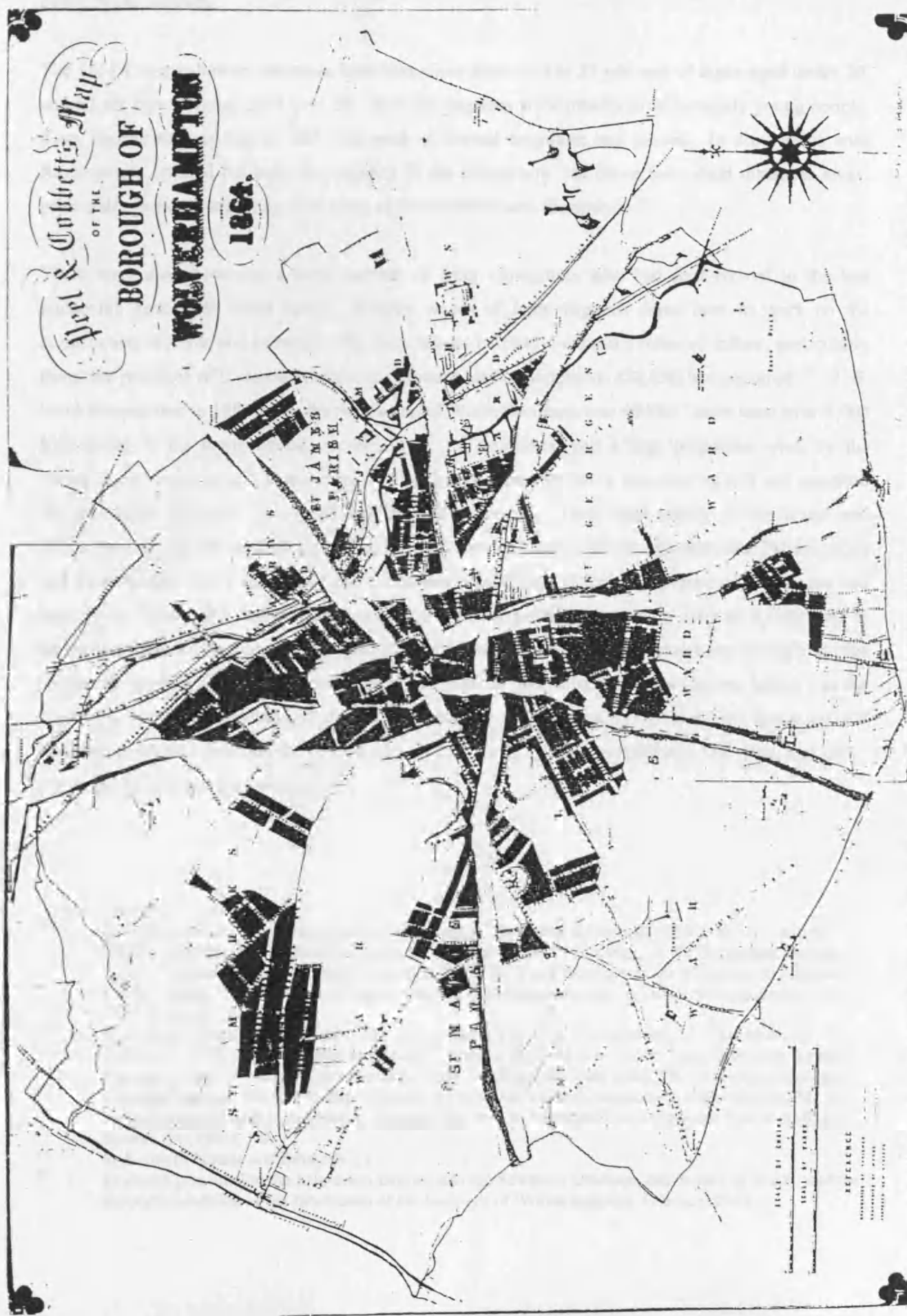
The migratory movements into and out of Wolverhampton between 1841 and 1871 were studied by T. S. Flory who argued that the Black Country towns were in effect independent competitive clusters of communities each of which had its own particular product, e.g. Cradley - chains, Tipton - nails, and Willenhall/Wolverhampton - locks, etc.²⁰ Because the skills required for Black Country manufacture differed significantly from town to town and because the flow of information was dominated by Birmingham, Flory's work suggested that Wolverhampton's superfluous skilled labour would not readily have transferred to adjacent areas. Therefore, as Charles Booth demonstrated for London in 1881, there was a situation characterised as 'Trades leave, people stay'.²¹ Thus the decline of what had been in 1851 the most productive iron-producing region in Britain may well have left more

¹⁹ See M. Shaw, 'Life in Wolverhampton 1841-1871', *West Midlands Studies*, 12 (1979), 1011; 'The Ecology of Social Change: Wolverhampton 1851-71', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 2 (1977) 332-348, and 'Reconciling Social and Physical Space: Wolverhampton 1871', *Ibid.*, 4 (1979), 192-213.

²⁰ T. S. Flory, 'The Geography of Migration into two Specialized Industrial Cities: Blackburn (Lancashire) and Wolverhampton (South Staffordshire), 1841-71' (University of Wisconsin-Madison, PhD thesis), 1978.

²¹ C. Booth, quoted by G. Stedman Jones in *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship between Classes in Victorian Society* (Harmondsworth, 1984), 154.

Map 5 - Wolverhampton in 1864 showing new housing development to the North West



unemployed workers and their families stranded in Wolverhampton than the bare figures of population trends might suggest.

The 1851 Census showed that those born elsewhere amounted to 27 per cent of those aged under 20, and 60 per cent of those aged over 20. Because migrants were usually predominantly young people, these figures suggest that by 1851 the peak of inward migration had passed. In accordance with Ravenstein's original findings, the majority of the immigrants had come from short distances away, principally from the adjoining rural areas of Staffordshire and Shropshire.²²

There were also, however, a large number of Irish immigrants who had first arrived in the late eighteenth century to build canals. Further waves of Irish migrants came later to work on the construction of roads and railways. The Irish famine of 1845-6 caused a renewed inflow, particularly from 'the province of Connaught where the greatest loss of population (28.6%) had occurred'.²³ R. E. Swift showed that in 1851 when the population of Wolverhampton was 49,935, 'there were over 6,000 Irish living in the town, almost one-eighth of the population and a high proportion even by the standards of Liverpool and Manchester'.²⁴ This Irish community had a low level of skill and provided the labour for collieries, ironworks and the building trade. They lived mainly in the courts and alleyways leading off Stafford Street and Canal Street, 'a district chiefly characterised by insanitary and overcrowded living conditions and containing a profusion of lodging houses, public houses and beer shops. Within this district lay the notorious 'Caribee Island' described in 1849 as 'a collection of the most squalid looking houses ... inhabited by the lowest class of Irish'. Sewers ran throughout 'this loathsome neighbourhood'.²⁵ There were other slums in Wolverhampton but Caribee Island was the most infamous. The surrounding district contained the worst slums in the town and, in the council discussions which eventually led to clearance in 1877, was referred to openly as 'the unhealthy area': it covered 16 acres of the town centre.

²² E. G. Ravenstein, 'The Laws of Migration', *J. Royal Statistical Society*, 48 (1885), 167-227 and 52 (1889), 241-301. For more recent analyses of migration, see D. B. Grigg, 'E. G. Ravenstein and the Laws of Migration', *J. Historical Geography*, 3 (1977). For a summary of the effects on population, see R. Lawton, 'Population' in J. Langton and R. J. Morris (eds), *Atlas of Industrializing Britain 1780-1914* (London, 1986), 10-29.

²³ R. E. Swift, 'Crime and Ethnicity. The Irish in Early Victorian Wolverhampton', *West Midlands Studies*, 13 (1980), 1-5. See also R. E. Swift, 'Another Stafford Street Row: Law, Order and the Irish Presence in mid-Victorian Wolverhampton' in R. Swift and S. Gilley (eds), *The Irish in the Victorian City* (Beckenham, 1985), 179-206. The urban ecology of the Irish community is described by M. Shaw in 'Individual Behaviour and Social Change: The Irish in Victorian Wolverhampton', *West Midlands Studies*, 14 (1981), 1-9.

²⁴ R. E. Swift, 'Crime and Ethnicity', 1.

²⁵ Evidence presented to the Rawlinson Inquiry into the Sewerage Drainage and Supply of Water, and the Sanitary Condition of the Inhabitants of the Borough of Wolverhampton, February 1849.

A description of central Wolverhampton and its workshops written in 1843 for the parliamentary committee on children's employment provides a compelling summary of the daunting environment which would have to be confronted by the newly-elected town council of 1848:

There are few manufactories of large size, the work being carried on in small workshops, usually at the back of the houses, so that the places where children and great bodies of operatives are employed are completely out of sight, in its narrow courts, unpaved yards, and blind alleys. In the smaller dirtier streets, in which the poorest live, there are narrow passages at intervals of every eight or ten houses, and sometimes every third or fourth house; these are under three yards wide and about nine feet high, and they form the general gutter. Having made your way through the passage you find yourself in a space varying in size with the number of houses, hutches, or hovels it contains, all proportionately crowded. Out of this space other narrow passages lead to similar hovels, the workshops and houses being mostly built on a little elevation sloping towards the passage. The great majority of yards contain two to four houses, one or two of which are workshops, or have room in them for a workshop. In process of time, as the inhabitants increased, small rooms were raised over the workshops, and hovels were also built wherever space could be found, and tenanted, first perhaps as workshops, then by families also. By these means the increasing population were lodged from year to year, while the circumference of the town remained the same for a long time, owing to the difficulty of obtaining land to build upon, as it was all the property of private individuals or of the church. As soon as land was obtained, Stafford Street and Walsall Street were built for the working classes, two of the largest and most disgraceful streets in the town.

None of these houses have any underground drainage; there is often a common dunghill at one end, where everything is cast, more generally there is nothing but the gutter and passage into the street. The interiors of the dwellings are extremely squalid, containing little furniture, and are for the most part exceedingly dirty in every respect.²⁶

Not surprisingly, disease was rife in central Wolverhampton. There were outbreaks of cholera in 1832 when 193 died and again, more seriously, in 1848-9 when 720 died. The danger of living in the central area was increasingly obvious. A doctor living in Salop Street in 1840 commented on the open sewer which was adjacent to overcrowded and ill-ventilated courts: he wrote that 'when this town was visited by the cholera (1832) it was very prevalent in this vicinity ... the only place in which any of the more respectable families were attacked by that disease.'²⁷ The figures in Table 2.4 show that in the three decades between 1840 and 1870 the death rates in the east were 50.2, 43.9 and 45.1 per cent respectively higher than those in the west. Even when the overall death rates for the borough were showing signs of improvement in the 1860s, the difference between east and west remained largely unaffected. Between 1840 and 1870, the average death rates were as follows: east 31.7 per thousand; west 21.6 per thousand. These rates may be compared with the corresponding figures for the Black Country as a whole (25.4) and the national average (22.4).²⁸ Infant mortality also showed a significant difference: in 1871 the figures for deaths of children under the age of 1 year were 218 and 189 per

²⁶ *Victoria County History of Staffordshire*, vol.1 (London, 1908), 306.

²⁷ Dr E. H. Coleman, letter replying to the Poor Law Commissioner, 25 January 1840. The 1832 cholera epidemic centred upon Bilston was regarded by many as an act of divine and justified retribution for sin. The result was widespread panic as described in R. V. Harrison, 'The Reaction of a Godly Community to an Awful and Unexplained Phenomenon!', *West Midlands Studies*, 10 (1977), 29-37.

²⁸ G. J. Barnsby, *A History of Housing*, 18.

thousand live births for east and west respectively.²⁹ When specific diseases visited in epidemic severity, the disparity between east and west became much more apparent. For example, in 1889, deaths from tuberculosis of children under 5 years of age were 12 times higher than in the west.³⁰

Table 2.4 - Death rate per thousand in Wolverhampton, 1841-1870

	1841-50	1851-60	1861-70
Wolverhampton East	32	33.1	29.9
Wolverhampton West	21.3	23.0	20.6
Wolverhampton Borough	27.0	28.0	24.0
England and Wales	22.4	22.2	22.5

Source: G. J. Barnsby, *A History of Housing in Wolverhampton 1750-1975* (Wolverhampton, no date), 18.

When the new council was elected in 1848, local attitudes to the problem of public health and the difference between east and west were ones in which an awareness of the danger was matched by a reluctance to meet the costs of environmental improvement. There was the customary failure to make the connection between ill health and poverty. There was also complacency in that those who commented officially were normally sufficiently prosperous to have avoided the worst effects and would later evade them more directly by moving out of the town centre. In effect, the gradual improvement in conditions would widen the divide between east and west.

In his report to the Chadwick Commission of 1842, Dr Dehane wrote in 1840 that fever, primarily typhoid, had been 'constantly present' in Wolverhampton for the past 20 years. He took the view that the geographical position of the town centre on a high sandstone ridge 530 feet above sea level would assist drainage and ventilation. However, this natural advantage was seen as vitiated by the density of housing and by the total disregard of hygiene in the streets. Dehane reported that for the previous 50 years (1790-1840), the town had retained 'in the arrangement of its streets and the buildings adjoining to them, all the evils of ancient times. The principal thoroughfares are narrow, and what is worse, it is in their immediate neighbourhood that close courts and alleys abound.' Dehane blamed the high price of building land for the excessive infilling and commented that 'in the formation of these buildings, as might be expected, everything has been sacrificed to secure a large pecuniary return; they are ... often of the very worst construction and in immediate contact with extensive receptacles of manure and rubbish'.³¹ Open storage of manure for sale was condemned as also was the keeping of pigs in close proximity to families. Dehane certainly gave a forthright account of the problem and indeed made

²⁹ Dr Ballard's Report to the Local Government Board on the Sanitary Condition of the Municipal Borough of Wolverhampton, 1 June 1874, 16.

³⁰ G. J. Barnsby, *A History of Housing*, 18.

some practical recommendations for improvement. The ready availability of cheap coal was cited as advantageous, not only in providing warmth, but also in encouraging ventilation by draught. Dehane suggested that more use could be made of the abundant local supplies of lime as a disinfectant. He also advocated that building regulations should be made more demanding at a national level.

Other local doctors who contributed to Dehane's report took a broadly similar viewpoint. Dr E. H. Coleman described the Salop Street area as containing 'a number of courts crowded with small and ill-ventilated tenements, the occupiers of which are chiefly employed in the manufacture of locks, keys, bolts and hinges. They have in general a pale and unhealthy appearance, and are very subject to disease.'³² Although all of the doctors gave realistic accounts of the problem, they tended to regard much of the remedy as lying in the education of the poor into better and cleaner habits. An honourable exception was the surgeon John Talbot Cartwright who in a list of 'causes amongst the poor which operate against a good state of health' included the following perceptive comment: '1st. The want of proper food, at all times scarce amongst the very poorest classes, but more particularly when there is little or no demand for labour.'³³

Thus, Wolverhampton in 1848 was a town in which public health was very unsatisfactory, particularly in the central and eastern districts. The reasons for this inadequacy were increasingly well understood and over the next few years the means by which public health could be improved significantly would become apparent, especially in relation to the water supply. It was not only a question of water quality; there was also an overwhelming problem of sanitation on the streets, 70 per cent of which had no drainage. However, the necessary improvements would require finance, the burden of which would fall on the town rate.

Despite the obvious need for action, there was always contemporary reluctance to commit public spending to reform projects which did not necessarily show a profitable return. The advocates of social reform were much criticised, as in the influential Liberal journal *The Financial Reformer* in 1858:

The social reformer in office is a dangerously popular man; because he is, in many cases, a dishonest one. He appears liberal that he may be all the more effectively obstructive and wasteful. His political science is the science of guiding the sewage of the country in the way it should go: ... it is the science of improving the architectural aspect of a city until it takes a foremost rank in the note book of the diletante [sic] tourist; ... but it is not the science of

³¹ Dr. J. Dehane, letter to the Poor Law Commissioner, 20 January 1840.

³² E. H. Coleman, letter to the Poor Law Commissioner, 25 January 1840.

³³ J. T. Cartwright, letter to the Poor Law Commissioner, 25 January 1840. Although Cartwright was the only contributor to the Wolverhampton report to single out poverty as a causal factor, the report as a whole was realistic and did not seek to minimise the problems. Parliamentary Papers, Health, General 3, 1844, 218-24. The Birmingham report by contrast was much more defensive and indeed somewhat complacent (*Ibid.*, 192-217).

good, cheap and honest government, which alone can make a country really great and respected, and a people really happy and prosperous.³⁴

The incoming Wolverhampton council would have to strike a balance between the need for reform and improvement on the one hand and the reluctance of ratepayers to accept increased charges in the cause of the general good on the other. Therefore the ways in which the new council would address the question of public health would provide a clear indication of their policies, priorities and motivations. However, in working within the constraints imposed by rating and public opinion, the council would need to be particularly aware of the views of manufacturing and trade, the lifeblood of the town.

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W. Ashworth, *The Genesis of Modern British Town Planning: A Study in Economic and Social History of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London, 1954), 66.

Chapter 3 - 'The Hard and Dirty Work'

'Which of us ... is to do the hard and dirty work for the rest - and for what pay?'

John Ruskin¹

'Nailers would throw their hammers up in the air on Monday morning, declaring that if they stayed up in the air, they would work that day.'

Black Country saying²

In 1983 S. G. Checkland wrote that although social and spatial themes had received most attention in urban historical studies, the relatively-neglected economic variable was in fact the most important of all. Entrepreneurs 'provided the economic base for the city, as well as largely determining its morphology (being the dominant claimants for sites)'.³ More recently Pinol and Rodger referred to the importance of 'functionality - the commercial or strategic position of a town or city which conveys an advantage'.⁴ Certainly the strategic advantage of Wolverhampton conferred by access to the mineral wealth of the Black Country was exploited to the full and provided much employment.

This chapter sets out to investigate the nature of the work which was carried out in Wolverhampton between 1848 and 1888, and what earnings and social stability it provided. The effect on the local environment is considered, not only in relation to the despoliation and the negative image thereby created, but also in terms of the attitudes which powerful elites adopted to counter growing public criticism. The relationships between men and masters are examined and discussed in the context of the relatively peaceful labour relations which emerged despite much greater militancy in neighbouring manufacturing centres. The incongruous position of local industrialists is discussed: some of the most prominent men commanded respect and even affection despite their enforcement of harsh working conditions. The social and political behaviour of different groups of working men is examined and contrasted.

3.1 The Industries of Wolverhampton

The industrial revolution transformed Wolverhampton from a market town into a much larger manufacturing centre and it was this change which determined the structure of the town from the middle of the eighteenth century onwards. The proximity of the 10 yard coal seam and abundant deposits of iron ore on the east side of the town provided the basis for all kinds of manufacturing but

¹ J. Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies* (London, 1907), 27n.

² E. Hopkins, *A Social History of the English Working Classes 1815-1945* (London, 1979), 5.

³ S. G. Checkland, *An Urban History Horoscope*, 455.

⁴ J.-L. Pinol and R. Rodger, Historical Urban Studies, General Editors' Preface in R. J. Morris and R. H. Trainor (eds), *Urban Governance. Britain and Beyond since 1750* (Aldershot, 2000), vii.

particularly those involving the working of metal.⁵ In effect, activity began in 1757 when John Wilkinson began to produce coke-smelted iron at Bradley near Bilston. Thereafter, the iron trade expanded, slowly at first, but later 'at a phenomenal rate'.⁶ Coal and iron were inextricably linked in this enterprise: 4 tons of coal were required to make 1 ton of cast pig iron.⁷ By 1802, there were 42 blast furnaces in the district converting the ore into iron at a rate of 1,600 tons per annum. In 1829 there were 129 blast furnaces. Production peaked in 1858 and shortly afterwards in the 1860s the industry began to decline.⁸ In 1871 there were 170 blast furnaces, but only 108 were in operation. At that time the total installed capacity in the Wolverhampton area was capable of producing 20,000 tons of finished iron weekly, equal to nearly one third of the total UK production.⁹

The decline of the iron trade occurred for a range of reasons. By the 1870s the coal and iron deposits became either exhausted or uneconomic to work. Foreign competition and restrictive tariffs affected the iron trade adversely. Domestic competition arose from other British regions, particularly the new areas working with steel.¹⁰ Trade became difficult and many local ironmasters closed their works. By 1900 'the iron industry of the Black Country had ceased to be of major importance'.¹¹ However, the metal working industries had survived by changing their products to satisfy new markets.

In 1800 local industry had been concerned with producing 'small metal goods and japanned iron and papier mâché ware, which all demanded a high degree of skill and were made either in the homes of craftsmen or in small workshops'. From the 1820s to the 1860s was the boom period in which 'the town flourished as a manufacturer of iron sheets and bars and of heavy crude iron products'.¹² Other products included cast and wrought iron household ware and the characteristic decorative japanned tinplate ware. After the 1860s, exhaustion of the coal and iron seams together with rising external competition and other problems previously described led the industry to change course. The manufacturers moved from heavy products to lighter and often decorative finished metal goods such as edge tools, hollow-ware and brassware. Although Wolverhampton was seriously affected by the

⁵ Elihu Burritt, in *Walks in the Black Country and its Green Border-land* (London, 1868) wrote the following:- 'Nature did for the ironmasters of the Black Country all she could; indeed, everything except literally building the furnaces themselves. The iron ore, coal and lime ... were all deposited close at hand for the operation ... In some, if not all, parts of this remarkable region, the coal and lime are packed together in alternate layers in almost the very proportion for the furnace requisite to give the proper flux to the melted iron.'

⁶ W.K.V. Gale, *The Black Country Iron Industry - A Technical History* (London, 1979), 3.

⁷ C. Upton, *A History of Wolverhampton* (Chichester, 1998), 86.

⁸ W.K.V. Gale, *The Black Country Iron Industry*, 3.

⁹ *Steen & Blackett's original illustrated Wolverhampton Guide and Visitor's Handbook* (Wolverhampton, 1871), 97.

¹⁰ Black Country ironmasters compounded their economic difficulties by being slow to adopt the Bessemer process for steel production. See S. Timmins (ed), *Birmingham and the Midland Hardware District* (London, 1967), 70, originally published 1866.

¹¹ W.K.V. Gale, *The Black Country Iron Industry*, 3.

¹² G. W. Jones, *Borough Politics. A Study of the Wolverhampton Borough Council 1888-1964* (London, 1969), 20.

Great Depression after 1873, the foundations of successful trading had been re-established and the 1890s saw a return of boom conditions.

Despite the vicissitudes of trade, manufacturing remained the major source of employment in nineteenth century Wolverhampton. The Census of 1861 shows that Wolverhampton ranked tenth among urban centres with respect to the proportion of the male workforce employed in manufacturing industry with 61.3 per cent compared with Coventry in first place at 73.4 per cent (see Table 3.1).¹³ It should be noted, however, that the figure for male manufacturing employment in Wolverhampton exceeded those quoted for Derby, Manchester, Glasgow, Newcastle upon Tyne, Bristol, Cardiff and Liverpool. When the corresponding figures for female employment in Wolverhampton's manufacturing industry are examined the town comes lower, in sixteenth place with 38.1 per cent (see Table 3.1). This result is not unexpected because the metal working industries which predominated in Victorian Wolverhampton

Table 3.1 - Percentage of workforce in manufacturing industry 1861

	Males		Females
Coventry	73.4	Dundee	84.7
Stockport	73.1	Preston	83.2
Preston	71.7	Stockport	80.2
Sheffield	70.2	Coventry	76.4
Birmingham	68.4	Leicester	68.9
Dundee	67.4	Glasgow	67.1
Northampton	67.4	Northampton	66.9
Leicester	65.2	Derby	65.1
Leeds	61.6	Manchester	64.8
Wolverhampton	61.3	Leeds	63.0
Derby	58.7	Birmingham	54.1
Manchester	57.9	Sheffield	41.9
Glasgow	56.4	Ipswich	41.0
Newcastle	52.4	Bristol	40.8
Bristol	49.3	Cardiff	40.2
Reading	47.4	Wolverhampton	38.1
Ipswich	44.4	Liverpool	36.5
Cardiff	40.2	Newcastle	35.9
Oxford	39.8	Edinburgh	30.7
Edinburgh	39.0	Reading	30.1
Liverpool	39.0	Oxford	29.0
Maidstone	29.0	Maidstone	27.0
GB	39.0	GB	43.0

Source: D. Reeder and R. Rodger, 'Industrial Towns 1840-1951' in M. Daunt (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, volume III, 1840-1950.

¹³ I am grateful to Richard Rodger for permission to use the data in Tables 3.1-3.3 which was derived from the results of the 1861 census and compared with the corresponding data for 1911.

did not provide such numerous opportunities for female employment as, for example, the textile industry which would have elevated the figures for female employment in such towns as Dundee, Leicester and Preston (Table 3.2).¹⁴

Table 3.2 - Ratio of manufacturing to service employment: Selected towns and cities 1861

	Males		Females
Coventry	4.8	Dundee	6.0
Stockport	4.6	Preston	5.3
Preston	4.4	Stockport	4.2
Sheffield	4.2	Coventry	3.4
Northampton	3.7	Leicester	2.3
Dundee	3.4	Glasgow	2.2
Birmingham	3.4	Northampton	2.1
Leeds	3.4	Derby	2.0
Wolverhampton	3.1	Manchester	1.9
Leicester	3.1	Leeds	1.9
Derby	2.5	Birmingham	1.3
Manchester	2.0	Cardiff	0.9
Glasgow	2.0	Sheffield	0.8
Newcastle	1.7	Bristol	0.7
Bristol	1.5	Wolverhampton	0.7
Edinburgh	1.0	Liverpool	0.6
Cardiff	0.9	Newcastle	0.6
Liverpool	0.8	Edinburgh	0.5
GB	1.3	GB	1.0

Source: As Table 3.1.

When the census figures are broken down further to establish the largest single occupational category, this analysis shows Wolverhampton in 1861 with engineering/manufacture as its dominant occupation, responsible for 39 per cent of the total male labour force (see Table 3.3). This is a remarkably high concentration on a single occupation and contributes to Wolverhampton's fifth ranked position among all towns and cities with respect to index of concentration, defined as the proportion of the total male and female workforce employed in the largest single occupational category. These considerations emphasise the remarkable predominance of metal working industries in Wolverhampton.¹⁵

¹⁴ By 1911 the proportion of females in Wolverhampton's manufacturing workforce had increased to 41.1% whereas for most towns the figure fell. The new and diversified industries of early twentieth century Wolverhampton (e.g. artificial silk, electrical plant, vehicle and component manufacture and general light engineering) attracted more female employees than were drawn to such traditional work as domestic service and the catering trades.

¹⁵ In contrast to the four towns which ranked more highly in 1861 (Sheffield, Stockport, Northampton and Preston) the index of concentration for males in Wolverhampton increased to 42% by 1911 whereas the indices for the other towns fell.

Table 3.3 - Index of concentration: Proportion of males and females employed in the largest single occupational category 1861 (expressed as %)

	Males	Females
Sheffield	49	41
Stockport	45	69
Northampton	44	62
Preston	41	73
Wolverhampton	39	46
Birmingham	33	32
Coventry	32	65
Leicester	32	48
Cardiff	30	55
Liverpool	29	49
Dundee	26	37
Leeds	22	38
Newcastle	20	49
Manchester	19	42
Derby	17	43
Glasgow	17	36
Bristol	13	47
Edinburgh	13	52
GB	24	37

Source: As Table 3.1.

The manufacturing resources of the district brought commercial success based upon metal working and Wolverhampton came to be regarded by many as 'a smaller edition of Birmingham'.¹⁶ The great majority of the manufacturing took place to the east of the town centre and the resultant despoliation of the landscape created a strange bleak outlook. A visitor wrote in 1835

about Wolverhampton, trees, grass and every trace of verdure disappear. As far as the eye can reach, all is black, with coal mines and iron works; and from this gloomy desert rise countless pyramidal chimneys, whose flames illumine the earth, while their smoke darkens the heavens.¹⁷

This surreal landscape was a constant reminder of the extreme polarisation of Wolverhampton between east and west. From the rural elevation of Tettenhall, 'the great residential suburb' two miles to the west of the town centre, the view was described as follows: 'Further south is the town of Wolverhampton, with its forest of tall chimneys belching forth their soot-laden clouds and obscuring the horizon.'¹⁸

A direct contemporary comparison between east and west is provided by the images from the 1830s represented in Figures 3.1 and 3.2. The contrast could hardly be more extreme between the ravaged

¹⁶ W. White, *All round the Wrekin* (London, 1860), 268.

¹⁷ F. von Raumer, *England in 1835* (London, 1836), 3, 232-3 quoted by D. Philips in *Crime and Authority in Victorian England: The Black Country 1835-1860* (London, 1977), 33.

¹⁸ J. P. Jones, *History of the Parish of Tettenhall* (London, 1894), 4.

Figure 3.1 - Wolverhampton from the East: Chillington Ironworks by George Wallis, 1837

Source: Wolverhampton Art Gallery



Figure 3.2 - Wolverhampton from the South West: An engraving published in 1830

Source: F. Calvert, *Picturesque Views in Staffordshire and Shropshire* (Birmingham, 1830)



east and the semi-rural west. However, although the overwhelming majority of manufacturing, particularly that associated directly with coal and iron, took place to the east of the town, there was nevertheless a small amount of manufacturing activity in the centre and to the south and west. The 1830 engraving shown as Figure 3.2 reveals a view from the south west which includes several factory chimneys. After about 1870 when the wealthier inhabitants tended to migrate outwards from the town centre, any manufacturing development to the south or west was curtailed. Moreover, those few works which were already in place came under severe pressure to limit their more obvious activities. The campaigns which arose against such activities illustrate the growing dichotomy between industry and environment.

In 1854 a correspondent to the *Wolverhampton Chronicle* objected to plans for a brick kiln to be constructed to the west of the town centre, a development which he considered could not fail 'to deteriorate the health, comfort and cleanliness of the inhabitants of St Mark's parish'.¹⁹ A respondent reminded the writer that Britain was 'a great commercial and manufacturing nation' and that in any event brick kilns were already operating in the residential areas of the town centre'. The people were urged to be 'content to put up with trivial inconveniences for the public good', even if they were to be sited in the 'quasi-aristocratic locality' of St Mark's parish.²⁰

In addition to resistance to new building, there were also sustained objections to nuisances caused by established factories. This was a particularly serious problem in the case of the paint and varnish manufacturers, Manders, who had been operating in the town centre since 1790. Not only were Manders major employers but their directors were senior political figures locally and indeed mayors on two occasions in the late nineteenth century. The process which the factory carried out generated resinous smoke to which some objected, as in 1854, when a petition was raised against the fumes emanating from Manders but the town council were unwilling 'to interfere with any established business in the town'.²¹ It was pointed out that 'works of this type were carried on in the midst of dense populations in London, Birmingham, Leeds and Glasgow'. Moreover it was 'difficult in a manufacturing town to define what is a nuisance'.²² In 1862 Manders responded to continued objections by admitting responsibility for what they described as 'occasional nuisance' up until one year previously.²³ They claimed that they had since installed a new patent condensing system at a cost of £1,100 and this would alleviate the problem. Even so, the smoke nuisance persisted and correspondence continued without any improvement being noted.²⁴

¹⁹ *Wolverhampton Chronicle*, 17 May 1854. [Hereafter the title of this newspaper is abbreviated to *WC*.]

²⁰ *WC*, 24 May 1854.

²¹ *WC*, 15 February 1854.

²² *WC*, 20 June 1855.

²³ *WC*, 9 October 1862.

²⁴ See *WC*, 11 May, 22 June, 12 October and 2 November 1864 and 18 October 1865.

When issues of this type arose there was always a powerful lobby to the effect that Wolverhampton was primarily a manufacturing town, indeed one of the most important in Britain, and therefore a quantity of smoke had to be accepted. It was seen as part of the price for employment and prosperity and a small price to pay at that. In 1855 the ironmaster John Neve (mayor 1853) argued against a motion in council objecting to smoke and stated that 'if there was any town in the kingdom which had a right to make smoke, it was Wolverhampton'.²⁵ During the hot summer of 1877 when there were many complaints against factory smoke, the nearby workhouse was obliged to take measures to reduce smoke from their boiler: Poor Law Guardian Peter Cremonini complained that according to medical evidence smoke was actually beneficial.²⁶ The popular reaction to these environmental problems was typified by a response in Council to the reforming views of the former mayor Henry Fowler who was reminded in 1877 that Wolverhampton was a manufacturing borough and could not be 'Bath, Cheltenham or Leamington'.²⁷ The persistent raising of objections had little effect in that manufacturing was always regarded as the lifeblood of the town and its smoke and pollution was dismissed as a minor inconvenience. The local population generally accepted this viewpoint and sometimes even glorified in the apparent absence of any harm suffered as a consequence of pollution. The prevailing argument was always that the town needed manufacturing, indeed existed only because of it.

In 1864 a new problem arose caused by the rapid expansion of the galvanising trade. 'The redoubtable Councillor Sidney became an outspoken enemy to its advance' and objected to the smoke emitted as being injurious to health. He urged the Council to take advantage of the Public Health Act of 1848 to restrain 'smoky and unhealthy trades and to drive them out of the town'. Sidney was an eloquent speaker and 'had great influence in the Town Council'. His campaign caused the manufacturers to close ranks and they held a meeting at which they conspired to react to the threat by making concerted attempts to increase their representation on the town council. Among those elected shortly afterwards was the manufacturer W. H. Jones (mayor 1873) whose business was japanning and galvanising, and this brought him into direct conflict with Sidney.²⁸

²⁵ WC, 12 December 1855.

²⁶ WC, 3 August 1881. See also D. E. Wood, 'The Poor Law in Wolverhampton, 1870-1900' BA thesis (Wolverhampton Polytechnic, 1986), 22.

²⁷ WC, 14 February 1877.

²⁸ All of the quotations in this paragraph are taken from W. H. Jones, *Story of the Municipal Life of Wolverhampton* (London, 1903), 131-2. Although Jones, being a japanner, was predictably opposed to Sidney's campaign, 'this foolish agitation', as he called it, he clearly had considerable respect for Sidney's eloquence and ability to influence the council. Sidney became the main advocate of the ratepayers in opposing council expenditure especially on schemes for sanitary reform as discussed in Chapter 5.

Sidney's campaign of 1864 soon died out but in 1869 the galvanising trade was faced with a more serious threat. When the Wolverhampton Improvement Bill was being reviewed by the House of Lords Committee, Council Henry Jones (brother of W. H. and a partner in the galvanising and japanning business) pointed out to the Committee that the Bill contained a section prohibiting manufacturers from using the town sewers. Jones argued that hardware manufacturers such as galvanisers, tin-plate workers and brass founders were the largest ratepayers in the borough and should therefore retain the privilege of disposing of waste through the town sewers. Jones is then said to have warned that if this permission was refused, the manufacturers affected would be compelled to leave the town and re-establish their business elsewhere. At this point the power of manufacturing was demonstrated clearly. The Committee Chairman, Lord Redesdale, said that the manufacturers of Wolverhampton must not be restricted in their business and the offending clause was altered before the Bill became law.²⁹

This situation in which the powerful vested interests of a manufacturing town were able to delay and sometimes frustrate the implementation of legislation against pollution was not unusual, neither was Wolverhampton particularly remarkable in this respect. For example, Jean Adams has argued that in Stockport 1844-45 'successful agenda manipulation by ... elites ensured that despite Lord Redesdale's efforts, smoke abatement was effectively manoeuvred ... into a non-decisional state for over 30 years'. Stockport was similar to Wolverhampton in that 'there was no benefit of smoke abatement legislation for those in authority ... because they usually lived outside the town and did not suffer the effects of their inaction.'³⁰

Those manufacturers who polluted the towns whilst acting as influential figures in their governance did not at that time have any difficulty in overcoming the fragmented and sporadic objections which they encountered. There was no informed medical or scientific opinion to call upon, and there was always great reluctance to commit public funds to addressing such intangible problems. It has also been argued that in the mid-nineteenth century the prevailing political philosophy of *laissez-faire* discouraged official intervention in individual enterprise.³¹ The net effect in Wolverhampton was that it would be the 1870s before environmental problems were approached with any real commitment.

²⁹ W. H. Jones, *Story of the Municipal Life of Wolverhampton*, 158-9.

³⁰ J. Adams, 'A Paradigm of Inaction? The Politics and Un-politics of Smoke Abatement Legislation in Stockport, 1844-56' in R. J. Morris and R. H. Trainor (eds), *Urban Governance: Britain and Beyond since 1750* (Aldershot, 2000), 165-81.

³¹ A. J. Taylor has commented that many regard 1865-85 as the period when 'laissez-faire finally lost its dominance' and that 'round about 1870 fundamental changes were occurring in British society which involved the replacement of an assertive individualism by a growing belief in and practice of collectivism'. See A. J. Taylor, *'Laissez-faire' and State Intervention in Nineteenth-century Britain* (London, 1972), 50-51.

3.2 Working Conditions and Labour Relations

In the prevailing climate of opinion whereby the interests of manufacturing industry received such substantial official support, it is perhaps not surprising that the organisation of labour was slow to develop in Wolverhampton. However, the conditions under which people worked were often harsh and probably the worst feature was the intermittent nature of employment.

The general level of trade was cyclical. The slump in the metal trade in 1845 resulted in local banks suspending payments and several manufacturers going into liquidation. Thereafter, trade dislocation attributed variously to cholera, the Crimean War and the Indian Mutiny affected the local economy adversely from 1855 to 1858 and further bankruptcies generated more unemployment.³² Apart from this two year disruption, the period from 1850 through into the 1860s was one of prosperity and high employment. Thereafter from the mid-1860s onwards, the decline of the coal and iron trade brought further hardship and unemployment, which was exacerbated after 1876 by the onset of the Great Depression.³³ Conditions were particularly difficult in 1877-78 when three major manufacturers closed (Thornycrofts, Shrubbery and Swan Garden Works) and there was acute distress again from 1879 to 1882 and in 1885-6. In 1885 a Royal Commission was appointed to investigate the causes.³⁴ The depression persisted until around 1895 by which time not only had trading conditions improved but the nature of local industry had evolved from the old heavy iron products to lighter finished metal ware.

Despite adverse working conditions and intermittent employment, there was less overt labour unrest in Wolverhampton than in the surrounding districts of the Black Country. It might be expected that Chartism, with its direct appeal to public meetings of workers, would have become well-established and indeed militant in Wolverhampton. There was a basis for organisation in that the Political Union, which had campaigned for the Reform Act of 1832, had been revived in 1838 and had developed into the Chartist Association which met at Mr Mogg's Coffee House on Snow Hill. However, visiting Chartist speakers from more active centres such as Birmingham criticised the Wolverhampton men for

³² G. J. Barnsby, *The Working Class Movement in the Black Country 1750-1867* (Wolverhampton, 1977), 168.

³³ Notwithstanding S. B. Saul's contention in *The Myth of the Great Depression 1873-1896* (Basingstoke & London, 1985), conditions in Wolverhampton were very depressed indeed during the late 1870s. For an account of the devastating effect of the Great Depression on the local iron industry, see G. J. Barnsby, *Socialism in Birmingham and the Black Country 1850-1939* (Wolverhampton, 1998), 75-76. The local press continually drew attention to the seemingly endless depression and the distress which it caused, e.g. *WC*, 8 and 15 January 1879.

³⁴ For a summary of evidence submitted to the Royal Commission, see V. B. Beaumont, *The Wolverhampton Chamber of Commerce 1856-1956* (Wolverhampton, 1956), 75-78.

their lack of support. Leading Chartists in Wolverhampton were not particularly militant but tended to preserve civil order.³⁵

When Chartist speakers of national importance visited Wolverhampton in 1842, the movement became linked with agitation against the Corn Laws. In February 1842 this synergy engendered a remarkable atmosphere in which local Chartists came close to forging an alliance with the reforming middle-class. A meeting was held under the auspices of the Chartists at which leading participants included two future mayors of Wolverhampton, the Liberal manufacturer Joseph Walker and the radical Quaker Jeremiah Wynn. The radical barrister who later became Alderman Sir Rupert Kettle also attended.³⁶ In his speech, Joseph Walker brought together the issues of the Corn Laws and suffrage. He was reported by the *Wolverhampton Chronicle* as claiming that 'Every man had a right to choose his M.P.'; he concluded by proposing a resolution in favour of 'repeal of the Corn Laws, dismissal of the Ministers and full and fair representation of the people as defined by the People's Charter.' At the end of his speech it was reported that Stiran and Campbell (Bilston Chartists) said 'Give us your hand. That's the way we work.' Mogg, the Wolverhampton Chartist, said that 'he was delighted at respectable men supporting the Charter', and the resolution was carried and formed the basis of a petition retaining the critical clause 'as defined by the People's Charter'. It was an outcome which Barnsby claimed was 'an acceptance by the middle-class in Wolverhampton of the name as well as the substance of Chartism' and 'was most unusual'.³⁷

This unusual degree of sympathy shown by elements of the middle class towards the working class when they considered the latter to have been treated unjustly was also identified by Barnsby in the case of the tinplate workers' strike of 1850. Although the iron and coal industries were disrupted by sporadic strikes of varying degrees of severity during the 1840s and 1850s, these were usually resolved locally without much lasting effect or influence outside the communities involved. The tinplate workers' strike was different; it was much more significant in its external impact and attracted national publicity. The dispute arose in 1850 when two local tinplate workers rejected the prices for work offered by the men's union, the Wolverhampton Tinplate Workers, which was affiliated to the much larger National Association for the Protection of Labour which had been established in 1830.

³⁵ G. J. Barnsby, *The Working Class Movement in the Black Country 1750-1867* (Wolverhampton, 1977), 78-116. In *Chartism in the Black Country* (Wolverhampton, no date), 29, Barnsby stated that Chartist leaders in Wolverhampton 'continually exhorted against violence' and that the *Northern Star* had reported that 'colliers would do almost anything for Henry Candy and if there was peace in Wolverhampton, this was mainly due to Candy.' Candy, who was a stonemason, was a very popular Chartist speaker whose audiences were as many as 2,000. He represented an early example of the articulate individual who was able to influence and even to control large segments of the malleable society which was nineteenth century Wolverhampton. See Barnsby, *Chartism in the Black Country*, 8, 9 and 11.

³⁶ G. J. Barnsby, *The Working Class Movement in the Black Country*, 74.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 95.

The proprietor of the works concerned was Edward Perry who was later to become mayor in 1855 and 1856. Having rejected the prices offered, Perry then struck cheaper deals with such of his workforce as would accept the lower prices. A strike was declared and amidst conditions of bitterness and intimidation, Perry was unable to obtain local replacements in order to maintain production. He brought in 28 workers from France and when they were persuaded to return home, he recruited Germans to live and work inside the foundry. Union delegates arrived from London and elsewhere for a solidarity meeting and Perry appealed to the mayor, George Robinson, for police protection. The mayor and some magistrates attempted to arbitrate in the dispute. Barnsby claimed that 'By this time there was considerable public support in Wolverhampton for the strikers not only among workers, but middle class people too, who saw Perry as deliberately obstructive'. Perry had warned that if the strike were to be successful, then organised agitation would move on to attack the other large manufacturers in the district: 'if trade unionists succeeded in raising wages the working class would be ruined by trade moving elsewhere'.³⁸

The matter was eventually resolved when Perry prosecuted the strikers for conspiracy to molest and intimidate his men to leave their employment. After three trials and several appeals. Perry won the action and eight men (three from the National Association and five from the strikers) were sentenced to three months hard labour. A further man was imprisoned for one month. After 18 months, full production was resumed. The union had spent £2,818 on their action to support the strike and suffered financial hardship for many years afterwards. Perry, perhaps from conscience or from some local impulse of sympathy, paid the men's costs. His reputation was not affected in the long run and in fact he became very popular by his leadership of the town corporation's successful efforts to recover from bankruptcy in 1857 as described in Chapter 5.

Despite the victory of the employer in the tinplate workers' dispute and indeed the decline of Chartism after 1860, there remained in Wolverhampton clear evidence that influential members of the middle class retained a declared sympathy with the working class in issues where conflicts of loyalty could have arisen. In 1866 the manufacturer S. S. Mander commenting on a strike of building workers, argued that the men 'had an undoubted right to combine'. He pointed out 'the value of arbitration' but emphasised that 'proceedings should be reasonable and just' and gave examples where he thought that this had not been so.³⁹ Even more remarkable were the comments by the Liberal barrister, Alderman Rupert Kettle (later Sir Rupert) who proposed in 1871 that in order to avoid strikes and lock-outs, there should be 'an industrial partnership'. Kettle advocated that artisans and the middle classes

³⁸ G. J. Barnsby, *Socialism in Birmingham and the Black Country*, 30.

³⁹ WC, 17 January 1866.

should share the wealth created by industry which could be maximised by 'self-denial' and 'economy of consumption' on the part of all concerned.⁴⁰

The associated feeling of responsibility for the workforce was also shown to a limited extent in the closure of the Shrubbery Ironworks in 1877. The owner, Colonel Thomas Thorneycroft (son of G. B. Thorneycroft, first mayor 1848 and founder of the company), decided that trade was so depressed that he had no alternative but to close the works and sell the remaining assets for whatever could be realised. The depression had by then lasted for three years and showed little or no sign of lifting. The distress created was said to be 'scarcely equalled within living memory'.⁴¹ Thorneycroft called the men together and explained the situation to them; costs had to be reduced if there was to be any chance of survival. The men deferred their decision for a week but then accepted their delegates' advice not to agree to a lower rate of wages. Thorneycroft wrote 'I cannot and do not blame them.'⁴² The works was closed and sold off leaving 1,000 men unemployed. With the large Swan Garden Works also having closed, there was great distress and the mayor opened a relief fund which in January 1878 had 1,300 applicants.⁴³ The cost of Poor Law relief in Wolverhampton rose by 35 per cent between 1877 and the low point of the depression in 1881.

It is perfectly reasonable to take a sceptical view of these events and to conclude that Thorneycroft was only going through the motions of consultation. After the closure of Shrubbery ironworks his personal lifestyle remained lavish and seemingly unaffected. However he was not obliged to consult the men: he had shown that paradoxical mixture of self-interest and compassion which characterised the more reform-minded of local manufacturers. In Thorneycroft's case, the compassion may well have been founded in his proximity to the workforce which began when, following a grammar school education, he spent his first two working years learning the trade by working on all the processes as one of the men.⁴⁴ He also worked at the face in coal and ironstone pits. After the closure of Shrubbery Ironworks, Thorneycroft said that he hoped 'to see once more our old town of Wolverhampton and this district in a flourishing state of prosperity'.⁴⁵

This empathy between masters and men, which was particularly evident in Thorneycroft's early years, was not uncommon in Wolverhampton. His father G. B. Thorneycroft, who was not formally educated, built up the ironworks by his own practical skills and ideas and always worked closely with his men. Despite his Tory politics and support of the Corn Laws, he was a popular figure among his

⁴⁰ WC, 12 July 1871.

⁴¹ WC, 25 December 1878.

⁴² WC, 5 February 1879.

⁴³ WC, 16 January 1878.

⁴⁴ J. P. Jones, *History of the Parish of Tettenhall*, 274.

⁴⁵ WC, 5 February 1879.

workpeople 'whom he looked upon with a brotherly feeling'.⁴⁶ His local popularity was enhanced by his generous donations to charity: in his mayoral year of 1848 he gave £1,000 insisting that applicants should be considered solely on grounds of poverty with no political or religious bias.⁴⁷ G. B. Thorneycroft was not unusual among local employers in maintaining a close relationship with his workpeople. This was often augmented by works outings or by visits to the gardens of the employer's house. Sometimes, these treats were mutual. For example, in November 1860 the incoming mayor Charles Clark was entertained to dinner by his 600 workmen from the Shakespeare foundry.⁴⁸ The following year Clark reciprocated by giving his workmen dinner at the Seven Stars Inn.⁴⁹

In a very real sense the more important manufacturers such as Thorneycroft and Clark represented the most obvious focal point for respect and deference from the working classes. The local aristocracy was neither sufficiently close in terms of residence nor was it seen as directly connected to the fortunes of Wolverhampton. The great landowners of the town - the Dukes of Cleveland and Sutherland - were both resident at considerable distances. Thus, the largest local employers became by default the accepted recipients of respect, always provided that they were seen as concerned for the welfare of their workers and as displaying a civic pride which sought progress for the town. In 1874 Alderman W. E. Edwards (mayor 1874 and proprietor of Griffin Works edge tool manufacturers) was presented by his workpeople with a life-size oil painting of himself and his wife at a dinner which he gave for 250-300 employees. He stated that he had been an employer for 20 years and that 'he stood for workmen ... they had the right to take their labour to the best market just as an employer had the right to send his goods'. He prided himself that his labour relations had always been good and that some had worked for him and his father for 25 years. Traditionally and significantly the toast which he proposed was 'the town and trade of Wolverhampton'.⁵⁰

This combination of social responsibility, tradition and civic pride was a very effective source of mutual respect between employer and employee. It was firmly rooted in a genuine love of the town itself. In 1869 Frederick Walton (councillor 1850-53 and JP, President of the Old Hall Japan Works, spoke at an outing for 130 employees visiting Aston park, Birmingham. In proposing the traditional toast to 'the town and trade of Wolverhampton' Walton struck a popular note by talking of 'the good

⁴⁶ W. H. Jones, *Story of the Municipal Life of Wolverhampton*, 39.

⁴⁷ Thorneycroft died in 1851 following a serious accident at the foundry when a steam engine exploded. He was very well respected in Wolverhampton. His family paid for a large marble statue which remains in the old Town Hall, now the Law Courts.

⁴⁸ *WC*, 12 December 1860.

⁴⁹ *WC*, 9 January 1861. Clark later committed suicide: pressure of work was blamed - see *WC*, 4 February 1863.

⁵⁰ *WC*, 27 May 1874.

old town ... if he were far away, he should often think of it with pleasure ... if called upon to leave it, it would be with regret.'⁵¹

Manders, the paint and varnish manufacturers, went further than many other companies in their provision of facilities for employees. In 1863 the company inaugurated a working men's club at the John Street factory with an initial membership of 60 men which rose to 170 within two years.⁵² The club was open not only to employees of Manders but to all working men who were judged to be suitable. The President of the club was C. B. Mander (councillor 1857-60) and the Vice-President was his cousin S. S. Mander, an active congregationalist and a campaigner for temperance.⁵³ At the first meeting it was made clear that the club would be strictly teetotal. The barrister Rupert Kettle, advocate of partnership between owners and employees, was a member of the original controlling committee. Manders always took pride in their 'excellent relations' with their workpeople; it was claimed that only one person had ever asked to leave the company.⁵⁴

This apparent closeness and commonality of interest between employer and employed would have been assisted by the structure of employment in Wolverhampton. Not only did manufacturing usually take place in relatively small groups of workpeople but also the owners of businesses in mid-nineteenth century Wolverhampton had frequently risen from the ranks of employees. In many cases owners continued to work closely with the employees in the role of foremen supervising small groups in workshops. This arrangement was similar to that identified in Birmingham by Dennis Smith who made the comparison with Sheffield between 1830 and 1914.⁵⁵ Smith concluded that participation in small manufacturing groups as experienced primarily in Birmingham generated much more harmonious and constructive relationships between owner and employee than did the large factory conditions generally experienced in Sheffield. The precise employment structure of mid-nineteenth century Wolverhampton is difficult to determine with precision, but there are some indications which may be drawn from a variety of sources. This information is related to the patterns of employment within specific trades.

In 1865 the iron trade with its many related activities was the largest single source of male employment in Wolverhampton. There were more than 2,000 men engaged at iron works, the largest of which were those of Messrs Thorneycroft, Chillington, and Sparrow: these three were situated close together east of the town centre. Iron was produced and then processed in two types of plant -

⁵¹ WC, 22 September 1869.

⁵² WC, 11 October 1865.

⁵³ WC, 29 August 1866.

⁵⁴ WC, 25 November 1866.

⁵⁵ D. Smith, *Conflict and Compromise: class formation in English Society 1830-1914: a comparative study of Birmingham and Sheffield* (London, 1982).

the blast furnace, which extracted iron from the ore, and the forge where the iron was rolled into sheets and bars ('puddled' in local terms). Thorneycroft's works was exceptionally large and employed 1,000 men at the time of closure in 1879 but most companies were considerably smaller. An average blast furnace gave employment to about 200 men.⁵⁶ It has been claimed that a skilled male ironworker could earn 28-30 shillings per week, some could earn £2-4, and a few even more: in harder times, male wages averaged 21-22 shillings per week and ranged between 18 and 25 shillings.⁵⁷ Wages fluctuated widely with the market. Men in the iron trade were described as 'singularly improvident' and generally observed 'Saint Monday'. They were hospitable and considerate towards each other giving mutual help and support within their community. Although 'uncouth' and lacking education themselves, they were interested in educating their children.⁵⁸ The ironworkers were generally 'well conducted', not given to 'violent speeches or demonstrations'. For example, in 1866 a dispute with employers was said to have been resolved after the men 'met quietly together'; there was 'not a single case of unruly conduct'. Moreover, 'employers were never molested in any way'.⁵⁹ These ironworkers were not a particularly militant community and their restraint was in marked contrast to the behaviour of their unruly counterparts in the north of Staffordshire.⁶⁰

Lock making employed roughly 1,500 men in Wolverhampton.⁶¹ There was one large factory which employed 200 making high quality locks, but there were also innumerable small businesses, 20 of which employed an average of 20 workers each.⁶² The average weekly earnings of the men varied from 25 to 40 shillings. Like the ironworkers, lock makers also observed 'Saint Monday'. However, the lock makers were generally more skilled and approached more closely to the category of artisan; 70 per cent were members of friendly societies, 50 per cent could read and write, 15 per cent attended mechanics' institutes, 10 per cent had Post Office Savings Bank accounts, and 5 per cent owned freehold cottages.⁶³

A similar level of skill to that of lock making was involved in the manufacture of cast iron hollow-ware and edge tools. This industry was carried out in 14 local companies which employed on average 175 workers each. Of these 56 per cent were skilled men, 37 per cent were boys and 6 per cent were

⁵⁶ Steen & Blackett's *Wolverhampton Guide 1871*, 97 and C. Upton, *A History of Wolverhampton*, 87.

⁵⁷ S. Timmins (ed.), *Birmingham and the Midland Hardware District*, 71. See also J. Ginswick (ed.), *Labour and the Poor in England and Wales 1849-1851. Letters to the Morning Chronicle from the Correspondents in the Manufacturing and Mining Districts, the towns of Liverpool and Birmingham and the Rural Districts*, Vol. II, *Northumberland and Durham, Staffordshire, the Midlands*.

⁵⁸ S. Timmins (ed.), *Birmingham and the Midland Hardware District*, 75.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 71. See also G. J. Barnsby, *Socialism in Birmingham and the Black Country*, 76-7.

⁶¹ G. C. Allen, *The Industrial Development of Birmingham and the Black Country 1860-1927* (London, 1929), 129.

⁶² S. Timmins (ed.), *Birmingham and the Midland Hardware District*, 89.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 91.

women and girls. Employment was regarded as regular and well paid. Skilled men earned between 25 and 40 shillings per week, and 20 per cent were freeholders.⁶⁴

A related trade with comparable skills was that of tinplating and enamelling with japan lacquer. These processes were carried out together to make high quality decorative items such as tea caddies and trays, ornamental boxes, etc. Trade was very successful and the business doubled in size between 1849 and 1866.⁶⁵ By that time there were 1,600 employed at 14 factories in Wolverhampton. The weekly wages of skilled men averaged 30 shillings.⁶⁶ It was reported that working conditions were good with well-built factories and spacious workshops. The larger factories each employed about 250 workers.

Together with the higher skills of the japping workers went a higher level of educational aspiration, which was particularly demonstrated in attendance at evening school.⁶⁷ The school inspector reported that the requirement to work late in the evening in the latter part of the week meant that many of these workers were prevented from attending regular evening classes. The japper Henry Loveridge, writing in the 1860s, commended the moral standing of the men; they were described as 'much improved in the last 20 years'. The public house was 'less frequented'. Many had 'the privilege of a vote and knew how to use it with intelligence'.⁶⁸ The japan and tinplate workers were described in 1900 by the japper and former mayor W. H. Jones as 'ardent politicians, following masters who were all liberal and radical'.⁶⁹ More recently it has been argued that such powerful Liberal affiliation was a general characteristic of relatively skilled working men across the Black Country.⁷⁰

The salient feature of manufacturing in Wolverhampton was the extent to which the work was carried out in relatively small units and supervised by men who worked or had worked alongside their employer. With the exception of the largest ironworks, the maximum size of a manufacturing unit was about 150 employees, a size at which it was still possible for the owner to be aware of the names of most employees, particularly those of long standing. In some craft trades such as lock making, units were often much smaller, amounting to little more than one master and several apprentices. As the levels of skill and education increased, so proximity and accessibility in the workplace tended to ensure that the men remained on reasonable terms with their masters.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁶⁹ W. H. Jones, *The Story of the Japan, Tinplate Working and Iron Braziers' Trades, Bicycle and Galvanising Trades and Enamel Ware Manufacture in Wolverhampton and District* (London, 1900), 15.

⁷⁰ E. Taylor, 'The Working Class Movement in the Black Country 1863-1914', (University of Keele, PhD thesis 1974), 7-9.

This relatively close relationship between employer and employed in the semi-skilled trades such as japanning and lock making was much less evident in the ironworks. Here the manufacturing units tended to be larger and many ironmasters damaged labour relations by profiting from the system of truck. Prices charged for goods bought at the 'Tommy-shop' were on average 15 per cent higher than those charged at the town market.⁷¹ Although there were 'honourable masters' who did not operate the truck system and paid their men regularly once a fortnight, there were many others who profited by 'constant and daring violation of the Truck Act'.⁷² It was reported that 'not a few magistrates [were] notorious truck store-keepers'.⁷³ The local press did not comment on this injustice and was considered to be 'overawed by the ironmasters'.⁷⁴ It was left to the clergy to make public complaint. Reverend Owen, vicar of Bilston, condemned the practice preaching on a text which commands the employer thus to treat his labourer: 'At this day thou shalt give him his hire; neither shall the sun go down upon it; lest he cry against thee unto the Lord and it is a sin to thee'.⁷⁵ Conflict between man and master in the iron trade was inevitable, but even so disputes in Wolverhampton were generally less acrimonious than in neighbouring areas. For example, in 1865 iron masters locked out their workers as a measure of support for their counterparts in North Staffordshire who had locked out workers who resisted wage reductions.⁷⁶ The lock-out continued for several weeks until the North Staffordshire masters released the South Staffordshire masters from their commitment. The Wolverhampton men returned to work for the masters with mutual regrets for the disruption and promises of a new system of conciliation.

From the 1860s trade disputes in Wolverhampton became more frequent and often involved the more skilled workers. For example, in 1864 there was a dispute in the lock trade when the 240 plate lock makers of Wolverhampton sought to improve their earnings which were only 15 shillings a week for a

⁷¹ *Labour and the Poor in England and Wales*, 108.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 105.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 105. In his PhD thesis, 'Crime, Law and Order in Two English Towns during the early Nineteenth Century: the Experience of Exeter and Wolverhampton 1815-1856' (University of Birmingham, 1980), 350, R. E. Swift pointed out that although G. B. Thorneycroft, Tory ironmaster, county JP and first mayor of Wolverhampton, was a man of strong Anglican principles responsible for much local philanthropy, he nevertheless operated a Tommy shop at his Shrubbery Ironworks. A similar paradox applied in respect of John Barker, county JP and later High Sheriff of Staffordshire, who was a Congregationalist and leader of the local Liberal party. Although Barker was also an active philanthropist, he admitted to keeping a Tommy shop at his Chillington Ironworks and was notably criticised for it in the local press which referred to 'one law for the rich and another for the poor' and asked how Barker could 'reconcile it to himself to be ... profiting by violating the law, and yet remain one of the administrators of that law'. See *WC*, 4 May 1842 for this remarkably powerful criticism in a journal which seldom failed to support established authority.

⁷⁴ *Labour and the Poor in England and Wales*, 110.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* The text is from *Deuteronomy*, 24, 15.

⁷⁶ G. J. Barnsby, *Socialism in Birmingham and the Black Country*, 26.

14-hour day. In the event they left employment and formed their own co-operative which, with trade union support, lasted until 1879 when it fell victim to the Great Depression.⁷⁷

As the incidence of disputes increased and as the issues in question became more complex, so organised labour grew stronger. In 1865 the Wolverhampton, Bilston and District Trades Union Council was set up, largely in response to the Masters and Servants Act which concerned regulation of contracts and facilitated the right of employers to sue employees. The Act was applied to an unusually high degree in Wolverhampton which had more prosecutions than any other borough in the country.⁷⁸ As originally constituted the Trades Council represented mainly the smaller trades and its early history is obscure. In 1875 the Trades Council re-emerged as a significant body over the issue of temperance. This issue was destined to become a source of considerable strain within the working class community of Wolverhampton and indeed within the political structure of the town as a whole.

The Liberals and Dissenters in particular were fervent advocates of temperance. In this respect they were opposed by the drink lobby who were allied to the Tories. In the same way that the School Board elections of 1870 provided a platform for overt political conflict in local government, so the temperance issue fulfilled the same purpose five years later. After some debate the Trades Council decided not to align themselves with the temperance movement but their dilemma was indicative of a gradual weakening of the hold which the Liberal/Radical politics espoused by many manufacturers and owners exerted over their workforce. Jon Lawrence has argued cogently that there was a sea change in the attitudes of the Wolverhampton working class who by the late nineteenth century had become disillusioned by the restrictive teetotal ultra-religious tone adopted by Liberal manufacturers and were vulnerable to the more libertarian hedonistic appeal of working class Toryism.⁷⁹ This development would seriously undermine the tradition whereby such skilled workers and jannpers took their political inspiration from their employers. This was a period of socio-political transition. The Great Depression began to lift in the late 1880s and Barnsby has commented that by this time 'the retreat of the labour movement was at an end and there suddenly burst forth, for the first time since the Owenite Socialists and Chartists of the 1840s, a new Socialism'.⁸⁰ In 1893 the Independent Labour Party was founded and this quickly became the largest working class party in Wolverhampton.

In the 40 years following incorporation in 1848 both the economic activity and the socio-political structure of Wolverhampton were subject to major change and the new council would have to

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 34-5.

⁷⁸ J. Lawrence, *Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England 1867-1914* (Cambridge, 1998), 83 and D. C. Woods, 'The Operation of the Master and Servant Acts in the Black Country, 1858-1875', *Midland History*, 7 (1982), 93-115.

⁷⁹ J. Lawrence, *Speaking for the People*, 73-127.

⁸⁰ G. J. Barnsby, *A History of Wolverhampton, Bilston and District Trades Council 1865-1990* (Wolverhampton, 1994), 19.

accommodate that change. The elites who were the council members would have to formulate their own policies regarding the development of the town, sometimes informed by previous service as commissioners, sometimes not. The priorities for action would inevitably depend upon the composition of the council, particularly with respect to occupations. Many of the council members would be major manufacturers and would be called upon to strike a balance between the prosperity of the town based upon their own industries and the growing concern for the environmental pollution which these industries generated. There would be an increasing requirement to recognise and accommodate the need for a growing artisan population with rising political awareness to improve their condition through facilities for education and constructive leisure. All of these requirements were bound to come into conflict against the inescapable background of a town divided so sharply between east and west. The priorities for action would depend inevitably upon the composition of the council, particularly with regard to occupation and to the measure of social conscience which councillors might derive from political or religious principles. In order to understand the actions of the council it is necessary to study both the characteristics of the council members and the ways in which these members interacted. In particular, those issues in which the value of urban reform and renewal had to be measured against the associated increase in rating give promise of identifying the main contending factions in local governance, the 'expenders' versus the 'economists'.

Chapter 4 - Urban Elites and Local Government

‘The Council, being the representative of the ratepayers, is the proper depository of power’.¹

The role of urban elites from 1850 to 1914 has been likened by John Garrard to that of a ‘new squirearchy’ which was particularly powerful in the period 1850-80 when there were the most favourable conditions for these elites to flourish, providing economic, political and social leadership within a receptive urban society.² The elites wielded economic power through their positions in local commerce; they employed sizeable work forces and were conspicuous consumers of capital and goods. Elites frequently acquired political leadership and its associated influence although in the case of Wolverhampton this influence had at least in theory to be exercised outside the borough council because unusually party-political attachment had to be disavowed in relation to local government. However, elites were very active across the whole spectrum of non-political urban activity including such areas as charities, poor law administration and religious organisations and also embracing the plethora of associations and societies which proliferated during the mid- to late-nineteenth century. Through the complex matrices of the social hierarchy, elites exerted powerful influence on urban opinion and values.³

After Wolverhampton became an incorporated borough in 1848, many members of the local elite maintained and even augmented their ability to influence urban affairs by gaining election to the new council. By virtue of their council membership, many elites acquired even more extensive networks of communication and their leadership roles within economic, political and social life were mutually reinforcing. It is nevertheless important to remember that these elite members of the council did not by any means possess total power and that, as Garrard pointed out in relation to urban governance, their authority was ‘often limited and of unpredictable quality’.⁴ Even so the role of elites is an essential constituent study in the investigation of governance. Elites were certainly one of the most directly influential factors in deciding the nature of urban society.

The objective of this chapter is to combine a study of the identity and characteristics of those elites who were the members of Wolverhampton council with an examination of the workings of that

¹ *How Shall the Town be Governed? addressed to the Ratepayers of Wolverhampton by one of themselves* (Wolverhampton, 1847) 7.

² J. Garrard, ‘Urban Elites, 1850-1914: The Rule and Decline of a New Squirearchy?’, *Albion*, 27 (1995) 583-621.

³ R. H. Trainor has commented on the continuing influence and versatility displayed by Black Country elites despite various forms of urban change. The Wolverhampton elites are said to have ‘significantly expanded the town’s institutions while learning to cope with a relatively strong factory base and labour movement’. Its leaders were described as ‘combining social substance with considerable diversity’. See R. H. Trainor, *Black Country Elites: The Exercise of Authority in an Industrialised Area* (Oxford, 1993) 374-5.

⁴ J Garrard, *Leadership and Power in Victorian Industrial Towns, 1830-80* (Manchester, 1983) 222.

council. The structure and actions of the council formed in 1848 are contrasted with those of the appointed commissioners who previously administered the town. The arguments deployed in the agitation for incorporation are examined and used to illustrate the reasoning and priorities of the time, especially in relation to the difficult and recurrent question of the cost of environmental and sanitary improvement which would have to be borne by the ratepayers.

The council members who held office during the period 1848-88 are identified and classified as far as possible in respect of occupation, wards of residence and representation, length and record of service and religious and political affiliation. This work enables conclusions to be drawn regarding the relative influence and prestige of various occupations and affiliations in relation to the council. Through the analysis of councils at decadal intervals, the strengths and influences of different groups are shown to be variable. The measurement of lengths of service reveals wide differences with some councillors holding considerable power over extended periods. The overall findings are compared with those for other towns where appropriate information is available.

Finally, an examination is made of the involvement of council members in other organisations having a bearing upon governance including particularly poor law administration and the magistracy. In the latter category, the treatment of municipal candidates for the town and county benches gives a clear indication of the graduated sequence of social standing in the borough, not only internally, but also from the external viewpoint of the county authority centred upon Stafford and linked directly to London.

The overall intention of this survey is to identify and classify those individuals who, either individually or in alliances (however temporary and expedient), were able to affect significantly the governance of Wolverhampton. In some cases this may be shown to have been achieved directly through the formal mechanism of the council and its committees. In other cases, the external matrices of communication embodied in such activities as magistracy, religious affiliation, and an extensive range of cultural and social organisations provided systems through which influence could be exerted indirectly, but nevertheless effectively, by establishing the customs and forms of behaviour which underpinned the foundations of governance.

4.1 Government by Commissioners: 1777-1848

Between 1777 and 1848 when the new council was elected, the government of Wolverhampton was in the hands of the commissioners.⁵ These men were not elected: they were appointed for life. Their

⁵ The government by commissioners is described in W. A. Smith, 'The Town Commissioners in Wolverhampton, 1777-1848', *West Midlands Studies*, 1 (1967) and there is an anecdotal account of the

authority rested on local Acts of Parliament of 1777 and 1814 which conferred upon them powers over streets, markets and public buildings and also over the general sanitary provision of the town. They had to be men of some standing qualified either by ownership of property having a yearly rateable value of £12 or possessing £1,000 value of real or personal estate. A total of 125 commissioners were appointed including 20 tradesmen, 16 manufacturers, 8 clergymen, 6 doctors, 4 attorneys and 3 publicans. Any vacancies (which usually arose because of death) were filled by co-option. The commissioners were essentially a cross-section of the prosperous business and professional community of the town. For much of their lifetime the commissioners had no established meeting place and held their discussions in a variety of local inns. Surviving minutes from the early years indicate that meetings were informal and even disorganised. Attendances were poor and the high membership figure of 125 at which the commission was maintained reflected the need to guarantee a quorum rather than any real numerical requirement. It has been claimed justifiably that there was no suggestion 'that the commissioners represented anyone except themselves'.⁶ In 1838 Commissioner Lewis complained to his fellow commissioners that 'when a rate was to be laid or a job to be transacted they had plenty of commissioners, but when the poor were to be heard, they had none'. The *Wolverhampton Chronicle*, ever supportive of the established majority, condemned Lewis for 'throwing a scandalous stigma' at his fellow commissioners.⁷

The effective power of the commissioners was always held within clearly-defined limits. Their facility for borrowing to finance civic improvement was never more than £20,000 raised either by annuities or by mortgages on the town rates. The rates themselves were restricted by Act of Parliament and the net effect was that the commissioners were in debt throughout their period of office. Moreover, they had no judicial power to enforce their edicts. One of their first major actions had been to clear in 1787 the congested and insanitary central area around the old market hall, which was demolished. It is symptomatic of the financial constraints which applied to the commissioners that a new market hall was not built until 1851 when the elected borough council had taken over. Financial constraints also limited the extent to which the commissioners were involved in the supply of gas: although they arranged for the laying of mains, they could not afford to purchase the gas works. The water supply also remained outside the commissioners' authority (in 1844 the private water company had a capital value of £26,000 which exceeded the commissioners' buying power). On the question of sanitation the commissioners had no effect beyond sweeping the streets and disposing of refuse. The provision of sewerage was regarded as the responsibility of private property

commissioners' activities in W. H. Jones, *Story of the Municipal Life of Wolverhampton* (London, 1903) 5-26.

⁶ F. Mason, *Wolverhampton Town Commissioners, 1778-1848* (Wolverhampton, 1976). This is an informative account based on reporting in the *Wolverhampton Chronicle* (hereafter *WC*).

⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

owners. In 1838 the commissioners threatened that unless private owners built the necessary sewers, they would take action against them, but there was no power of enforcement.

The limited authority of the commissioners, which was principally directed towards control of streets and markets, meant that many of their deliberations were concerned with what now appear to have been relative trivia such as rights of way and small planning problems. However, they did accomplish the construction of some important new streets. Their major achievement was the negotiation with the Earl of Darlington which resulted in purchase of land enabling the construction of Darlington Street, opened in 1823: this new wide main street by-passed the deteriorating Salop Street and gave a more direct route to Shrewsbury and Wales.

By the 1840s economic and demographic change in Wolverhampton was accentuating old problems such as sewerage and bringing new problems such as sharply rising levels of crime. Pressure was brought to bear on the commissioners to augment the watchmen with a police force. In 1842 the commissioners called a public meeting on this subject and the eventual result was the establishment of a police force of 12 men, but it was appointed by the county authorities in Stafford. This episode was a small but important example of the way in which restricted autonomy and dependence upon Stafford became increasingly frustrating to the people of Wolverhampton who felt themselves capable of running their own affairs.

Although by the 1840s the commissioners had become much more organised and held their meetings in new public offices shared with the courts of justice, they remained an undemocratic body with limited authority. They were secretive in that the public were not admitted to their meetings. Their members in these later years included successful manufacturers and merchants and the decisions arrived at were mainly influenced by the priorities of manufacturing and trade which were not necessarily those of the general population of Wolverhampton. For example, although the town was expanding rapidly, there were no building regulations. Furthermore, the profit from public utilities such as gas and water went to private industrialists (who were also commissioners). There was a modest level of philanthropy from the commission but generally the priority was commerce and the profit was private.

Wolverhampton had become a large town of major industrial importance and government by the commissioners was increasingly regarded as inappropriate: it was outdated, financially limited and lacking in accepted authority. Moreover, the commissioners themselves were vulnerable to charges of

apathy and inertia.⁸ W. H. Jones, writing in 1903, stated that by 1847 the commissioners had ‘lost the confidence of the inhabitants’.⁹ There was a new political atmosphere of reform and a wider electorate. The Municipal Reform Act of 1835 had given towns the opportunity to apply to become incorporated and to have elected councils. It was natural that agitation for incorporation would be prevalent in Wolverhampton.

The arguments which arose from the time of the 1835 Act onwards are very instructive in throwing light on the attitudes of the electors of Wolverhampton towards urban government at that time and indeed thereafter when the new council was formed. In 1838 Mr T. Bolton, an attorney, spoke at a dinner held to celebrate the defeat of a move by the commissioners to impose a church rate. He said that ‘many things wanted reforming in Wolverhampton. They wanted justice fairly and impartially administered, they wanted stipendiary magistrates, they wanted a new Court of Requests, they wanted a new Court Leet. In fact, they wanted a Corporation (loud cheers).’¹⁰

The commissioners attempted to improve and stabilise their situation by trying to compose a new Act of Parliament, a submission which would have materially increased their powers but in the event this was never presented. Serious divisions became apparent among the commissioners themselves with increasing numbers backing the campaign for incorporation. Commissioner Joseph Walker, a nail manufacturer and ‘a man of broad and liberal sympathies’ told his fellow members that they ‘were a self-elected body and as such did not possess the confidence of the ratepayers’.¹¹ At the same meeting in 1841, Dr T. S. Simkiss spoke for a group opposing any change which might increase the cost to ratepayers. The confrontation between advocates of civic expenditure and those demanding economy, which would eventually be a salient feature of discussions in the elected council, was becoming increasingly apparent.

In 1847 the case for incorporation was set out in a pamphlet entitled, *How shall the town be governed?*, which was ‘addressed to the ratepayers of Wolverhampton’ and written ‘by one of themselves’.¹² The writer urged the ratepayers to take control of their own affairs and covered a wide range of issues in which advantage might be gained. In particular, the writer stated ‘we may blush to own that we are subjugated to a rural police’ and suggested that the new elected council should appoint and pay its own police and ‘instantly be rid of the present obnoxious force’. The new council was also encouraged to establish baths and wash-houses for the poor, an area in which

⁸ Rosemary Sweet wrote that ‘for several years after Improvement Acts had been obtained in Manchester and Wolverhampton, almost nothing happened, due to the apathy and inertia of the commissioners’.

See *The English Town 1680-1840: Government, Society and Culture* (Harlow, 1999) 112.

⁹ W. H. Jones, *Story of the Municipal Life of Wolverhampton* (London, 1903) 20.

¹⁰ F. Mason, *Wolverhampton Town Commissioners*, 65 and WC, 31 October 1838.

¹¹ F. Mason, *Wolverhampton Town Commissioners*, 66 and WC, 10 February 1841.

¹² *How shall the Town be Governed?*, 3-12.

Wolverhampton was notably deficient. An unfavourable comparison was made between Wolverhampton and the 190 other towns and cities which had already become incorporated: 'We may be sure that what is good enough for London and Liverpool, for Manchester and Glasgow, for Edinburgh and Dublin, cannot but be beneficial to Wolverhampton.' Any reservations which ratepayers might have had about the expense of incorporation were countered by quoting the example of Manchester which, having bought the gas company, made an annual profit of £30,000, which was spent to improve the city. The writer asked 'why should not the corporation of Wolverhampton do the same, and thus secure to the public, instead of to individuals, the prospective profit arising from the increase of the town'.

In February 1847 a public meeting was called to consider whether to petition parliament for incorporation and was 'largely attended'. Once again Joseph Walker advocated self-government and proposed the resolution as follows:

That the principles of Municipal Government by a representative body, popularly chosen, is [sic] peculiarly suited to the English people. It recognises the rights of the ratepayers to a control over the fiscal expenditure, and it also fixes the responsibility upon those in whom is vested the trust of levying and expending of public money. One of the stronger arguments used against the extension of the Parliamentary franchise was that the people were ignorant and not able to exercise the privilege properly. But by the Charter of Incorporation they would be creating a school in which the working classes would be trained by the exercise of the municipal franchise for the higher duty of the Parliamentary franchise.¹³

Some opponents of incorporation, prominent among whom was Henry Crane (merchant and commissioner) expressed reservations regarding the cost of incorporation. They claimed that in the case of Birmingham incorporation had raised the annual cost of rates from £10,000 to £35,000. However, support for incorporation was growing rapidly and Crane was told that he was 'a few years behind the time'.¹⁴ Mr T. R. Andrews (draper and commissioner) conceded that the commissioners had lacked both the courage and the means to deal with the growing problems of the town; he supported self-government. A new feeling of confidence emerged from this meeting. Mr Bolton 'contended that no one could say that in a population of over 36,000 they did not possess among them men with qualifications sufficient to manage their local affairs ... the town of Wolverhampton possessing the three necessary qualifications of wealth, intelligence and population'.¹⁵

The petition received widespread support and was backed by about 30 commissioners among whom were such major figures as John Barker (ironmaster), Dr E. H. Coleman, W. F. Fryer (banker) and Dr Slade (rector of St Peter's church) among others. Those opposing the petition represented such vested interests as those of the Duke of Cleveland and some manufacturing companies such as James Shipton

¹³ W. H. Jones, *Story of the Municipal Life of Wolverhampton*, 21.

¹⁴ F. Mason, *Wolverhampton Town Commissioners*, 69.

¹⁵ W. H. Jones, *Story of the Municipal Life of Wolverhampton*, 22.

& Co. and Charles Chubb and Son (lock manufacturers). After presentation of the petition to the Queen, the Privy Council ordered an official enquiry which was held in Wolverhampton in the Court of Justice building in August 1847. Mr T. Walker and Mr T. Bolton, solicitors, spoke for the petition and Mr Thorne, solicitor, opposed. It became apparent that most of the important ratepayers supported the petition and Mr Thorne withdrew his opposition. The battle for incorporation had been won.

4.2 The Municipal Borough Council: 1848-88

Following incorporation in 1848 the town was divided into eight electoral wards which remained unchanged until 1896 (Map 6). The division of the town was very significant. The four wards which constituted the eastern districts contained most of the heavily industrialised area. By contrast, the four wards of the western districts were essentially residential with much substantial housing, a lower population density and pleasant surroundings which extended out to adjoin open country. This apportionment of the municipal electorate was a clear illustration of the views proposed by Keith-Lucas and Richards that wards in the newly-incorporated boroughs were designed to have a predominant separation between middle and working classes.¹⁶ This separation had been encouraged in parliamentary debates on the 1835 Municipal Reform Act by the Tories who feared electoral defeat if the vote were to be taken across the whole of a town. It was agreed that towns with more than 6,000 inhabitants should be divided into wards but rateable value would count as well as the number of votes. This produced a situation in which 'a rich man's vote counted for more than a poor man's vote'.¹⁷ The relatively wealthy ward of St Peter's in west central Wolverhampton was a good example of this anomaly as late as 1887, as shown in Table 4.1. Despite increasing migration of the prosperous further afield to the south and west of the town, St Peter's retained one of the highest rateable values from a voting population which was less than half that of any other ward. Although the voters were so few, St Peter's returned a full complement of councillors and aldermen.

¹⁶ B. Keith-Lucas and P. G. Richards, *A History of Local Government in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1978) 20-21.

At that time Wolverhampton was, in parliamentary terms, a single constituency which returned two members of parliament to Westminster. However, when the constituency was divided into Wolverhampton West and East in 1885, the new parliamentary boundary ran directly through the town centre on a north-south axis and again separated the town into the four wards on each side, east and west. The coincidence between parliamentary and local government boundaries was not perfect because two central wards - St Peter's and St Mary's - had sectors in both parliamentary constituencies, but it was sufficiently close to re-emphasise the clear distinction between east and west.

¹⁷ B. Keith-Lucas and P. G. Richards, *A History of Local Government*, 21.

Map 6 - The wards of Wolverhampton, 1848-1896

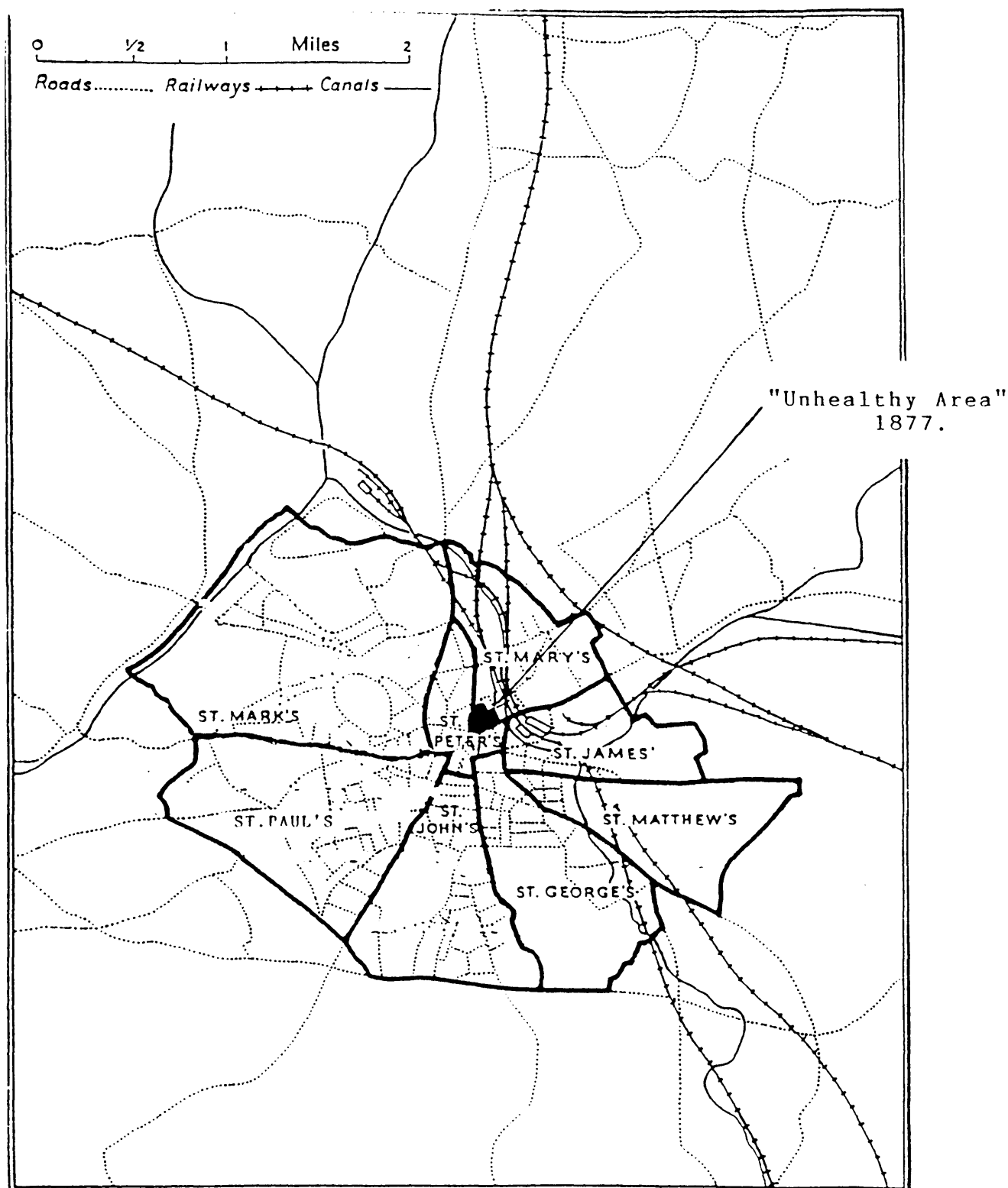


Table 4.1 - Ward details 1887

Ward	Burgesses (N)	Rateable Value (R) £	R/N	Aldermen	Councillors
St Peter's	620	50,547	81.5	2	6
St John's	1,987	32,300	16.2	2	6
St George's	1,290	29,873	23.1	2	6
St James'	1,292	24,898	19.3	2	6
St Paul's	1,905	30,714	16.1	1	3
St Mary's	1,742	22,849	13.1	1	3
St Mark's	2,261	52,328	23.1	1	3
St Matthew's	1,408	14,909	10.6	1	3

Source: *Minutes of the Borough Council*, Book 11 (1887).

When elections for the new council were held the committee formed to support incorporation put up their own recommended candidates for the wards. The *Wolverhampton Chronicle* objected on the grounds that this action threatened to introduce partisan politics into local government and this would not be acceptable. The list of members of the 23 man committee suggests that its political sympathies were predominantly Liberal and therefore it is not altogether surprising that the Tory-favouring *Wolverhampton Chronicle* took this stand. However, the objection was adopted and extended by the new council which determined to exclude any form of party politics from its proceedings. This prohibition was enforced rigorously: any council member introducing an issue which could be construed as having any bearing on party politics was compelled to withdraw it immediately.¹⁸ This determination to exclude party politics remained a constant theme in council proceedings until 1891 when a candidate first stood for election on the basis of a declared political affiliation. Of course the councillors from 1848 to 1891 had political sympathies which could often be detected readily, but they were all nominally independent and this independence, however unreal, was zealously preserved - in appearance at least. With party politics consciously excluded from the local government of Wolverhampton, the 48 council seats available in 1848 were contested by men who all stood as independents. There were to be 36 councillors who would serve for three years before having to seek re-election and 12 aldermen who would hold office for six years on the same basis. The councillors and aldermen would elect a presiding mayor who would serve for one year.

The election took place on 12 May 1848: votes were cast, not as now by indicating preference, but by crossing off the list provided those candidates whom the voters did not wish to support. The candidates themselves had to be men of good financial standing. The Municipal Corporation Act of 1835 had set the qualification for membership of the council of a large borough such as Wolverhampton as either the ownership of real or personal property worth £1,000 or the occupation of

¹⁸ For objections to the introduction of a subject which 'bore upon politics' see *Minutes of the Borough Council*, Book 6 (1874) 414.

property rated at £30 per annum. The candidates were voted for by the very limited number who qualified for membership of the electoral roll. The ironmaster G. B. Thorneycroft, who became the first mayor of the borough, was elected to the council on a mere 74 votes.

When the poll took place there was some public misgiving that several erstwhile opponents of incorporation were seeking places on the council, including notably Henry Crane who was elected. Many of the new councillors were former commissioners. However, doubts about former allegiances were short-lived and from the outset the new council adopted a conciliatory approach and sought social stability as a basis for civic success.¹⁹

The first council meeting took place in the Assembly Room, Queen Street on 22 May 1848. The council elected twelve aldermen from among their number and then proceeded to discuss the appointment of the first mayor. The process by which the mayor was selected on this occasion illustrated two salient features of local government in Wolverhampton at this time: firstly, the determination to eschew party politics, and secondly the resort to negotiation directed towards the common good of the new borough. It was agreed that the mayor was to be 'a man of good position, one who had taken a leading part in the progress of the town and was directly connected with its manufacturing interests'.²⁰ There were two suitable candidates, both of whom were ironmasters. John Barker, a Liberal, had been a leading campaigner for incorporation; George Thorneycroft was a Tory, self-made and outspoken but locally popular. The candidates, who were personal friends, decided against holding a contest which could have been an unfortunate beginning for the council and might well have involved 'the bitterness of party strife'.²¹ After discussion, Barker withdrew and supported Thorneycroft who thus became the first mayor.

In some ways this negotiation to produce a satisfactory candidate without recourse to an electoral contest set a pattern for Wolverhampton which generally applied to council elections throughout the period 1848-1888. A contested election for a ward was a very infrequent event. At most one or two contests took place in the annual November elections to council. The *Wolverhampton Chronicle* editorials complained that it was rare to find 'a contest for municipal honours' (1855)²² and later in 1873 that there was only one ward in which a contest was taking place.²³ This apparent apathy suggested either that electors were satisfied with their candidates or that there was a lack of interest in voting in municipal elections. However, the method by which a candidate emerged suggests a

¹⁹ See W. H. Jones, *Story of the Municipal Life of Wolverhampton*, 28. In fact Henry Crane was elected as one of the first group of aldermen despite his record of opposing incorporation.

²⁰ W. H. Jones, *Story of the Municipal Life of Wolverhampton*, 32.

²¹ *Ibid*, 33 and *WC*, 24 May 1848.

²² *WC*, 7 November 1855.

²³ *WC*, 5 November 1873.

possible explanation for the low poll. The candidate would be nominated by groups of associates with whom he had connections through such interests as business, politics, religion, or some other form of association. The small size of the electorate ensured that canvassing the constituency would give a reliable indication of the prospects for being elected. Any candidate whose campaign appeared to be doomed to failure would then withdraw leaving the favourite to be elected unopposed. In its outcome, this manoeuvring gave the outward impression of unanimity and agreed acceptance of the chosen candidate. However, later in the period, from about 1870 onwards, there was increasing evidence of discontent with nominated front-runners as described in Chapter 9.

When the new council took office in May 1848 they found themselves to be in an anomalous position because at that stage the commissioners were still in existence so that the town had two governing bodies. Therefore John Barker called a meeting of commissioners on 12 June 1848 which led eventually to a deed of transfer being signed on 14 November 1848 by eleven commissioners which conveyed all powers of the commission to the new council. Of the eleven signatories, nine were also members of the new council. All of the eleven signatories were either manufacturers or traders, which demonstrated clearly where power and influence lay in Wolverhampton in 1848.²⁴

All of the 242 council members who were elected during the period 1848-1888 have been listed and classified as far as possible in respect of occupation, wards of residence and representation, length and record of service both on the main council and on sub-committees, and religious and political affiliations. In addition, the resultant database of councillors has been widened to include general socio-political involvement in such areas as magistracy, poor law administration, education, literary and philosophical societies, etc. The objective was to examine the nature and personal characteristics of those who held nominal power through elected office and to explore the networks through which they interacted both with each other and with the town in general.²⁵

There are two important reservations to the treatment of local government in this manner. Firstly, the relative significance of the above interactional factors was dependent upon time, particularly in the fluid circumstances of the mid- to late-nineteenth century. Therefore the results of most of the analyses were compared at ten-year intervals. Secondly, the occupation of elected council office did not necessarily result in the holder exerting any noticeable influence on the town. Not only did the quality of contributions in council vary widely, but also there were other external and informal networks of interaction through which local policy could be influenced. These networks included the organised interests of manufacturing and trade and of religious and educational bodies. Moreover the

²⁴ F. Mason, *Wolverhampton Town Commissioners*, 71.

²⁵ The sources of information concerning Wolverhampton council members and the methods and definitions used to assemble the database are described in Appendix I.

favoured technique of submitting controversial decisions to public meetings gave real opportunities to articulate individuals. These influences external to the council are dealt with in Chapters 5-9. The performance of the council itself is judged in Chapter 5 in the context of its actions to deal with the environmental problems of Wolverhampton. As described in Chapter 2, the incoming council in 1848 was faced with a range of problems which threatened public health and required urgent attention.

The results of the survey on the councillors, aldermen and mayors of Wolverhampton from 1848 to 1888 are summarised in Tables 4.2-4.20. They have been compared with and related to the work of G. W. Jones on Wolverhampton in the later period from 1888 onwards and also the work of others on different towns and cities where informative comparisons may be drawn.²⁶ The overall intention of this work was not only to determine the characteristics and imperatives of Wolverhampton council but ultimately to attempt to reach some general conclusions regarding the relationship between urban governance and the nature of individual towns.

The results in Tables 4.2-4.6 show that between 1848 and 1888 the majority occupational influence on the council was that of manufacturing which provided 34 per cent of the councillors, 40 per cent of the aldermen and 49 per cent of the mayors. However, manufacturing did not achieve continuous supremacy throughout this period: there were swings in the composition of the council. In the beginning in 1848, manufacturers were outnumbered on the council by shop/trade at overall percentages of 27 and 48 respectively. By 1858 the situation was finely balanced with manufacturing holding a slight advantage at 33 compared with 31 for shop/trade. By 1868 shop/trade had gone ahead at 31 compared with 29 for manufacturing. Thereafter, manufacturing regained the advantage and from 1878 onwards outnumbered shop/trade on the council (Table 4.2). The increasing representation of manufacturing after 1869 is also demonstrated by the occupational classification of new entrants detailed in Table 4.4.

It was not only in weight of numbers that manufacturing predominated, but that manufacturers steadily increased their hold on the more senior positions. Although shop/trade outnumbered manufacturing in aldermen in 1848 and 1868, here again manufacturing drew level by 1878 and was well ahead in 1888 (Table 4.5). By 1888 shop/trade had fallen away as a contributing influence in high office and this was particularly apparent in relation to the mayoralty. Of the 41 mayors elected between 1848 and 1888, 20 (49%) were from manufacturing; shop/trade provided only 12 (29%) of the mayors and did not hold the office again after 1877 (Table 4.6).

²⁶ G. W. Jones, *Borough Politics: a Study of Wolverhampton Borough Council 1888-1964* (London, 1969). For comparative purposes, a parallel study has been carried out on the 325 men who were members of Leicester council between 1835 and 1883. Details of the sources and a summary of the results are given in Appendix 2.

The extent to which the council was dominated by manufacturing was unusual, even for an industrial town like Wolverhampton. Moreover, this domination was increasing at the end of the nineteenth century and was by no means typical of civic society. For example, the figure of 38 per cent of council members who were also manufacturers in Wolverhampton in 1888 may be compared with corresponding figures for Bristol (27% in 1890)²⁷ and for Leicester (27% in 1888)²⁸. Even in Birmingham, the total of all those council members who were in business (which combines both manufacturing and shop/trade categories) was no more than 39 per cent in 1892 and had fallen to 33 per cent by 1902.²⁹ In Bristol by 1900 the manufacturers had been overtaken as the most numerous group on the council by both merchants and professionals.³⁰ By contrast the manufacturing group on Wolverhampton council retained numerical advantage until 1930.³¹

Table 4.2 - Occupational composition of the council members, 1848-1888
(figures are percentages)

	Councillors	Aldermen	Whole council
Manufacturing	34	40	36
Shop/trade	27	37	29
Drink	10	6	9
Professional	23	35	25
Administration	0.5	2	1
Gentleman	5	-	4

Total council members analysed - 242 (190 councillors, 52 aldermen)

Source: *Minutes of the Borough Council*.

Table 4.3 - Occupational composition of the council - specific councils
(figures are percentages)

	1848-9	1858-9	1868-9	1878-9	1888-9
Manufacturing	27	33	29	44	38
Shop/trade	48	31	31	31	21
Drink	4	10	4	8	15
Professional	18	23	23	8	19
Administration			2	4	4
Gentleman	2	2	4		4

Source: As Table 4.2

²⁷ H. E. Meller, *Leisure and the Changing City, 1870-1914* (London, 1976) 87 quoted 27% for 'Merchants and Industrialists' in Bristol in 1890. David Large quoted 24% for manufacturers on Bristol council in 1891. See *The Municipal Government of Bristol 1851-1901* (Bristol, 1999) 12.

²⁸ Appendix 2, Table 1.

²⁹ E. P Hennock, *Fit and Proper Persons: Ideal and Reality in nineteenth-century urban government* (London, 1973) 34.

³⁰ D. Large, *The Municipal Government of Bristol*, 12.

³¹ G. W. Jones, *Borough Politics*, 368.

Table 4.4 - Occupational composition of the council - new entrants
(figures are percentages)

	1848-58	1859-68	1869-78	1879-88
Manufacturing	29	31	43	25
Shop/trade	43	32	33	22
Drink	9	5	7	19
Professional	17	23	12	31
Administration		2	2	3
Gentleman	2	8	2	

Source: As Table 4.2

Table 4.5 - Occupational composition of the aldermen - specific councils
(Figures are percentages)

	1848-9	1858-9	1868-9	1878-9	1888-9
Manufacturing	25	50	16	42	50
Shop/trade	50	33	42	42	8
Drink	8		8		
Professional	16	25	25	8	25
Administration			8	8	16

Source: As Table 4.2

Table 4.6 - Occupational composition of the mayors
(figures are percentages)

	1848-58	1859-68	1869-78	1879-88	Summary 1848-88
Manufacturing	55	20	60	60	49
Shop/trade	27	50	30		29
Drink					
Professional	9	30		30	17
Administration			10	10	5

Source: As Table 4.2

Although manufacturing had regained numerical advantage on Wolverhampton council by the 1870s and certainly held more of the prestigious positions such as the mayoralty, the persistence of shop/trade must be noted as very significant. M. J. Daunton has pointed out that the shopocracy, which was always directly associated with the interests of ratepayers, gained control of many councils in the mid-nineteenth century. This advance was achieved on the strength of what Daunton termed a 'ratepayers backlash' which encouraged 'economists' to seek office in order to oppose schemes which would increase the rates.³² Although in Wolverhampton between 1848 and 1888 shop/trade was

³² M. J. Daunton, 'Urban Britain' in T. R. Gourvish and A. O'Day (eds), *Later Victorian Britain, 1867-1900* (Basingstoke 1988) 33-67.

generally outnumbered by manufacturing in terms of council membership, aldermanic places and the mayoralty, it was clearly a persistent and powerful influence, especially in the early to middle years of the period. Another feature of Dauntton's analysis to which Wolverhampton conformed was in exhibiting the rising power of the professionals, as represented by architects, doctors, solicitors and surgeons for example. The analyses in Tables 4.2-4.6 show that not only were professionals always present as a significant group in council (1848-1888 average 25%) but that they were increasingly favoured for high office. By the 1880s professionals, together with the relatively new occupation of administration or management, were the only serious rivals to manufacturing for the mayoralty.

Within the category of professionals may be observed the advance of medical men who accounted for 6.6 per cent of council members between 1848 and 1888. Hennock commented that the four medical men on Wolverhampton council in 1888-90, i.e. 8.7 per cent, was a comparable figure to those of Birmingham (1882 6.3%, 1892 9.7%) and markedly higher than those of Leeds (1882 1.6%, 1892 3.1%).³³ Hennock attributed the relatively high figure for Birmingham to the high degree of respect accorded to medical men and to their involvement in bodies dealing with public health. A similar argument would apply to Wolverhampton where two medical men were elected to the mayoralty in the 1880s.

The drink lobby was always present in Wolverhampton council and averaged 9 per cent of council members between 1848 and 1888. This was quite a high proportion. Hennock commented that the drink lobby in Wolverhampton was notable at 10 per cent in 1889 and again in 1904.³⁴ However, his classification method appears to have reduced the figure and therefore his other figures must be taken as minima in relation to the Wolverhampton data in Tables 4.5-4.7. The other figures which Hennock gave for the drink faction were for Birmingham (1856 14%, 1862 7.8%) and for Leeds (1872 7.8%, 1902 16.9%).³⁵ As Hennock argued, it is not surprising that those concerned with the drink trade should have made concerted efforts to gain council representation. Increasingly militant temperance campaigns from the 1860s and the Licensing Act of 1872, which stressed the role of the police in countering licensing offences, made the acquisition of influence through council membership much more important for those involved in the drink trade. By the late 1870s and 1880s the representation of the drink trade on Wolverhampton council was increasing steadily and reached 15 per cent in 1888-9. However, the drink lobby was always opposed in Wolverhampton by the influential supporters of temperance who had links with Nonconformism and were often leading manufacturers with Liberal political allegiance. Although the drink trade achieved a substantial representation on the council as a

³³ E. P. Hennock, *Fit and Proper Persons*, 37.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 34-5.

whole at 9 per cent (1848-88), there were limits to the level at which it was accepted: it was less evident among aldermen at 6 per cent and was never represented as mayor.³⁶

Smaller groups on council included the category of administration which, in representing senior managers employed by large organisations, was in reality a sub-section of the professionals and was similarly favoured in providing candidates for high office. Its most notable representatives between 1848 and 1888 were Thomas Bantock (agent for the Great Western Railway and mayor 1868-70) and John Annan (manager of the gas company and mayor 1884-5).³⁷

The time taken to progress from the rank of councillor to that of alderman and even of mayor is of particular interest in relation to Wolverhampton. The block diagrams, Figs 4.1 and 4.2, show that although the average times taken to progress from councillor to alderman and from councillor to mayor were 6.0 and 6.2 years respectively, Wolverhampton was notable in having an appreciable number of what might be termed 'fast-track' candidates who received advancement during their first three years of council service. This effect was particularly marked in relation to the mayoralty. Discounting the first three years of the council itself from 1848 to 1851 when obviously some new councillors had to receive early promotion, then there were eight councillors promoted to alderman and four councillors promoted to mayor within their first three years of service on Wolverhampton council.

When these 'fast-track' councillors are analysed with regard to occupation, it becomes apparent that professionals predominated. The eight aldermen consisted of three solicitors, one barrister, one architect, two medical men, a merchant and a carrier. The four mayors consisted of two solicitors, the manager of the gas company and a successful manufacturer. It is not surprising that professionals, in the sense of being educated men, predominated within these two groups. They would presumably have combined the required level of prosperity with a desirable degree of erudition which would have attracted public esteem. Furthermore self-confidence in public speaking would have been another likely advantage. The mayor and senior aldermen were sometimes obliged to address public meetings

³⁶ As early as 1855, the licensed victuallers of Wolverhampton described themselves as 'the most persecuted body of men in the country'. See *WC*, 31 October 1855.

At the 1874 licensed victuallers' dinner in Wolverhampton, they complained that their representation in parliament and in council was not strong enough: they 'were not encouraging drunkenness'. It was commented pointedly that this was the first annual dinner since incorporation which the mayor had refused to attend and preside over; neither had he sent an apology. It is significant that the mayor in question was the Liberal Congregationalist W. H. Jones, and this was therefore another example of the way in which the powerful Congregationalist group on the council would later adopt increasingly puritanical policies in their drive for civic respectability. The dinner is reported in *WC*, 4 November 1874.

³⁷ Minority groups on council included the category of 'gentlemen' at 4% (see Table 4.2), but this group never achieved higher rank than that of councillor. The working man did not achieve council membership until 1891. The first female councillor was elected in 1921.



Figs 4.1 & 4.2

SOURCE: Minutes of Borough Council

including ratepayers and liable to become unruly. In addition, the regular convivial dinners held by the council often demanded speeches and even songs from councillors which frequently embarrassed or totally silenced bashful newcomers.³⁸

The advantage possessed by professionals may be confirmed by comparing the average time taken by various occupations to progress from councillor to alderman and from councillor to mayor. The results shown in Table 4.7 demonstrate that professionals (together with the associated group - managers) had the shortest times of progression either to alderman or to mayor. After these two groups, manufacturers had the next fastest progression to mayor, shop/trade was the slowest group in progression to mayor but had a shorter average time to alderman than did manufacturing. There may well have been in this effect an element of compensation in the creation of shop/trade aldermen who as shown before were most unlikely to progress to mayor after the 1870s.

Table 4.7 - Average rates of progression from councillor analysed by occupation, 1848-88

	Councillor - Alderman (years)	Councillor - Mayor (years)
Manufacturing	8.7	6.3
Shop/trade	5.3	8.4
Drink	12.3	-
Professional	4.8	5.1
Administration	4.6	5.0
Overall average	6.0	6.2

Source: As Table 4.2

The office of mayor, the senior citizen and main representative of the town, demanded more than the basic qualification that 'the honourable position of Chief Magistrate should be given to a man of good position, one who had taken a leading part in the progress of the town and was directly connected with its manufacturing interests'.³⁹ There was also considerable cost involved. It was always understood that the mayor would make generous contributions to local charities and this could be very expensive indeed. The first mayor, the ironmaster G. B. Thorneycroft was very wealthy as a result of selling rails and axles to the rapidly developing railway companies. He acquired great respect and popularity through his support of charity. In 1840 he contributed £500 to the foundation of the Wolverhampton Hospital and, by challenging other ironmasters to match this sum, was able to raise a large opening subscription. In 1848, to commemorate the granting of incorporation, he gave £1,000 to initiate a

³⁸ For a lively account of a convivial dinner held in 1855 to mark the impending retirement of the mayor James Shipton, see W. H. Jones, *Story of the Municipal Life of Wolverhampton*, 84-95.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 32.

charity known as the 'Thornecroft Benefaction', the interest being used annually to provide winter blankets for the poor.⁴⁰

There were some instances of financial assistance to the mayor when his required expenditure on behalf of Wolverhampton appeared to be excessive. In 1851 the council voted £300 to the mayor William Warner, a draper, to cover his expenses relating to the brief visit of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert when they passed through by railway en route to Scotland. The mayor and aldermen presented a loyal address at Wolverhampton station. In 1871, during the mayoralty of the contractor James Walker, the Royal Agricultural Show was held in Wolverhampton on the race course site (which later, in 1881, became the West Park). To assist with the expense of decorating the town and entertaining visitors, the council awarded the mayor £1,000. Nevertheless, these votes of expenses were unusual and in general the mayor was obliged throughout the nineteenth century to meet his own municipal expenses without any assistance from the corporation.

The expense incurred in acting as mayor became a considerable deterrent to acceptance of that office. There was a further disadvantage which applied particularly to any successful businessman who might be offered the mayoralty; this was the loss of working time caused by the innumerable engagements of the mayor, sometimes important but often relatively trivial or purely ceremonial. Even at the basic level of becoming a councillor, businessmen were often reluctant to stand because the council was seen as a talking shop, a place of endless debate about trivia in which the quality of discussion was low and final decisions were often avoided.

So serious was the reluctance to accept municipal office that in 1855 for example it proved difficult to find a suitable candidate willing to accept the office of mayor. The town council was facing costs of £6,500 arising from an adverse decision of the parliamentary committee set up to consider the future of Wolverhampton waterworks. It appeared that these expenses could not be recouped by raising the rates; discussion in council was acrimonious and unruly. The incumbent mayor, James Shipton, refused re-election. Later in 1903 W. H. Jones wrote that 'the members of the Council were perplexed and almost in despair for who would take the office of Mayor under such circumstances?' After applying to several persons and being refused, they at last thought of Mr Councillor Edward Perry.⁴¹ In the event, Perry accepted the office, resolved the financial problems by raising a voluntary subscription and served as mayor for two years until 1857.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 41 and see also J. B. Owen, *G. B. Thornecroft, A Memoir* (London, 1856).

⁴¹ W. H. Jones, *Story of the Municipal Life of Wolverhampton*, 96. It should be noted that W. H. Jones (mayor 1873-4) was himself a second choice for the office. J. C. Major (who later became mayor in 1875-6) had declined, as described in *WC*, 5 November 1873.

Even in years when the business of the council was not so fraught, there were problems in persuading suitable candidates to accept nomination to the mayoralty. For example, in 1870 no suitable member of council would agree to be nominated. It was therefore agreed that local gentlemen who seemed to be acceptable candidates should be invited to stand for guaranteed election to the council followed by immediate promotion to the mayoralty. This desperate measure was rejected by several men approached of whom the last was the industrialist Major Thomas Thorneycroft, the son of the first mayor G. B. Thorneycroft elected in 1848. Thorneycroft, who was not and never had been an elected councillor, also refused the offer.⁴²

The choice, or at least the office, finally fell on the contractor Alderman James Walker who had turned down the office in the previous year. The town council conceded that there had been great difficulty in finding anyone to accept the mayoralty. Walker and the council were heavily criticised for the £1,000 voted to support the mayoral expenses. Ratepayers demanded 'Let those who dance pay the fiddlers' and were insistent that this new expense placed upon the rates should not set a precedent.⁴³ Walker was also criticised because of 'his antecedents' which were thought by some to render him unsuitable to embody the civic dignity of Wolverhampton in a year when the Royal Agricultural Society were due to visit the town.⁴⁴ In these later years of the nineteenth century, the mayoralty of Wolverhampton was becoming a difficult appointment to fill. There were insufficient suitable and willing candidates and the requirements were increasingly demanding both financially and socially.⁴⁵

Contemporary accounts of the mayors of Wolverhampton published in 1880 and 1893 were traditionally eulogistic but significant in the specific virtues which attracted praise. Local origins were seen as particularly advantageous and applied to at least 75 per cent of the mayors. To be honest and business-like was very desirable and was regarded as far more important than the experience of much formal education. Self-help as described by Samuel Smiles was the ideal pattern.⁴⁶ Overall, the archetypal mayor of Wolverhampton was a locally-born religious man of strict business-like habits who 'rose by his own exertions' and through his commitment to the civic cause and to philanthropy gained 'the generous regard of all classes'.⁴⁷

⁴² WC, 26 October and 9 November 1870.

⁴³ WC, 9 November 1870.

⁴⁴ It is difficult to decide which of James Walker's 'antecedents' the correspondent to the *Wolverhampton Chronicle* of 9 November 1870 found unacceptable. Walker was a self-made man, born in Wolverhampton, who served the Council well for 25 years. A Church of England member, created a magistrate in 1880, he contributed significantly to the town, particularly as Chairman of Public Works and of the Free Library Committee.

⁴⁵ John Jones (mayor 1878-79-80) and brother of W. H. was at first unwilling to accept nomination for a third term. He expressed regret that no other candidate had come forward and it was reported that the heavy expense involved was a considerable deterrent. See WC, 3 November 1880.

⁴⁶ S. Smiles, *Self-Help* (Harmondsworth, 1986) originally published 1859.

⁴⁷ This is a compilation of typical comments from J. Jones, *The Mayors of Wolverhampton*, Volume I, 1848-80 and Volume II, 1881-1909.

Between 1848 and 1888 eleven councillors were elected as mayor without having passed through what might have been regarded as the intermediate stage of alderman. These councillors included the four 'fast-track' candidates, the solicitors John Hawksford and Herbert Owen, the edge tool manufacturer William Edwards and the gas company manager John Annan. However, it was accepted that all those who had become mayor should be elected as aldermen before their retirement and this convention was always followed. Thus, the rank of alderman was a mark of respect shown by the council to those who contributed significantly to local government, even in some cases by long service alone. Some aldermen remained members of the council for very long periods indeed: the japanner William H. Jones served 38 years from 1864 to 1903, the rope and twine manufacturer Moses Ironmonger served 39 years from 1848 to 1887. However, both of these men were mayors of the town (Jones 1873-4, Ironmonger 1857-8 and 1868-9) and made major contributions to local government.

The aldermen of Wolverhampton who held office between 1848 and 1888 were the incumbents of an honorary position which had the effect of extending their potential service on the council because aldermen were elected for six years, councillors for only three. Moreover, aldermen were given an accepted measure of seniority. They were frequently appointed to chair committees. For example, in 1861 there were ten committees of which nine were chaired by aldermen; in 1883 there were thirteen committees of which ten were chaired by aldermen.⁴⁸ The council committees were granted extensive powers by the main council: they were empowered 'to carry out and execute the statutory and other duties and powers of the Council'.⁴⁹ They did not, however, receive power to set a rate or to borrow money, neither were they permitted to acquire or dispose of land and buildings. The council retained, in theory at least, the right to change committee proposals and to make the final decisions. In practice, the committees could and often did make plans which committed the council and it was customary for committee decisions to be ratified without much discussion.⁵⁰ Thus, the committees became 'the workshops of the Council'. The council itself, whilst continuing to engage in what the local press described as 'desultory and irregular discussion of great length', had effectively conceded much of its power to the committees.⁵¹ Reports and other information were submitted directly to the committees wherein decisions were made and submitted to the council for the formality of ratification.

⁴⁸ There was a proliferation of committee membership. The General Purposes committee included not only the mayor as ex officio chairman but also the chairmen of every other standing committee and every alderman who did not chair a committee. The General Purposes committee also had to include the senior councillor from each ward and was one of the larger committees. In 1875, for example, General Purposes and four other committees had 21 members each: the other six committees were not much smaller, having 18-20 members.

⁴⁹ G. W. Jones, *Borough Politics*, 224.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 225, refers to a council meeting in 1899 when the Chairman of the Sewage Committee sought approval to buy some land which he had already purchased. The discovery that he had already acted was greeted with 'loud laughter'.

⁵¹ *WC*, 10 March 1852.

Within the committee structure, the chairman was very dominant. He possessed a casting vote but it was very unusual for committee members to oppose the views of the chairman. The committee elected its own chairman annually but re-election was a formality until the chairman was compelled to give up office, e.g. by death, illness or defeat at a municipal election.⁵² It was not uncommon for committee chairmen to hold office for more than 20 years. The chairmen of major committees, e.g. Watch, Sewerage, Finance, Public Works, had a much greater influence on the affairs of the town than did senior members of the full council.

Table 4.8 - Occupation composition of committee chairmen
(Figures are percentages)

	1851	1855	1861	1865	1870	1871	1875	1880	1887
Manufacturing		25	20	11		9	36	46	66
Shop/trade	62	62	50	33	73	55	27	46	20
Drink	13					9		8	
Professional	25	13	30	55	27	27	27		14
Administration							9		

Source: As Table 4.2

The occupational analysis of committee chairman shown in Table 4.8 indicates that although there were frequent fluctuations in occupational composition, some general conclusions may be drawn. For example, manufacturing achieved a reasonable level of representation in the 1850s, lost influence around 1870, and then regained a dominant position in the late 1880s. Shop/trade predominated in the early years after incorporation and was always well represented until the 1880s when manufacturing was regaining authority and also the professionals were becoming much more influential. The professionals had two important advantages as chairmen: in the first place their generally higher level of education made them more obvious candidates for chairmanship, and secondly their unique varieties of expertise frequently qualified them to preside over committees which dealt with technical matters such as gas and sewerage.

The effects of these occupational factors upon the conduct and decisions of committees might be expected to have been significant, particularly in view of the overwhelming authority of the chairmen. The shop/trade lobby, with its commitment to the small ratepayer, might be expected to have advocated extreme economy in municipal expenditure with particular effect in the early years. As the power of the shop/trade group in the committees declined in the 1880s, it might be expected that resistance to expenditure on municipal welfare would be weakened, especially as the more educated professional group increased their influence. Certainly these effects may be observed but it must be

⁵² G. W. Jones, *Borough Politics*, 226.

stressed that there were many other factors involved in civic change and the council committees, although powerful, were only one element of a complex and pluralistic process.

In addition to acting as the forum for decision-making, the council committees also fulfilled an important function in training for civic office. As a required element of their municipal service, all councillors were assigned to committees and it was considered that this arrangement would provide newcomers with the necessary familiarisation and training.⁵³ Thus, all the councillors were involved in numerous meetings of committees and council. The workload was daunting, even for the most conscientious. During the municipal year between 9 November 1887 and 15 October 1888, the mayor was summoned to attend 391 meetings; most council members were summoned to an average of 145 meetings consisting of the council plus usually three committees. The aldermen and councillors had fairly similar attendance records at 59.3 and 62.5 per cent respectively with an overall attendance record of 61.6 per cent. Understandably the mayor had a lower attendance record of 36.3 per cent but this equated to 142 meetings, a figure exceeded by only four other council members.⁵⁴

Further analysis of the attendances for 1887-8 reveals two small groups at opposite ends of the distribution. The eight members with attendance records above 80 per cent included three representatives of the drink trade; this is quite possibly explained by the campaign of licensed victuallers at that time to maximise their level of council representation in the face of increasing opposition from temperance movements. On the other hand, the nine members who made less than 40 per cent attendance included seven representatives of the manufacturing and professional groups. It could be argued that these two groups would have the fullest and most demanding work load and were finding it increasingly difficult to attend the endless round of meetings.

Table 4.9 - Average years of service of council members

	Decade of Appointment		
	1848-58	1859-68	1869-78
Councillors	5.9	6.5	5.9
Aldermen	5.3	12.3	19.3
Whole council	5.8	7.4	10.0

Source: As Table 4.2

⁵³ *Minutes of the General Purposes committee*, 10 November 1851.

⁵⁴ *Minutes of the Borough Council*, Book 11 (1888) 426.

Table 4.10 - Number of aldermen appointed by decades

1848-58	24
1859-68	16
1869-78	7
1879-88	10

Source: As Table 4.2

The long service achieved by many aldermen on Wolverhampton council between 1848 and 1888 had a very marked effect on raising the average time served by all council members. The figures shown in Table 4.9 demonstrate that although the average time served by those who did not rise above the rank of councillor remained remarkably constant at 5.9-6.5 years between 1848 and 1888, the corresponding time served by aldermen rose sharply. During the three decades between 1848 and 1878, the average time served by aldermen rose from 5.3 years in the first decade through 12.3 in the second to reach 19.3 years in the third decade. This was essentially a generational effect in that the early councillors who became aldermen often remained in office until debarred by infirmity or death. The effect is confirmed by the figures in Table 4.10 which show that in the decades 1848-58 and 1859-68, 24 and 16 aldermen respectively were appointed. In the following decades, 1869-78 and 1879-88, there were only seven and ten new aldermen respectively. By 1888/9 the influx of new aldermen had caused the average length of service to fall to 14.9 years. G. W. Jones' analysis showed that from 1889 onwards, there was a second major regeneration of aldermanic ranks which resulted in average periods of service increasing to the remarkable length of 26.3 years by 1919-20.⁵⁵

For those councillors who did not gain promotion, the average periods of service across the four decades between 1848 and 1878 were, as stated previously, remarkably constant at 5.9, 6.5, and 5.9 years respectively. These figures were fairly typical and were very similar to those applying in Leicester during the four decades from 1835 to 1875 which were 6, 6.6, 5.5 and 5 years respectively.⁵⁶ Many council members made relatively brief and insubstantial contributions to the local government of Wolverhampton. Between 1848 and 1878 15.7 per cent served less than one three-year term and a further 34 per cent completed only one three-year term (Table 4.11). This was not unusual. In Leicester between 1835 and 1875 the corresponding figures relating to three-year terms were 40 and 21 per cent respectively.⁵⁷

At the other end of the scale there were some notably long periods of service. In Wolverhampton between 1848 and 1888 13 per cent of council members completed more than nine years membership, 6 per cent more than twelve years, and 10 per cent more than 15 years (Table 4.11). Again this was

⁵⁵ G. W. Jones, *Borough Politics*, 381.

⁵⁶ Appendix 2, Table 4.

⁵⁷ Appendix 2, Table 5.

not unusual. The corresponding figures for Leicester between 1835 and 1875 were 13, 6, and 12 per cent respectively.⁵⁸ Hennock commented that for Birmingham council between 1882 and 1902 42-44 per cent of councillors including aldermen served for ten years or more and 19-20 per cent served for twenty years or more.⁵⁹ Clearly at the end of the nineteenth century, lengths of council service in such industrial cities appear to have been increasing. G. W. Jones' work showed that the average length of service across the whole of Wolverhampton council had risen steadily to reach 12.3 years by 1919-20.⁶⁰

It is not surprising that there was a wide variation in lengths of service for individual councillors. It is perhaps more illuminating to consider not only those who achieved advancement but also to focus on those councillors who served, for example, four terms, i.e. 12 years without receiving preferment to alderman (or of course directly to mayor). When these relative non-achievers are analysed, the results show an overwhelming preponderance of shop/trade at 48 per cent compared with 17 per cent for manufacturing, 14 per cent for professionals and 10 per cent for the drink lobby. Once again, manufacturing is confirmed as the dominant influence on the council. Shop/trade was well represented on the council, albeit in reducing numbers, but was progressively failing to gain advancement either to alderman or to mayor (Table 4.12).

Table 4.11 - Length of service of council members 1848-1888
(Figures are percentages)

	0-3 years	3-6 years	6-9 years	9-12 years	12-15 years	15 years +
Councillors	20	38	23	14	3	2
Aldermen	7	16	16	7	13	42
Whole council	15	34	23	13	6	10

Source: As Table 4.2

Table 4.12 - Occupational composition of long-serving councillors failing to gain promotion to alderman, 1848-88
(Figures are numbers of councillors)

	4 x 3-year terms	3 x 3-year terms
Manufacturing	2	3
Shop/trade	4	10
Drink	-	10
Professional	1	3
Administration	-	1
Gentleman	1	1

Source: As Table 4.2

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ E. P. Hennock, *Fit and Proper Persons*, 55.

⁶⁰ G. W. Jones, *Borough Politics*, 381.

It is likewise informative to analyse the details of those councillors who served less than one three-year term between 1848 and 1888. There were some unavoidable reasons for leaving the council including death in office, serious illness and leaving the district. Occasionally there were disqualifications arising from either misdemeanour or bankruptcy. In 1852 and 1853, two newly-elected councillors were required to resign immediately because their elections were regarded as 'irregular'; in the latter case, there were allegations of 'bribery and treating'.⁶¹ Any councillor who became bankrupt was disqualified automatically.⁶²

When the numbers of councillors serving less than one term are reduced to those who resigned freely there remain 27 councillors of whom 13 were manufacturers, 9 were professionals and 5 were from shop/trade. These findings support the contemporary view that manufacturers and professionals were increasingly reluctant to devote their valuable time to what was seen by many as a self-indulgent, talkative and ineffective council.⁶³ This was already identified as a discouraging factor for some of those who had been offered the mayoralty and there were complaints in the press that the more capable and business-like men in the town were thus deterred from formal participation in local government.⁶⁴

In view of suggestions that local men of ability and achievement might well be reluctant to stand for election to the council, it is appropriate to try to make some estimate of the calibre or quality of the council. The method adopted is that of G. W. Jones which he applied to studying the borough council from 1888 to 1964.⁶⁵ It amounts to a personal grading process which allocates council members to one of four groups, described by Jones as follows:

Class A is for those outstanding figures who made a mark on the Council as a whole, on many aspects of its work and not in just one committee. Class B is for those who made a significant contribution in more than one field on the Council, although more narrow in the range than Class A. Class C is for those who made some mark, though usually only in one committee. Class D is for those who made a little or no impact at all.

⁶¹ For discussion in council on 'bribery and treating' following the resignations, see *WC*, 11 May 1853.

⁶² For council debate resulting in decision to declare vacant the seat of a bankrupt councillor, see *WC*, 14 September 1853.

⁶³ For example, *WC*, 10 March 1852 reported that 'a desultory and irregular discussion of great length ensued'. This debate which lasted for more than four hours was on footway paving.

⁶⁴ G. W. Jones, *Borough Politics*, 150 gives several examples from 1885 onwards of press comments suggesting that the most capable men in the town were unwilling to become members of a council which the *Express & Star*, 1 November 1887, described as 'a haughty, plutocratic, oppressive, supercilious, obnoxious body with horse-head proclivities'.

⁶⁵ G. W. Jones, *Borough Politics*, 149-62.

Table 4.13 - Quality of council members - specific councils
(Figures are percentages)

Quality	1848	1868	1888
A	14	12	14
B	34	38	33
C	19	17	15
D	33	33	38

Source: As Table 4.2

The results in Table 4.13 for the councils of 1848, 1868 and 1888 suggest that the quality of these three councils was relatively constant. Although it is accepted that this method of assessing council quality is very subjective, the results should be significant in a relative sense when comparing councils. As previously indicated from studies on length of service, less than half of the councillors made any significant contribution.

Furthermore, it is noticeable how few men in Wolverhampton society in general made a lasting impact on the town in terms of either its structure and facilities or its civic policy. Although the judgement is necessarily very subjective, it can be argued with some justification that between 1848 and 1888, there were less than twenty men who could be accorded this distinction.⁶⁶ They were by no means single-handed agents of change but they accelerated it to a remarkable extent.

Table 4.14 - Residence zones of council members
(Figures are percentages)

		Radius from town centre (miles)				
		0 - ¼	¼ - ½	½ - ¾	¾ - 1	>1
1848	Councillors	25	33	39	-	3
1848	Aldermen	38	15	31	8	8
1848	Whole council	29	29	37	2	4
1868	Councillors	45	25	20	8	3
1868	Aldermen	42	8	25	25	-
1868	Whole council	44	21	21	13	2
1888	Councillors	21	18	35	9	18
1888	Aldermen	25	8	8	33	25
1888	Whole council	22	15	28	15	20

Source: As Table 4.2

⁶⁶ In the opinion of the writer, the twenty would have to include the mayors G. B. Thorneycroft, Edward Perry, G. L. Underhill, H. H. Fowler, Sir John Morris, Thomas Bantock, W. H. Jones and Samuel Dickinson, councillor Robert Sidney, the journalist A. C. Pratt, the Congregationalist minister Dr Charles Berry, the benefactor Philip Horsman and the town clerk Sir Horatio Brevitt. The MP Charles Villiers would have to be included because, although noted for his absences, he was a powerful advocate for the town. There are obviously other worthy candidates but the above are the modest choice of the writer.

An important source of tension lay in the residential structure of the town. At the time of incorporation in 1848, more than half of the new councillors lived within half a mile of the town centre. The analysis in Table 4.14 shows that more than 29 per cent lived within a quarter mile radius and an additional 29 per cent lived within a half mile radius. This was quite normal for an industrial town such as Wolverhampton or indeed Birmingham where metal work was carried out in small workshops which often adjoined living accommodation. By 1868 the councillors of Wolverhampton were drawn from the central zone to an even greater extent: 44 per cent within a quarter mile radius and a further 21 per cent within half a mile.⁶⁷ However, from about 1870 there was a progressive movement outwards particularly to the south and west, and by 1888 the proportion of councillors living in the town centre was much lower; 22 per cent lived within a quarter mile radius with a further 15 per cent within half a mile. Indeed by 1888 the majority of councillors - 63 per cent - lived more than half a mile from the town centre. It is therefore reasonable to suppose that although the early councillors (say from 1848 to 1868) had a natural commitment to the town centre and its environment, by 1888 outward migration would have placed this commitment at risk.

The problems arising from outward migration were exacerbated in Wolverhampton by the fact that the more prosperous inhabitants, having moved away from the congested industrially-polluted eastern area nevertheless continued to provide a disproportionate number of council members. The council seats were divided equally between the four wards in the west and the four in the east. The analysis in Tables 4.15 and 4.16 demonstrates that even the new council of 1848 had 75 per cent of its members resident in the west. Thereafter the disparity continued to increase with western residents representing over 80 per cent of the councillors in 1868 and 1888.

Table 4.15 - Residence of council members (west and east) 1848-1888

	Seats		1848		1868		1888	
	W	E	W	E	W	E	W	E
Councillors	18	18	28	8	24	12	26	10
Aldermen	6	6	9	3	12	-	12	-
Total	24	24	37	11	36	12	38	10

Source: As Table 4.2

⁶⁷

The migration of more prosperous inhabitants toward the west of the town has been studied by Mark Shaw who considered the environmental quality of Wolverhampton in 1871 and commented that 'clearly the west was far more attractive as a place to live than the industrial east and south'. See M. Shaw, 'Life in Wolverhampton, 1841-1871', *West Midlands Studies*, 12 (1979) 1-11. At a very basic level of analysis it may be observed that of the 14 aldermen who recorded changes of address between 1862 and 1883, 12 moved outwards to the west.

Table 4.16 - Representation and residence wards of mayors 1848-1888
(Figures are numbers of mayors)

	Mayors representing ward	Mayors residing in ward
St John's	5	8
St Mark's	4	14
St Paul's	4	5
St Peter's	4	10
St George's	10	1
St James'	6	1
St Mary's	3	-
St Matthew's	4	1

Source: As Table 4.2

The disparity was not only numerical but was also marked in respect of municipal seniority. In the councils of 1868 and 1888 all of the aldermen were resident in the west. Moreover, of the 37 mayors from 1848 to 1888, only three lived in the east although more than half represented eastern wards. Incongruously the two wards whose representatives provided most of the mayors were in the east; these were St George's and St James' with seven and 6 mayors respectively but only two of these mayors lived in the east. The majority of mayors lived in the western wards of St Mark's and St Peter's which contained the addresses of fifteen and ten mayors respectively (See Table 4.16).

These inequalities between east and west were destined to provoke considerable tension, especially after 1870 when articulate residents of the eastern wards began to raise objections to the dominant power and prestige of the west. The disparity was criticised as being not only unfair democratically but also as leading to preferential treatment of the western wards despite the much greater priority of dealing with social deprivation in the east.

Wolverhampton councillors would of course be well aware of the inferior conditions which applied in the eastern wards. Most of the councillors had been born and bred in Wolverhampton. Moreover, those who had been born outside the town were frequently natives of the industrial communities to the east. Senior figures such as the mayor and aldermen were often closely connected with conditions in the east because many of them had workshops and factories in the east.

As previously stated, a close connection with manufacturing was regarded very favourably as a qualification for civic office. Several future mayors of Wolverhampton were apprenticed in early life to masters who were also involved in local government. For example, Isaac Jenks (mayor 1872) was apprenticed to the first mayor G. B. Thorneycroft: John Marston (mayor 1889-91) was apprenticed to Edward Perry who served two terms as mayor from 1855 to 1857.

Council members were also frequently linked by family relationships either directly or by marriage. The remarkable Jones dynasty of five brothers included three mayors - William H. (1873-4), John (1878-81) and Joseph (1887-8). The other brothers were Henry, a councillor who died young aged 37 in 1870 and Benjamin, a councillor from 1871 to 1888. John's son later became a councillor (1904-10) and John's daughter married A. B. Bantock, mayor 1905-07 and 1914-5. Bantock was the first mayor to be the son of a previous holder of the office; his father Thomas Bantock was mayor in 1869-70 and married the sister of Samuel Dickinson, mayor 1876-7.

In addition to the extensive Jones/Bantock families, there were many other relationships, less pervasive perhaps but potentially significant. The brothers John and Joseph Ford were mayors of Wolverhampton in 1864 and 1871 respectively. Other important families in local government included the Ironmongers and the Underhills. It is however very important to note that, as G. W. Jones has commented, a close family relationship did not necessarily result in similar voting patterns. Sometimes, families were divided by religious or political differences, or both, as was the case with the cousins Charles Mander (Anglican, Conservative, mayor 1892-3) and S. T. Mander (Congregationalist, Liberal, mayor 1899-1900). In summary, there was, as G. W. Jones has shown for the period from 1888 onwards, 'no close connection between voting and kinship'.⁶⁸

As with family relationships, it is not difficult to imagine other social networks through which particular policies might be urged upon the council in some concerted way. Among these networks, freemasonry could be regarded as a natural vehicle for reinforcing social and professional linkages among the local middle classes. Barry Doyle has studied freemasonry as one of the factors affecting the elite networks of Norwich after 1900 and concluded that the movement was designed 'to extend networks, power and influence'.⁶⁹ However, it is unlikely that there was any concerted influence arising from freemasonry in the early government of Wolverhampton. Lodge membership accounted for 12 per cent of the councillors but included only three aldermen and four mayors between 1848 and 1889. Furthermore, these masons were well separated in time and would not have been in a position to exert undue influence.⁷⁰ G. W. Jones has studied the later period of the nineteenth and early

⁶⁸ G. W. Jones, *Borough Politics*, 142-8 gives an analysis of kinship and the town council.

⁶⁹ B. Doyle, 'The Structure of Elite Power in the early Twentieth Century City: Norwich 1900-1935', *Urban History*, 24, 2 (1997)

⁷⁰ I am greatly indebted to Haydn Palmer, Secretary to the Provincial Grand Lodge of Staffordshire who identified those councillors who were also members of any of the three lodges meeting in Wolverhampton at that time. His generous help enabled conclusions regarding masonic membership to be approached with confidence.

In attempting to make a comparison with the influence of freemasonry on Leicester council, the evidence proved to be indirect and amounted only to limited information held at the Leicestershire Record Office in Wigston. It is, however, probable that as in Wolverhampton masonic membership in Leicester was insufficient to have had significant influence on municipal policy. Between 1850 and 1884, only about 12% of council members appear to have been freemasons including only five aldermen of whom three became mayor.

twentieth century and reached similar conclusions.⁷¹ Freemasonry appears to have provided business contacts and good fellowship, but nothing more.

Table 4.17 - Analysis of Poor Law Guardians for occupation and council membership
(Figures are actual numbers on a 12-man board)

	1861	1862	1883	1885
Ministers of religion	2	2	2	2
Manufacturing	3	1	-	1
Shop/trade	2	2	4	3
Drink	1	1	-	-
Professional	2	3	-	-
Other	2	3	5	6
Aldermen	3	3	-	-
Total council members	8	7	-	4

Source: As Table 4.2

Some members of the council were also poor law guardians, a position which was usually held either by members of the gentry or by those who were generally accepted to be respectable citizens possessed of substantial means. The analysis in Table 4.17 shows that in 1861 67 per cent of the guardians were also members of the town council, but by the 1880s the figure had fallen to an average of about 33 per cent. In many respects the council and the Poor Law union represented diverging systems for contributing to urban society. The way in which the Union was perceived as different was emphasised by the regular inclusion of Anglican clergy: the Union was primarily concerned with charity and this gave an obvious opportunity for involving ministers of the established church who were excluded from membership of the town council.⁷²

The guardians were able to play a significant part in urban society without undertaking the obligations of council membership with all of the associated commitment to electioneering together with the endless and no doubt frequently unrewarding attendance at council committees. It is noticeable that as the period 1848-88 progressed, the relatively small proportion of manufacturers and professional men among the guardians declined. Pressure of work may well have been a factor in this decline because by the 1870s these two groups were providing a rapidly increasing proportion of the council administration, especially at the more demanding levels of committee chairmen, aldermen, and mayors. Moreover by the 1880s manufacturers may have become reluctant to be associated with poor law administration which was regarded as having been too closely identified with the interests of employers.⁷³

⁷¹ G. W. Jones, *Borough Politics*, 136-7.

⁷² E. P. Hennock, *Fit and Proper Persons*, 362.

⁷³ F.M.L. Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society: A Social History of Victorian Britain, 1830-1900* (London, 1988) 347.

The attitudes of the Wolverhampton guardians could be divided between the two categories identified by F. M. L. Thompson as 'humane' and 'economical' with various shades in between. The guardians faced severe criticism on grounds of expenditure particularly the escalating cost of outdoor relief which doubled in the thirteen years between 1855 and 1868.⁷⁴ The replacement of the national Poor Law Board in 1871 by the Local Government Board caused new emphasis to be placed on public works schemes which were expected to reduce the cost of outdoor relief. However, relief expenditure in Wolverhampton continued to rise which the guardians attributed to depression in trade both generally and specifically in the local iron and steel trade. The guardians were severely criticised in the *Wolverhampton Chronicle* in 1873 and also in 1880 by the former mayor H. H. Fowler (then Liberal MP for Wolverhampton) who claimed (albeit incorrectly) that all municipal expenditure in the previous ten years was 'nominal' in comparison with the increase in poor rate.⁷⁵ There was clearly a climate of opinion which favoured the 'economical' faction and this was certainly apparent in the urban politics of Wolverhampton in general. The office of guardian occupied a modest position on the local scale of public esteem as quoted by the *Wolverhampton Chronicle* on the occasion of the death of Alderman Jeremiah Wynn, aged 85, in 1869. Wynn was eulogised as having made 'a progress through every civic gradation' identified as the following sequence: parish constable - overseer - church warden - guardian of the poor - director of hospital or orphanage - bank director - town commissioner - alderman - mayor - magistrate of the borough and of the county.⁷⁶ It is apparent that a wealthy guardian would have derived much more local respect from his evident prosperity than from his connection with poor law administration. In order to achieve the maximum of respect as a function of office, it was necessary to become a magistrate of the borough and ideally of the county.

Some consideration of those who became JPs in Wolverhampton and the surrounding district between 1848 and 1888 is instructive, not only in demonstrating the qualifications required to join the magistracy, but also in throwing light on the way in which the increasingly prosperous manufacturers and traders of Wolverhampton were regarded by the county hierarchy. Philips has shown that the Black Country 'remained predominantly under the control of county magistrates into the 1860s even though it ... included five fairly large towns: Wolverhampton, Dudley, Walsall, West Bromwich and Bilston, whose combined populations increased from 92,041 in 1831 to 209,730 in 1861.'⁷⁷ Even after incorporation in 1848, Wolverhampton's borough jurisdiction remained under the control of the county magistrates until 1960. The county magistrates were described by Philips as 'a local oligarchy, appointed for life and responsible to no-one'. Moreover, they were a tightly-knit group who defended their social ranking zealously and took particular care to exclude from their numbers those who were

⁷⁴ *WC*, 30 August 1869.

⁷⁵ *WC*, 17 April 1880.

⁷⁶ *WC*, 14 April 1869.

⁷⁷ D. Philips, 'The Black Country Magistracy 1835-60. A Changing Elite and the Exercise of its Power, *Midland History*, 3 (1975/6) 163.

involved in manufacturing and trade. This exclusion did not show signs of being relaxed until after 1840.

Throughout the nineteenth century the nominal qualification to become a county magistrate was to own land worth £100 a year or to be entitled to the immediate reversion of property worth £300 a year. Although some knowledge of the law was advantageous, it was not strictly necessary. JPs were appointed for life by the Lord Chancellor who relied almost entirely on the advice of the Lord Lieutenant. In the early nineteenth century the county bench was traditionally made up of landowners, aristocrats, gentry and selected Anglican clergy. Those men who had made their fortunes through manufacturing or trade would be considered for the magistracy only if they had retired from business and acquired a sufficient estate to be classified as a landowner. Even then, preferment was by no means guaranteed and it was certainly refused to the wealthy who remained actively engaged in trade. Until about 1840 and sometimes beyond that 'the county gentlemen set their faces against the admission of any person engaged in trade, manufacture and commerce',⁷⁸.

Although the exclusion of wealthy business men was probably founded primarily on the basis of class distinction, there was nevertheless a valid reason for refusing to appoint them. This was set out by Earl Talbot, Lord Lieutenant of Staffordshire who in 1835 wrote to the Home Secretary Lord John Russell rejecting two men recommended by Russell on the grounds that 'The rule has been in this county, not to place Gentlemen in the Commission of the Peace who are in trade, or they might be called upon to adjudicate in cases where they have an interest.'⁷⁹

The rejection by Talbot may well have been influenced by the feeling that such men were socially unsuitable to sit with peers and gentry on the bench. However, Swift has argued that the ways in which coal and iron masters and manufacturers administered justice on the Wolverhampton bench from 1840 onwards impeded the impartial application of justice in that they tended to act in

⁷⁸ S. & B. Webb, *English Local Government: The Parish and the County* (London, 1963), 383, originally published 1906.

⁷⁹ R. E. Swift, 'Crime, Law and Order in two English Towns during the early Nineteenth Century. The Experience of Exeter and Wolverhampton 1815-1856', (University of Birmingham PhD thesis, 1980) 220.

Earl Talbot had attempted to avoid appointing 'men in trade' by creating stipendiary magistrates as the lesser of two evils but failed to obtain government approval. Successive Whig governments had also ruled against further appointments of Anglican clergy. Although one stipendiary magistrate was eventually appointed for South Staffordshire by an Act of 1846, the shortage of magistrates in the Black Country remained. From 1849 onwards, when Earl Talbot was replaced as Lord Lieutenant by the Whig Marquis of Anglesey, coal and iron masters were appointed to the county bench. See D. Philips, *The Black Country Magistracy*, 173, and also, for a more localised study, M. Jones, 'Justices of the Peace in Wolverhampton: The Clerical Magistrates', *West Midlands Studies*, 11 (1978) 19.

accordance with their own social and economic interests. This influence was enhanced when the manufacturers who were borough magistrates also held office on the town council.⁸⁰

In the climate of reform after 1835, there was increasing pressure from Lord Russell to encourage appointment of manufacturers to the magistracy and thus to widen the range of participants. This change was inevitable because there was a growing shortage of what would previously have been regarded as suitable candidates in the Wolverhampton area. Meanwhile the number of indictable offences rose sharply and many more magistrates were required. In a heavily industrialised area such as that to the east of Wolverhampton it was likely that wealthy landowners would have moved some distance from the immediate vicinity. However, in 1840, the local coal and iron masters and manufacturers still tended to live within a two mile radius of their factories and mines and therefore they were obvious candidates for the magistracy once the authorities changed their selection policy.⁸¹

Between 1848 and 1888, 16 per cent of the town council members were appointed as magistrates. Of these 40 men, 35 were aldermen of whom 28 had occupied the mayoralty. The remaining five were councillors but were relatively distinguished members of the community consisting of a banker, an ironmaster, an important manufacturer and two senior medical men. The occupational profile of the council members who were also borough magistrates is analysed in Table 4.18 and compared with the corresponding data for councillors and aldermen as a whole. The results show that there was an even greater proportion of manufacturers among the magistrates than was the case for the council in its entirety. (For shop/trade, the converse applied.) The new magistrates were mainly wealthy manufacturers and, as shown in Table 4.19 they amounted to more than half of the 39 men who were both borough magistrates and council members between 1848 and 1888.

Table 4.18 - Occupational composition of borough magistrates who were also council members, 1848-1888
(Figures are percentages)

	Whole council	Aldermen	Borough magistrates
Manufacturing	36	40	56
Shop/trade	29	37	23
Drink	9	6	3
Professional	25	35	13
Administration	1	2	5
Gentlemen	4	-	-

Source: As Table 4.2

⁸⁰ D. Philips, *The Black Country Magistracy*, 168-9.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 169-71.

This apparent democratisation of the borough bench was not always achieved without a struggle. The Lord Chancellor and Lord Lieutenant continued to make sporadic objections to nominees long after the conditions for qualification were believed to have become more relaxed. For example, in 1848 the new town council nominated ten candidates for borough magistracy. They consisted of five ironmasters, two manufacturers, two drapers and a maltster. The unconditional acceptance of all these men was surprising but gave great satisfaction to the council. By 1858 more magistrates were needed and therefore six new candidates were proposed comprising the mayor and ex-mayor who were both manufacturers, together with a carrier, an iron merchant, and a surgeon. The council accompanied their application with a pious statement affirming that their choice was free of political or sectarian bias and had been arrived at without any external influence.⁸² Once again, all candidates were accepted.

The next application made in 1862 proposed the mayor, Alderman H. H. Fowler (an attorney) together with Alderman E. Banks (architect), Alderman Simkiss (doctor) and Councillor C. B. Mander (manufacturer). Surprisingly, only three names were accepted, the mayor being refused. The explanation given by the Lord Chancellor, Lord Westbury, was that Fowler was an active attorney and he explained further that 'if the mayor is willing to have his name removed from the roll of attorneys and solicitors, the Lord Chancellor will, at the end of his term of office as Mayor, have pleasure in appointing him a magistrate.'⁸³ The council suspected that the Lord Chancellor and senior members of the county magistracy, who were all considered to have Tory allegiance, were engaged in a political plot against Fowler, who was a Liberal and a Nonconformist, and they sent a unanimous letter of protest to the Lord Chancellor but without success. Fowler refused to withdraw from his profession. He was eventually appointed as a JP in 1880, the year in which he also became one of the two MPs for Wolverhampton.

Exclusion was encountered again in 1867 when the proposals consisted of the mayor Sir John Morris (hemp and flax merchant), Alderman Joseph Ford (merchant) and three others who were not members of council but respected men of considerable means. This time the Lord Chancellor wrote to the council enquiring what were the politics of the candidates and what effect their possible inclusion would have on the political stance of the town bench. The candidates voluntarily revealed their political allegiances as follows: Sir John Morris - Conservative, Joseph Ford - Conservative, S. Loveridge - Liberal, J. Moreton - Conservative Whig and J. W. Weaver Conservative. Although the existing bench was predominantly Liberal in political conviction, the Lord Chancellor surprisingly rejected the self-declared Conservative Joseph Ford but accepted the other four candidates. He assured the council (unconvincingly) that 'no slight was involved' on Ford of whom he had received

⁸² W. H. Jones, *Story of the Municipal Life of Wolverhampton*, 118.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 127.

'only good reports'.⁸⁴ The Liberal MP Charles Villiers took up Ford's case and succeeded in that Ford was appointed a JP later in 1867.⁸⁵

In 1875 the council submitted a further six candidates consisting of the Mayor W. Edwards (edge tool manufacturer) and five others who included two aldermen and ex-mayors Isaac Jenks (ironmaster) and Thomas Bantock (local agent of the Great Western Railway). Both of these latter were Nonconformists, Wesleyan and Congregationalist respectively. All of the other candidates were accepted but Bantock and Jenks were rejected. Opinion in Wolverhampton was that they were rejected by the Conservative government because they were both Liberals and dissenters. Jenks was eventually accepted but at that stage Bantock was not. A similar problem arose in 1880 when the Lord Chancellor requested further evidence before eventually accepting the former mayors William Highfield Jones (japanner) and John Clarkson Major (manufacturing chemist).⁸⁶

In 1887, a further application was made on behalf of Thomas Bantock who by that time had served the council with dedication and considerable ability for 27 years. He had even served as a town commissioner from 1843 to incorporation in 1848. He was, however, a Liberal, a dissenter and involved in trade. Once again, Bantock was refused, the only one of eight candidates to be rejected.⁸⁷

The unstated policy of exclusion which lay behind these rejections was summarised by the Webbs writing in 1924 as follows:

The Country Gentlemen set their faces against the admission of any person engaged in trade, manufacture or commerce; they were prejudiced against any unconventionality in opinions, tastes or conduct even in men of their own class; they resented any expression of Radical or even of Whig politics, and they extremely disliked any active association with the Methodists or other Dissenters.⁸⁸

The persistent rejection of Bantock, considered together with the earlier exclusion of H. H. Fowler, widened the perceived gulf between Wolverhampton's municipal politics and the county hierarchy. Even so, the magistracy was described in the town council as 'much sought after'.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ *WC*, 13 March 1867.

⁸⁵ *WC*, 20 March 1867.

⁸⁶ *Minutes of the Borough Council*, Book 8 (1880) 412, 17 September.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, Book 11 (1887) 9 May. Bantock was eventually appointed as a magistrate later in 1887, See Book 11, 21 November 1887.

⁸⁸ S. & B. Webb, *English Local Government*, 383.

⁸⁹ *WC*. 13 February 1867.

Table 4.19 - Occupational composition of borough magistrates, changes with time
(Figures are percentages)

	1848	1851	1855	1861	1883
Ironmaster	30	42	40	8	-
Banker	30	-	-	17	-
Manufacturing	-	25	20	50	64
Shop/trade	20	17	30	17	18
Drink	-	8	10	-	9
Professional	20	8	-	8	9

Source: As Table 4.2

Table 4.20 - Occupational composition of magistrates, comparison of borough and county benches
(Figures are percentages)

	Borough 1855	County 1854
Landed aristocracy	-	12
Ironmaster	40	27
Banker	-	12
Manufacturing	20	19
Shop/trade	30	19
Drink	10	-
Professional	-	11

Source: As Table 4.2

Despite the exclusions, some democratisation of the magistracy proceeded gradually between 1848 and 1888. Table 4.19 gives an analysis of the occupations of the borough magistrates at the time of incorporation in 1848 compared with corresponding data for later years. The later groups exhibit a marked increase in manufacturers accompanied by movement away from traditionally acceptable occupations such as ironmasters and bankers.

There remained, however, a clear distinction between borough and county magistrates with the latter being more privileged and exclusive. The analysis in Table 4.20, which compares borough and county magistrates in 1854-5, demonstrates the difference. Swift claimed 'that there was sometimes a degree of animosity and jealousy on the part of borough justices who were not promoted to the County Bench'. He cited the case of the wealthy Whig draper Alderman Thomas Andrews who attempted to gain promotion to the county bench because 55 per cent of his fellow borough magistrates were also justices for the county, 'thus placing me in a position of inferiority which I of course have been annoyed at'.⁹⁰ Andrews' plea was rejected. The pinnacle of social standing in the public life of nineteenth century Wolverhampton was the county bench.

⁹⁰ R. E. Swift, *Crime, Law and Order in two English Towns*, 340.

From the incorporation in 1848 onwards, there had developed in Wolverhampton two principal and largely separate hierarchies, that of the town as expressed mainly by membership of the council, and that of the county as represented by the county magistracy. The transition from the urban to the county hierarchy was very difficult to achieve, being limited by questions of social standing and the wish to avoid recognition of those involved in trade. If wealthy businessmen succeeded in becoming magistrates, especially those appointed to act within the county, they were regarded as having gained the major prize and it was reasonable that they should distance themselves from local government with its endless round of meetings and its parochial debates of questionable quality.

For the majority of local elites, those who remained outside the county hierarchy, an advance in social standing and influence could in theory be obtained by membership of the town council. However, because the town council became increasingly discredited, even ridiculed, and as its proceedings were known to be tedious and relatively unproductive, it was natural that many of the town's leading businessmen should have no wish to join the council. There were after all many other networks available for social interaction including for example groups based upon such common interests as charitable work, cultural and recreational activities and religious observance.⁹¹

Those elites who became members of the council were certainly not the recipients of unchallenged authority. The council was very divided, especially between the interests of shop/trade and of manufacturing. In the beginning, immediately after incorporation, the shopocracy were well represented on the council and indeed they retained their numerical strength despite losing the more prestigious positions to manufacturers and also latterly to professionals. The process of urban governance proved to be both broadly-based and susceptible to outside influence. An alliance emerged between the 'economists' of the shopocracy and local ratepayers who expressed their views forcefully in frequent public meetings and this alliance acted as a powerful restraint on schemes for civic improvement, especially those concerned with sanitary reform. It is impossible to determine the authority and intentions of council members without considering case studies of local governance in action. The most informative studies in this respect are those concerned with the controversial issue of public health where the clash between ratepayers and those advocating civic improvement paid for by the rates came to a head. Moreover, as Robert Millward has argued, 'public health was the core activity in the period up to 1900 with its scope closely circumscribed by local wealth and income ... it dominated local government spending'.⁹²

⁹¹ These are the networks described and analysed by R. J. Morris, in *Class, Sect and Party. The Making of the British Middle Class, Leeds 1820-1850* (Manchester, 1990).

⁹² R. Millward, 'Urban Government, Finance and Public Health in Victorian Britain' in R. H. Morris and R. H. Trainor (eds), *Urban Governance: Britain and Beyond since 1750* (Aldershot, 2000) 50.

Chapter 5 - The Public Health

‘... while Birmingham is getting better, the health of the district of Wolverhampton is every year getting worse.’

The Times, Editorial, 16 May 1862

‘Wolverhampton is as clean a town as any manufacturing town in the kingdom.’

The Mayor, Alderman G. L. Underhill, responding, *Wolverhampton Chronicle*, 11 June 1862

In 1902 the former mayor William Highfield Jones was awarded the honorary freedom of the borough. Looking back on his 38 years of municipal service, Jones reviewed the progress made by the town council since incorporation in 1848. He referred briefly to the ways in which the new council established its authority supported by borough magistrates and an effective police force. He then emphasised (to considerable applause) that ‘the more important business of the Council was in connection with the health of the people’.¹

Jones clearly regarded the improvement of public health as of paramount importance to the council and few would have disagreed with this analysis. It is reasonable therefore to assume that the ways in which the council addressed the issues surrounding public health will give an insight into their collective approach. This study may also provide a mechanism for dividing the council into those who were in favour of expenditure to improve public health and indeed regarded it as essential, and those who opposed expenditure on public health principally for reasons of economy. Furthermore bearing in mind that party politics was consciously excluded from council activity, this study attempts to identify any groups who might have acted in concert; these groups should be revealed by considering the discussion and voting patterns on major issues of public health when the tension between reform and economy was at a maximum.

The principal events and main capital projects related to public health in Wolverhampton were as follows: (i) the purchase of the waterworks 1855-1869; (ii) the new sewerage scheme 1866-1870; and (iii) the street improvement scheme for the clearance of the so-called ‘unhealthy area’ in 1877. These three council projects will be discussed under the abbreviated and general headings of water supply, sewerage and the improvement scheme. The connecting theme of all three projects was the sanitary condition of the borough in relation to the effect on the rates and they will be analysed in that context.

In 1874, shortly after a serious outbreak of typhoid came the publication of the Ballard Report on the sanitary condition of the borough and this highly critical document is shown to have been particularly

¹ W. H. Jones, *Story of the Municipal Life of Wolverhampton* (London, 1903), 297.

effective in promoting remedial action by the council. A growing tendency is identified for informed external criticism to catalyse reform of the borough.

5.1 Water supply

Before 1844, water was supplied to the town by a variety of wells but in that year the Wolverhampton Waterworks Company was set up as a private venture² despite opposition from inhabitants of the outlying village of Tettenhall who objected to the establishment of a pumping station in their relatively wealthy residential area.³ The company nevertheless began operating in 1847 and added a second waterworks on Goldthorn Hill to the southwest of the town. The combined output was only 40 per cent of the company target and the supply was augmented by water drawn from local collieries. The quality of the resultant water was strongly criticised in council, most notably when the collieries were shown by a local doctor to have been the source of water for the neighbouring district of Bilston when cholera was rife in 1832 and again in 1849.⁴ In addition to suspect quality, there remained the problem of inadequate capacity. The supply was intermittent, being turned off between 7.00pm and 5.00am daily except at weekends.⁵

Since the early 1840s it had been well known to the Poor Law Commission that the water supply to Wolverhampton was deficient in both quality and quantity. The Shropshire barrister and MP, Robert A. Slaney, visited Wolverhampton in 1843 on behalf of the Commission and wrote a report which was very critical of the sanitary conditions of the town and supported what he described as the 'able report' which Dr Dehane had written in 1840 containing similar criticism. Slaney's report was published in 1845 and stressed the intolerable conditions which prevailed in the poorer areas such as Salop Street where the courts were 'in the most filthy state, full of stagnant puddles of fetid water; neglected privies with open vaults, pigsties and heaps of manure on all sides'. Slaney also emphasised that the capacity of the water supply was completely inadequate.⁶

In contrasting his findings with replies received from the town, Slaney was particularly perceptive. He wrote that 'replies from the principal inhabitants and local authorities to the Commission's questions were frequently too favourable'. He attributed this distortion to either 'a natural desire to represent things in the best light' or to the possibility that 'they had not had their attention called to the existence of evils close to them, which did not immediately affect themselves'. At that time Wolverhampton

² C.J.L. Elwell, 'The Sanitary Movement in the Black Country: Part 1: Wolverhampton & Bilston', *The Blackcountryman*, 31, (1997), 51.

³ G. J. Barnsby, *A History of Housing in Wolverhampton 1750 to 1975* (Wolverhampton, no date), 16.

⁴ W. H. Jones, *Story of the Municipal Life*, 75-6.

⁵ A. S. Wohl, *Endangered Lives: Public Health in Victorian Britain* (London, 1983), 62.

⁶ C.J.L. Elwell, 'The Sanitary Movement in the Black Country', 53.

was still governed by the Commissioners but questions would soon be asked regarding the attitude of the newly-elected council.

After promulgation of the Public Health Act of 1848 which ensued from the Chadwick Report, the General Board of Health was established and it became possible for towns to petition the Board for the establishment of a local Board of Health. Wolverhampton Council duly sent a petition signed by the necessary 10 per cent of rated inhabitants and this resulted in a visit to the town by the engineering inspector of the General Board of Health, Robert Rawlinson.⁷

Rawlinson's report published in 1849, described the town as having a site which was 'highly favourable to health', but warned that 'the town and suburbs ... are very unhealthy and particularly liable to epidemic and endemic diseases at all times; that the cholera prevailed in 1832, and may be again anticipated should the town be left in its present condition'.⁸ There was 'an entire absence of main sewers ... and this renders ineffective such drains and sewers as might otherwise be considered useful'. To this almost total absence of sanitation, Rawlinson related the exceptionally low life expectation in Wolverhampton which averaged nineteenth years and one month.⁹

Rawlinson was well aware of the financial implications of sanitary reform and no doubt anticipated opposition on this score. It was not unusual to encounter spirited resistance from ratepayers and therefore Rawlinson went to some pains to calculate the financial effects of his findings. In a particularly revealing section of his report based on the Census of 1841, Rawlinson estimated the financial losses which were being incurred through widespread illness and premature death. He contrasted the living conditions in Wolverhampton unfavourably with those in rural Penkridge ten miles to the north. The average ages at death were widely different, thus: Wolverhampton 19 years 1 month, Penkridge 37 years 9 months. The death rates were much higher in Wolverhampton with an average of 30.9 per thousand population for the three years 1839-41 compared with 16.7 per thousand for Penkridge. Rawlinson concluded that 'the approximate proportion of life lost by each person in Wolverhampton is one half'.¹⁰

⁷ Chadwick was very committed to the petitioning method as a means of establishing local boards of health. He was also insistent that inspectors should try to obtain local goodwill, to make contact with doctors and clergy and to call public meetings to inform inhabitants of the purpose of the inspection. These matters are discussed by S. E. Finer in *The Life and Times of Sir Edwin Chadwick* (London, 1952), 432-36.

⁸ R. Rawlinson, *Report to the General Board of Health on a Preliminary Inquiry into the Sewerage, Drainage and Supply of Water and the Sanitary Condition of the Inhabitants of the Borough of Wolverhampton and the Townships of Bilston, Willenhall and Wednesfield* (London, 1849).

⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 52.

By calculations based on loss of productive labour as a result of sickness and early death, Rawlinson claimed that the financial loss relative to Penkridge arising as a result of the preventable lack of sanitation was £136,509. This calculation was no doubt designed to appeal to local opinion and to reinforce the demand for sanitary reform. Rawlinson reported that 'the general feeling of the Town Council of Wolverhampton and the ratepayers of the district was strongly in favour of the Public Health Act.' His recommendations involved much cleaning of the town, removal of nuisances and opening out of confined living space. However, his main conclusions were that the town required urgently 'a full and constant supply of pure water laid on in every house and in every room-tenement' and 'a system of sewers laid down in the towns, and of drains properly arranged and taken into every house, back street, court, yard and alley.' He costed the overall improvements required at an annual rate which would not exceed 9d in the pound compared with a poor rate of 2s 6d and would actually save money because 'the health of all classes will be improved and the present rates reduced'.¹¹

Even at this early stage of incorporation, Rawlinson drew an adverse comparison between sanitary provision in Wolverhampton and that in other towns. He pointed out that 'the whole of the streets and roads of Birmingham are Macadamized; they are regularly watered, and are cleansed with Mr Whitworth's sweeping machines'. In showing that a full water supply could be laid on at a price not exceeding 1½d a week rental for each house, Rawlinson quoted a variety of other towns where this had been done at a cost of 1d to 1½d per week.¹² This comparative approach was particularly cogent in that Wolverhampton council was compelled to understand that the town did not exist in a vacuum but could be given a ranking in the national urban hierarchy, and a low ranking at that. This assault on civic consciousness and pride proved to be an effective catalyst for stimulating action in this and other areas of civic improvement.

The first step taken by the council to improve the water supply was to attempt to acquire ownership of the private waterworks company but the company raised their price well above what the council were willing to pay. In May 1854 the council passed a resolution to the effect that 'it was indispensably necessary for the Borough to have the water supply in its own hands'.¹³ The council then petitioned Parliament to obtain a bill to acquire the water company; meanwhile the water company, although intending to contest the issue in Parliament, offered the council a mutually acceptable purchase price. At the council meeting on 21 April 1855 the vote to purchase was carried by 22 against 7. The objectors consisted of two ironmasters, a mill manufacturer, two japanners, an auctioneer and,

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹² The towns quoted by Rawlinson as having a full supply of water at a cost less than 1½d per week were Bury, Carlisle, Nottingham, Preston and what he described as 'a similar district in the Potteries, Stoke-upon-Trent, Hanley, Shelton, Longton and other towns, hamlets and villages'. In some cases the cost was 'only 1d a week'. See Rawlinson *Report*, 49.

¹³ W. H. Jones, *Story of the Municipal Life*, 77.

surprisingly in view of the implications for public health, Dr William Mannix (a senior physician and Director of Medicine). At this stages the battle lines between reform and economy in sanitary matters were not clearly defined and they remained obscure as events unfolded although vested interest in the private waterworks company became apparent. The company then restructured itself and put forward a proposal for erecting new waterworks to the west of the town and close to the existing supply. The chairman of the company was a local banker and the solicitor acting for it was a member of the town council, as also were several of the main shareholders. The company proposed their new scheme to Parliament in opposition to that of the council. After nine days sitting, judgement was given for the new private scheme and against that of the council. The chairman of the Parliamentary Committee ruled that the council scheme was illegal: it required an increased local rate to repay the cost of buying the old waterworks and the council had no legal right to place the burden of cost on the ratepayers without first obtaining their consent. The council contract to buy the old waterworks company was declared invalid.

This setback was a disaster for the council who were left with liability for costs of £6,500 to pay consulting engineers and lawyers. The council were quite unable to pay and therefore the High Sheriff sent in bailiffs who took possession of the town hall furnishings, mayoral regalia and the silver gilt mace of office. Bailiffs also entered the police barracks and seized equipment, uniforms and the town fire engine. In effect the town administration was bankrupt and had become the object of public ignominy and derision.

The ratepayers' opposition to being charged for the new water supply was compounded by the revelation that the council had acted illegally in failing to obtain their consent. These events triggered a great wave of indignation which not only united the ratepayers but also divided the council. A public meeting was called in which several senior members of council who had opposed the original waterworks purchase spoke for the ratepayers against the council. These included the solicitor Henry Underhill who, as one of the eleven councillors holding shares in the private waterworks company, had been debarred from voting at the council meeting of 21 April 1855 which resulted in the decision to proceed towards purchase. Public anger was exacerbated by the obvious absence at the meeting of either the mayor or any other senior council members who had voted in favour of the purchase plan and thus set in train the events which had had such a disastrous financial outcome. Mr T. Bolton, the solicitor who had been such a powerful advocate of incorporation in the latter days of the Commissioners, was prominent in criticising the conduct of the council against whom feeling was very strong.¹⁴

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 82.

An angry and often intemperate debate continued throughout 1855 and the waterworks question received wide coverage in the *Wolverhampton Chronicle*. Not only were the arguments on both sides expressed forcefully, but also the conduct and language of council meetings was criticised: one correspondent suggested that 'the dignity of the council must be at a low ebb'. The editorial column of the paper developed a constructive viewpoint and argued that the questions of water and sewerage had to be resolved. The writer concluded 'with the expression of the hope - May private interests be sacrificed to the more important and lasting interests of this great and advancing community.' Throughout these exchanges, however, the editorial emphasised that the profits generated by the water supply must go to the town.¹⁵

The financial liability arising from the waterworks question and the judgement that it could not be paid from conventional rates made it unusually difficult to find a candidate to be the new mayor in November 1855. Several of those approached declined the offer before the joiner Edward Perry accepted and set about resolving the debt. His first action, which secured the withdrawal of the bailiffs, was to divert £738 18s out of council funds held for magistrates fees to provide a part-payment. This was a controversial move which caused acrimonious debate in council. The arguments demonstrate the way in which a recurrent theme of comparison with Birmingham would become increasingly significant. Councillor Griffiths (an oil merchant) complained that the conduct of the council exposed him to ridicule when visiting the Stock Exchange in Birmingham. He claimed to have been greeted with shouts of 'You belong to that Corporation that's got the "bums" in the Town Hall'.¹⁶

The council proceeded to impose a further £1,000 charge on the district rate after obtaining a judgement that this would be legal and the rate was duly collected. Perry was re-elected as mayor for a second year and set about discharging the remainder of the debt by raising a voluntary rate which he hoped to obtain from leading citizens of the town. In this enterprise Perry was assisted by a remarkable surge of civic pride. A public meeting was held at which it was demonstrated that prominent ironmasters and others were prepared to accept a voluntary rate of 1s in the £ 'to relieve the Borough from its present state of debt and dishonour, to restore peace and harmony, and to maintain the character of the good old town'. The mood of the meeting was described as 'quiet and respectful'. Among the signatories of the resolution to appeal for a voluntary rate were representatives of both sides of the waterworks dispute and of the ratepayers' committee. It is notable that issues of civic pride and responsibility for the common good of the town had succeeded in temporarily unifying the warring factions in the debates for reform versus economy and for public versus private ownership. The mayor went all around the town appealing personally accompanied by the rate collector who gave

¹⁵ WC, 9 May and 23 May 1855.

his services freely. W. H. Jones recorded later that Perry appealed to him as follows. 'As a brother brush do as I do; pay the rate, and help our good old town to get out of debt.' He added that 'everybody is paying willingly, except a few very mean people - and the grumblers.' It is a remarkable tribute to the civic pride of Wolverhampton to note that within a few months £3,700 had been subscribed and all debts were discharged. Pride in 'the good old town' had been a powerful motivating factor and would remain so.¹⁷

Without detracting in any way from the mayor's achievement, it must be remembered that the voluntary rate was a special appeal directed primarily towards relatively wealthy townsmen in order to relieve a unique crisis which threatened the continuation of democratic local government. The important question at the end of 1855 was to what extent the less wealthy and their council representatives would continue to support the rising rate which would be required to finance further sanitary improvement. There were ominous signs of accelerating rate demands.

The *Wolverhampton Chronicle* commented in its editorial column that the two public meetings held in 1855 regarding local taxation on the one hand and the water question on the other were the first meetings of any importance on the rating of the borough to have taken place since incorporation in 1848. The mood of these meetings indicated that 'the ratepayers are at length beginning to direct their attention to municipal affairs'. Moreover the editorial severely criticised the mayor James Shipton who had not only failed to attend either of the public meetings but had stated that members of the town council were 'the only qualified parties' to discuss such issues.¹⁸

Increasing concern about the burden of rising rates was becoming apparent against a background of a widening division between council and ratepayers. The *Wolverhampton Chronicle* suggested that the electorate of ratepayers at large should have a voice in major decisions which affected the rates. It was not only a question of the natural reluctance to pay higher rates but there was also the risk (expressed at a preliminary meeting of ratepayers held earlier in 1855) that the high rates were 'driving out trade' at a time when business conditions were unusually hard. Wolverhampton, it was feared, would become 'a deserted village'.¹⁹

The anxiety of the less wealthy to limit rate increases is understandable, especially in the period after 1862 when the new sewerage scheme had to be financed. As shown in Fig. 5.1 the town rate increased between 1850 and 1862 at an annual average of 3.9 per cent. From 1862 to 1875, however, the corresponding annual average rate increase was 15.9 per cent. This escalation was far greater than

¹⁶ W. H. Jones, *Story of the Municipal Life*, 99.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 105 contains an account of Perry's campaign to discharge the remaining debt.

¹⁸ *WC*, 19 September 1855.

could be accounted for by the very small inflationary decline in the value of money which between 1850 and 1875 was at an annual average of only 0.5 per cent.²⁰ The ratepayers would have perceived a catastrophic increase in the rates which they were charged.

The major component of the rates between 1850 and 1862 was the charge for policing which was usually about 70 per cent of the total. This was relatively uncontroversial. The ratepayers of Wolverhampton had always accepted the need for an efficient and well equipped police force. Between 1850 and 1862 the cost of policing generally kept pace with the total rates. After 1862, however, when the total rate increased sharply, the cost of policing rose only slowly as shown in Fig. 5.1: despite significant increases in the organisation and size of the police force, the cost between 1862 and 1875 increased at an average rate of only 3 per cent per annum. Thus, it was clear to everyone that it was in the general area of the municipal environment that the largest increases in rating were being generated.

The water question, which had aroused such hostility from the ratepayers, was not resolved finally until 1868 when the council voted to purchase the waterworks company by 'a fair majority'. Unfortunately the town council minute book did not record details of the voting so that it is not possible to define the opposing factions with complete certainty. However, from accounts of the lively public meeting which took place a few hours before the council vote, it is clear that the issue was fought over between the sanitary reformers represented by the more prominent (and wealthy) members of council and the economy faction represented by small ratepayers and traders, the petty bourgeoisie of the town.²¹

¹⁹ WC, 5 September 1855.

²⁰ For an estimate of the relative values of money at decadal intervals during the period in question, see Appendix 3.

²¹ W. H. Jones, *Story of the Municipal Life*, 154-5. Alderman Henry Fowler led the campaign to purchase the waterworks. About 40 years later he wrote 'Although the purchase was denounced as an act of supreme folly, ignorance and extravagance, which must result in disaster and disgrace, there was no one now who would not say that the step which was then taken was wise and successful in the interests of the community. In the years 1871 to 1873 there was an aggregate loss of £2,100, but in 1878 the Council was able to make a very large reduction in the water rate ... It gave the people the advantage of an unlimited supply of pure water and the income was now over £32,000 a year.' E. H. Fowler (Hon. Mrs R. Hamilton), *The Life of Henry Hartley Fowler, First Viscount Wolverhampton*, GCSI (London, 1912), 53.

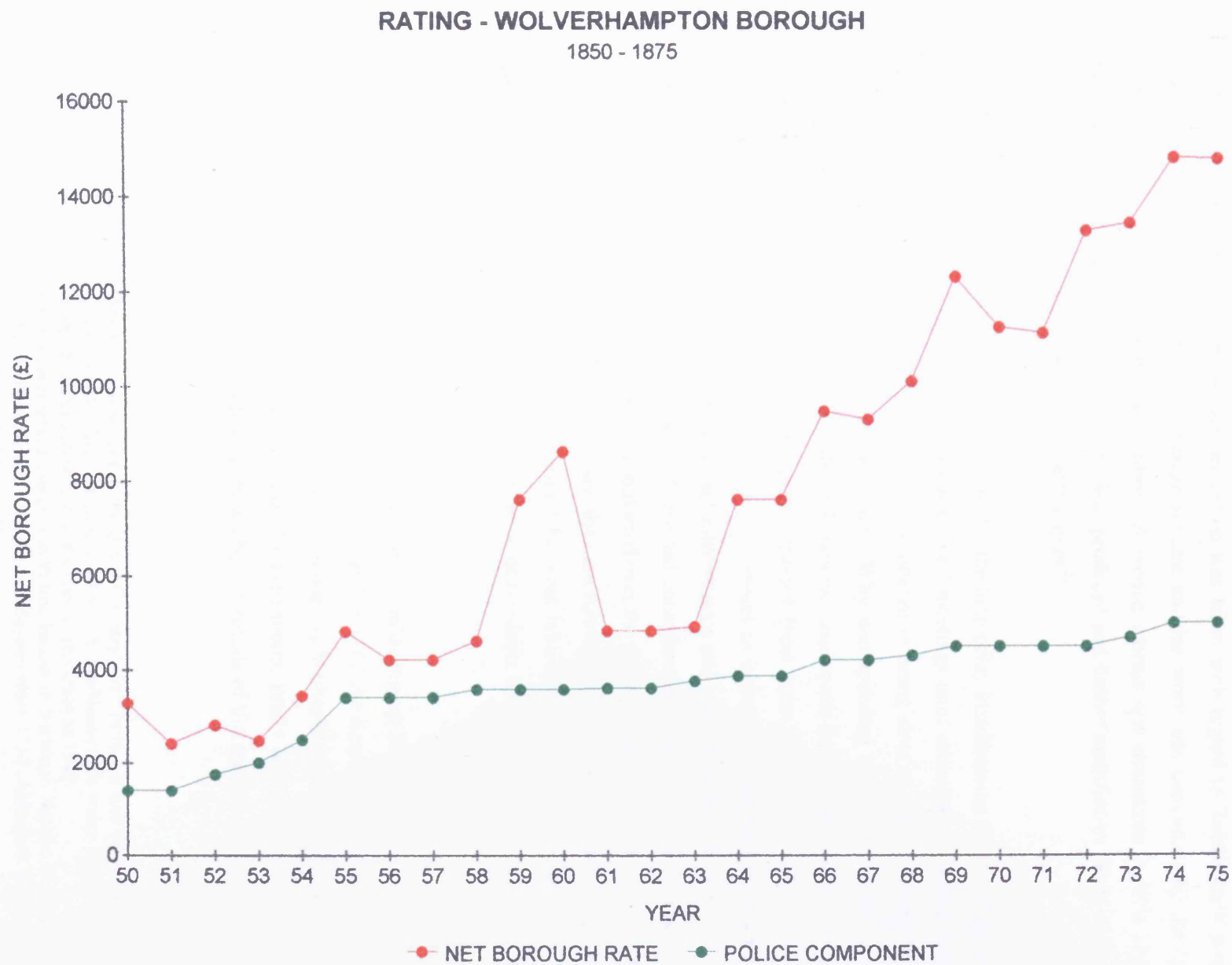


Fig 5.1

SOURCE: Minutes of Borough Finance Committee

Figure 5.1 – Rating - Wolverhampton Borough, 1850-1875
Source: Minutes of Borough Finance Committee

5.2 Sewerage

The two contending groups may be identified quite clearly by studying the sewerage question which arrived at a point of decision in 1862. The Rawlinson report of 1849 had demonstrated that Wolverhampton was lacking in any effective sewerage or drainage and that the congested living conditions of particular areas in the centre and the east exacerbated all forms of sickness and disease. It was, however, 1854 before any further action was taken with regard to Rawlinson's proposals. Rawlinson was asked to design a sewerage scheme and his work was completed by the borough engineer, D. J. Henry. No action was taken. A second scheme was considered in 1858 and again nothing was done. In 1861 a third scheme was produced and further modified in 1863. It was 1866 before a fourth scheme was produced and acted upon.²²

It is difficult to assign with confidence reasons for the long delay in addressing the sewerage question because it was not discussed in any detail at council meetings until immediately before action was pending. However, Wolverhampton was not exceptional in being slow to react. Robert Millward, working on finance and public health, has asked 'Why was spending so delayed in the nineteenth century?', and has identified three possible explanations: inadequate knowledge of sewer technology, governmental difficulties arising when sewers crossed local boundaries, and finally 'the capital-intensive nature of public health expansion (which) meant an increasing need for loan finance'. The financial problems were exacerbated because 'interest rates and repayment periods were ungenerous for the main central government loans'.²³ These last considerations must have weighed heavily with Wolverhampton councillors who had been pilloried over the waterworks episode and shouted down at public meetings with cries of 'We won't pay, they are ruining the town; turn the blooming lot out.'²⁴ Under these circumstances, the council would be most reluctant to enter into major new financial commitments unless it could be demonstrated to be unavoidable by external pressure acting upon civic consciousness.

Wolverhampton Council were undoubtedly dilatory in following up Rawlinson's expert and logical report. However, external pressure was increasing and in 1862 the Registrar-General's report on the sanitary state of England and Wales included a section on Wolverhampton which was particularly severe in its criticism. *The Times*, in its editorial on the report, firstly welcomed the overall national improvement in public health which was shown by the results of the original surveys carried out in

²² C. J. Elwell, 'The Sanitary Movement in the Black Country', 55. In fact it was more than twenty years before the town council could claim to have achieved a combination of water supply and sewerage which would have been broadly acceptable to Rawlinson reporting in 1849.

²³ R. Millward, 'Urban Government, Finance and Public Health in Victorian Britain' in R. J. Morris and R. H. Trainor (eds), *Urban Governance: Britain and Beyond since 1750* (Aldershot, 2000), 64-5.

²⁴ W. H. Jones, *Story of the Municipal Life*, 100.

1860.²⁵ Rural Surrey was identified as the healthiest county in England; Lancashire and the West Riding of Yorkshire were the least healthy. The manufacturing counties as a whole were severely criticised, but particular towns were singled out for praise. Among 'abundant illustrations of the truth of sanitary principles' Liverpool and Manchester were 'beginning to profit by their recent improvements'. Birmingham 'maintained the credit which she easily deserved by attending to drainage and water supply'.

By contrast, South Staffordshire was severely censured by the Registrar for its disregard of 'the health of the people who suffer from all kinds of pestilential diseases, and are in a deplorable sanitary state'. The report revealed that

in the district of Wolverhampton alone, for example, 980 deaths occurred in 91 days; the mortality was high before and, while Birmingham is getting better, the health of the district of Wolverhampton is every year getting worse. Several hundreds of the inhabitants are every year disabled by sickness; funerals are a staple trade; parents lose their children, wives their husbands, and children their fathers, by the poison of the place; workmen and people in trade are cut down at all ages in alarming numbers.

The Registrar refused to admit that the 'severity of the weather' during part of the year was 'an excuse for an excessive rate of mortality'. There had been 'wilful acquiescence in nuisances'. *The Times* commended to the municipal authorities of Wolverhampton the biblical example of Naaman who 'although he was wroth when told to wash and be clean, yet finally obeyed the injunction and was healed'.²⁶

The mayor who responded to the *Times* editorial and to the Registrar-General's report was the iron merchant G. L. Underhill who was also chairman of the sanitary committee. Underhill's response was equivocal; he began by promising that if the claims made were true, he would do everything within his power 'to stem the progress of death'. He read out the section of the *Times* leader in which Wolverhampton was compared unfavourably with other towns. He then continued thus: 'I can say of Wolverhampton that we are not, neither were we in 1860, in a deplorable sanitary state for I will observe that Wolverhampton is as clean a town as any manufacturing town in the kingdom particularly where we take into consideration the nature of the different manufacturers.' Underhill then complained about the figures in the report which he criticised in terms of their presentation, although he had to concede that they were broadly correct. He accepted that the average death rate in 1851 was very high at more than 30 per thousand but claimed that the figure for 1861 had fallen to 21 per thousand.

²⁵ *The Times*, 16 May 1862.

²⁶ 2 Kings 5, and Luke 4, 27.

Underhill concluded by seeking refuge in civic pride and criticised the report for gratuitously damaging the reputation of 'a town of the importance of Wolverhampton'.²⁷ The attitude of the solicitor alderman H. H. Fowler was much more constructive. Fowler was a Liberal and a Wesleyan Methodist; he was a reformer and came to be regarded by many as the leader of the progressive party. Fowler conceded that during the previous 20 years questions of sewerage and public health had often arisen but they had only received attention from the council in times of trouble. When epidemic disease receded, the question of sewerage fell back into disregard. Fowler emphasised that the medical authorities of the borough had lately demonstrated that Wolverhampton had a higher annual incidence of typhoid than London, Manchester, Leeds or Birmingham. Furthermore, the town death rate for the previous seven years was 28 per thousand compared with 22 per thousand for England as a whole. Fowler also stated that in Wolverhampton the average number of deaths caused by preventable diseases was 400 per annum and that an effective sewerage scheme had to be helpful in reducing this figure. It was agreed to form a committee to evaluate possible systems of sewerage.

The matter reached a stage of decision in 1862 when the sewerage committee reported on the schemes adopted by a range of other towns which they had visited. The committee report concluded by proposing a scheme which would cost £35,000. Fowler was particularly eloquent in his support of the new scheme. He could not believe that there was 'in the Corporation a man ignorant enough to oppose a scheme of general sewerage on the ground of its needlessness'. He emphasised that it was 'better (and) cheaper to spend the money in the prevention of disease than in the cure'. He concluded thus: 'The sewerage is a public necessity; it is the disgrace of the Town Council that the necessity has existed so long; it will be their crime if it exists any longer.'²⁸

The council meeting which was called upon to decide upon the sewerage question was very animated. Opposition to the scheme was dominated by Robert Sidney, a retired draper described by W. H. Jones as 'a tall gentlemanly man, gifted with an eloquent tongue and considerable power of declamation'.²⁹ Sidney drew powerful support from small property owners and became *de facto* the ratepayers' champion. He claimed that the sewerage scheme was both expensive and unnecessary and reminded councillors that 'in four years the corporation had expended £99,473, while the union, which included four parishes, had only spent £101,000 inclusive of county and borough rates'. Sidney and his

²⁷ WC, 11 June 1862. The council debate which followed the mayor's response to *The Times* editorial included the claim by Councillor Barker that 'Wolverhampton is one of the healthiest towns in the kingdom and if it is dirty, why, the people must thrive on dirt.'

²⁸ E. H. Fowler, *The Life of Henry Hartley Fowler*, 46-7. The towns visited by the Sewerage Committee are listed in *Minutes of the Borough Council*, Book 3 (1862) 476 as Bilston, Cheltenham, Coventry, Derby, Ely, Gloucester, Leicester, Rugby, Sunderland and Worcester. All of these towns were sewered and claimed to have trapped out offensive smells. From Gloucester came the sensible advice 'Employ an engineer and let him be one acquainted particularly with the working of sewers.'

²⁹ W. H. Jones, *Story of the Municipal Life*, 122-4.

supporters demanded that the sewerage scheme should be decided upon not by the council but by the ratepayers.

Sidney had claimed that the cost of sewerage in Liverpool was about £1 per head of population but Bantock, a member of the sewerage committee, stated that in Wolverhampton 'the probable cost would be 10s per head', half of that figure.³⁰ With 26 miles of undrained streets, action had to be taken.³¹ Alderman Henry Underhill (solicitor and later town clerk) said that the death rate in Wolverhampton which he set at 22 per thousand should be as low as 17 per thousand if sanitary improvements such as the sewerage scheme were introduced. He added that the problem had been under discussion for seven years and a decision to proceed was imperative.³²

The subsequent vote to proceed with the sewerage scheme was carried but only by a narrow majority of 23 against 21. A second vote later in 1862 confirmed the decision to proceed by a wider margin of 25 against 18. These were arguably the first votes on a major issue of public health which tested the strength of the sanitary reformers in the face of organised opposition from the economisers, the 'anti-sewerage party' as it was described at the time. A contemporary writer identified the anti-sewerage party as follows:

Are there not owners of small tenements
Whose only incomes are the hard wrung rents.
There [sic] noisome houses yield; and who would fain
The ills 'neath which their tenants droop retain
Rather than wisely spare the smallest fraction to give their tenants health and satisfaction.³³

Analysis of the voting patterns confirms that the senior members of council consisting of the mayor and nine aldermen were predominantly in favour of the scheme; only two aldermen voted against. The breakdown of voting in Table 5.1 shows that most of the manufacturing and professional councillors voted for the sewerage scheme. Even a majority of shop/trade supported the scheme. There was strong opposition from the drink lobby and from the retired, described as 'gentlemen'. The overall support from shop/trade is remarkable and suggests that even to the petty bourgeoisie it was increasingly apparent that to retain inadequate sewerage was not an acceptable option even though the cost of the new scheme was appreciable.

³⁰ WC, 10 December 1862.

³¹ WC, 12 February 1862. Wolverhampton had 38 miles of streets of which 26 miles had no drainage of any kind: of the remaining 12 miles, 6½ miles had no sewers deep enough to drain cellars. Thus, only 5½ miles out of 38 total were effectively sewered in a town of 60,000 inhabitants.

³² WC, 10 December 1862.

³³ G. J. Barnsby, *A History of Housing in Wolverhampton*, 13.

Table 5.1 – Analysis of Voting on the Sewerage Scheme 1862

	First vote: January 1862		Second vote: December 1862	
	For	Against	For	Against
Manufacturing	7	6	7	4
Shop/Trade	6	6	7	5
Drink		4		3
Professional	9	2	9	2
Administration	1		1	
Gentleman		3	1	4
Aldermen included	8	2	10	2

Source: *Wolverhampton Chronicle*, 15 January and 10 December 1862

This significant shift in opinion was confirmed by the final vote in April 1863 when the council sought formal approval that the scheme should be adopted and submitted to the Home Secretary ‘requesting his sanction to borrow the sum of £37,000, repayable by instalments, extending over a period of 30 years’. The town council approved this resolution by a massive majority of 33 against 3. Councillor Sidney and three others did not vote.³⁴

The highly controversial issue of the sewerage scheme had thrown up a number of significant factors in the decision-making process by which Wolverhampton was governed. There was an increasing awareness among council members of the responsibility placed upon them in relation to the town. When the health of the town was at stake, action was required. This was sharpened by any available comparison with other towns, particularly if the comparison was unfavourable and related to a near neighbour, especially Birmingham. External criticism was resented and was initially opposed vehemently often on illogical grounds. Nevertheless, serious criticism was usually taken into consideration and acted upon in time. Reaction to the *Times* editorial of 16 May 1862 regarding the Registrar-General’s report was typical.

The rapidly rising cost of rates continued to cause concern especially to shopkeepers and other members of the petty bourgeoisie, who were primarily affected. With their opposition expressed powerfully by Councillor Sidney, their concerted view acted as a brake on council expenditure, delaying but not preventing necessary improvement. In some cases the resultant delay enabled attention to be directed towards excessive costs incurred by the council and passed on to ratepayers. The disproportionate results achieved by Sidney through his individual eloquence demonstrated that the council was malleable and could be manipulated by an articulate individual. The prevalence of public meetings of ratepayers to collect views on major issues provided an influential platform for such oratory.

³⁴ *WC*, 15 April 1863.

A cogent example of the rising pressure for economy in municipal expenditure arose in 1863 when Sidney was particularly prominent in council action against the gas company who were accused of making excessive profits. The council had complained about both the poor quality of the gas supplied and the cost which the company charged for lighting the public lamps. It was revealed that the lighting charge exceeded those of 21 other towns including even Leeds, Manchester and Birmingham. Furthermore a survey of 70 towns carried out in 1859 had shown that the price of gas for municipal consumption was set at an average of 75 per cent of the cost to private customers. Wolverhampton council requested a similar concession. Sidney's unique and characteristic contribution to this debate was to demonstrate that the gas company were retaining profits which, according to the relevant Act of Parliament, they should have set aside to reduce the charges to customers. A protracted dispute between the council and the gas company ensued which was eventually settled at the Court of Quarter Sessions. The council lost the action but received sufficient concessions to be able to justify their lengthy and expensive campaign.³⁵

These proceedings, taken together with the sewerage project, contributed further to raising Sidney's reputation as the champion of economy and the ratepayers. Originally elected to the council in 1862, he was a very frequent correspondent to the *Wolverhampton Chronicle* regarding rates and a very wide range of other issues. In 1862 he opposed the removal of 3,000 householders from the electoral register which had been proposed on the grounds that they were tenants whose rates were paid by the landlord. His objections to sewerage expenditure and to gas prices were widely known. He wrote that the ratepayers had 'no control over the supply of those essential necessities to our daily comfort - light and water'. He suspected 'private avarice'. Although Sidney attracted criticism for his 'defamatory and gasconading propensities' and for seeking personal popularity, he was nevertheless a very effective spokesman for the ratepayers. He was the accepted scourge of municipal authorities, 'the admired oracle and critic of the little Swan dinner clique'.³⁶ Throughout the 20 years after the death of Sidney in 1868, the ratepayers never found a comparable advocate; his chosen role was that of the independent individual opposing sectional interest.

The intensity and frequency of the criticism which Sidney and his supporters directed at council members was unrelenting, not only in council but also in public meetings and in the correspondence columns of the *Wolverhampton Chronicle*. The overall reaction of the council to these attacks was not

³⁵ W. H. Jones, *Story of the Municipal Life*, 155-7. For examples of Sidney's eloquence on the gas question, see *WC* 18 March, 24 June, 2 September, 23 September and 14 October 1863. Sidney's brother, Thomas, Lord Mayor of London in 1854, was also a man who attracted controversy. See F. Boase, *Modern English Biography*, III (1965) 569 and *The Times*, 12 March 1889.

³⁶ *WC*, 10 January 1866. The 'Swan dining clique' criticised by Sidney was the shadowy group composed of the town's leading power-brokers. For example, in *WC*, 12 November 1851, Councillor Henry Underhill recorded as having complained that the new mayor had already been voted in unofficially at

dissimilar to their reaction to any external criticism. There was a closing of the ranks and a denial of unwelcome comment. There was a great reluctance to allow any widening of the rights of admission of press and public to council meetings. Only the press were admitted in limited numbers to meetings of the full council. In 1852 there had been an attempt to extend the admission rights of the press to cover committee meetings, except in those cases where confidentiality necessitated a closed session. Alderman Henry Underhill proposed the motion and pointed out that it originated from the rising dissatisfaction of ratepayers; if, via the press, the ratepayers were given greater access to council meetings, Underhill thought that their discontent might be somewhat reduced. The town clerk pointed out that the press were allowed into meetings of Birmingham watch committee. However, the proposal was voted out easily by 22 votes against 11: the mayor and six aldermen voted against the proposal which was supported by only two aldermen. In 1875 it was proposed that a limited number of additional press or ratepayers should be permitted to attend committee meetings provided that they had made previous application in writing. Once again the proposal was easily defeated, this time by 31 votes against 5. The mayor and all the aldermen who voted opposed wider admission. The council was increasingly defensive.³⁷

The sewerage scheme was completed and came into operation in the autumn of 1870 but a wide variety of sanitary problems remained. The ways in which these problems were addressed would test the willingness of the council to take action on public health issues beyond the bare minimum required for water supply and sewerage.

The sanitary committee had always maintained that the town should have a full-time Medical Officer of Health (MOH).³⁸ The 1872 Public Health Act made the appointment of an MOH obligatory for all local sanitary authorities throughout England and Wales. A few local boards of health had already appointed MOHs. However, the examples set by appointments in Leicester (1846) and Liverpool (1847) were not widely followed. Most industrial towns eventually appointed MOHs but later, e.g. Leeds (1866), Manchester (1868), Birmingham (1872) and Bradford (1873). Wolverhampton council appointed Vincent Jackson as MOH in 1878 but the appointment was only for three months, later extended to six months. After this brief period in office, Jackson's appointment was terminated. A succession of part-time appointments followed; it would be 1921 before a full-time MOH was appointed.

the Swan in a typical 'hole and corner meeting'. Robert Sidney never became an alderman. He died at the height of his influence: there are generous tributes in *WC*, 15 July 1868.

³⁷ *WC*, 11 February 1852 and *Minutes of the Borough Council*, 14 June 1875.

³⁸ The Public Health Act of 1848 empowered towns to establish a sanitary authority and to appoint staff including an M.O.H. The inaction of Wolverhampton may be contrasted with events in Bristol where the council made the necessary appointments in 1851 and did much to improve the physical environment. See H. E. Meller, *Leisure and the Changing City, 1870-1914* (London, 1976), 28.

The Local Government Board became increasingly concerned about the sanitary condition of Wolverhampton and wrote to the council warning that 'after a further period an inspector will be sent down to see what improvement has been made'.³⁹ The answer was of course very little above the bare minimum but there was a defensive complacency about the council which could only be counteracted by powerful external pressure.⁴⁰ Admittedly something had been done but the death rate remained unusually high. In 1871 the death rate in Wolverhampton was 23.6 per thousand; Steen and Blacket's guide to the town claimed correctly that the average death rate was 'about 24 per thousand ... rather less than other towns of the same magnitude and manufacturing character'. However, this average figure concealed the disturbing fact that the death rate in the west, 18.9, was in stark contrast to the figure of 41.4 in east Wolverhampton.⁴¹

This period of quiet complacency was brought to a sharp conclusion by the outbreak of typhoid in 1873. The epidemic arose because a milkman diluted the milk with water which had been contaminated by an open sewer: there were 69 cases of typhoid of whom 13 died. The national medical press picked up the story, and both the *Lancet* and *British Medical Journal* commented adversely on the health of the town. The *British Medical Journal* was particularly critical because the local MOH refused to supply them with requested information. The Local Government Board was forced to act and commissioned Dr Edward Ballard to visit the town and report back. Ballard's report, published in May 1874, was as severely critical of Wolverhampton council as Rawlinson's report had been 25 years previously.⁴²

5.3 The Ballard Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Borough

Ballard's report was a comprehensive document which comprised 26 pages plus an Appendix containing much technical detail. His criticism of the town administration and his recommendations for action were reasoned, well-supported and wide-ranging. They may be summarised as follows:

- (i) The town required a full-time and suitably qualified MOH with sufficient staff to carry out effective sanitary inspections.
- (ii) Many houses, particularly in the town centre, were of a kind 'in which no human being should be lodged'.

³⁹ F. Mason, *The Book of Wolverhampton* (Wolverhampton, 1979), 75.

⁴⁰ In 1872 Councillor Frederick Turton resigned his position because the council continued 'to ignore all measures devised for the promotion of the public health, and so stultify the Sanitary Committee by the contemptuous manner in which they treat their proposals.' *WC*, 10 April 1872. Between 1848 and 1888, Turton was the only man to resign from the council on a question of principle.

⁴¹ Steen & Blacket's *Original Illustrated Wolverhampton Guide and Visitor's Handbook* (Wolverhampton, 1871), 15. The 1870 death rate figure of 23.6 per thousand and its components of 18.9 and 41.4 for west and east Wolverhampton respectively were calculated from official returns quoted in Ballard's report, referred to in footnote 42 and reproduced as Table 5.4.

⁴² *Dr Ballard's Report to the Local Government Board on the Sanitary Condition of the Municipal Borough of Wolverhampton*, 1 June 1872.

- (iii) The sewerage system was still unsatisfactory. Ballard expressed his opinion that the council 'improperly and unwisely (although doubtless to save expense) while laying down new and efficient sewers left the old and inefficient sewers still to be used'. He recommended that only the new sewers should be used and that drainage throughout the town should be approved by the MOH.
- (iv) Ballard considered that the water supply as a whole was unsafe and recommended that some contributory supplies should be abandoned. Others required treatments including filtration before they could be certified as satisfactory for use. Ballard also recommended that because their water quality was suspect and subject to frequent pollution, all of the public wells should be closed: 'In place of them, and in addition to the existing gratuitous supplies of water, numerous public fountains or taps should be gratuitously set up in convenient places in all parts of the borough.'
- (v) Ballard drew attention to the almost total absence of water-flushed sanitation. Wolverhampton remained a midden town using privies and ashpits, which were emptied infrequently. The collected soil was stacked on the street to allow liquid to run off before eventual collection. The consequent danger to public health was very serious.

The first reaction to Ballard's report, which the council received at the end of May 1874, was defensive, equivocal and petty in the objections raised. The report was circulated in the town only after an elaborate defence by the mayor had been attached as a preface. The delay of several months between receipt and eventual circulation was explained as a result of the council having been sent an insufficient number of copies. This problem, said the mayor, had delayed the necessary process of consulting ratepayers. There was some further prevarication involving claims of lost post and a reiteration of the time which the council required to compose a 'candid and exhaustive reply'.⁴³

The mayor began the substantive section of his reply to the Local Government Board by alluding to the heavy cost of the improvements recommended by Ballard which 'would fall upon the ratepayers with crushing weight'. The mayor wrote that much sanitary improvement had already taken place in Wolverhampton. The corporation could 'with pride point out the vast improvements which have been made during the term of their administration, extending only over a period of less than 30 years'. The mayor emphasised that the town council was the body best fitted to deal with these problems and had (of course) already anticipated many of Ballard's suggestions before his visit.

Insofar as specific criticisms needed to be answered, the mayor maintained that Ballard's comments were generally exaggerated and sometimes in error. All of the open water supplies were not

necessarily contaminated. With regard to public wells, it was considered impractical to close all of them as Ballard had requested, neither was regular testing of the wells a feasible option. It was appreciated that some wells and other sources would become contaminated from time to time. It was to be hoped that the public would 'not only learn but act upon the fact that there is no more certain means of causing disease than by drinking polluted water'.

The suggestion by Ballard that a free supply of pure water should be provided was summarily rejected by the mayor. He considered that people would continue to use the wells even in areas where there was a gratuitous council supply. In some cases where the wells had become contaminated, Ballard had charged the council with failing in what was their statutory duty to provide an alternative pure supply. It appeared that the council tended to regard its control of water less as a means of providing a clean supply but rather as a mechanism for controlling rates by selling water only to those prepared to pay for it.

The mayor accepted Ballard's criticism of the privy and ashpit sanitation system but claimed predictably that the council had anticipated the comment and had already gone to a new method for removal of night soil. This was the so-called 'pan system' which had originally been approved by Rawlinson in his report of 1849. The pan system was described by the Borough Engineer R. E. W. Berrington writing in 1891 as 'about the dirtiest and most expensive plan that has seen the light during the present century'.⁴⁴ Nevertheless this system seemed to the mayor in 1874 to provide a cheap and workable alternative at a time when the ratepayers were expected to resist the cost of a wider installation of water closets.

Ballard's comments on sanitation and public nuisance also included a warning of the dangers arising from trade effluent and smoke. This issue posed a dilemma for Wolverhampton council because many of its senior members were involved with the offending factories. The mayor stated that the council were already aware of the problem and were attempting to enforce better control over these emissions. However, the council pleaded that they had no legal authority over the ironworks which were the main culprits or over other works which were often situated just outside the borough limits to the east.

In summary, the council reaction expressed by the mayor amounted to an acceptance that most of Ballard's comments were broadly correct (even if allegedly overstated) but that the council (who were the most appropriate body to deal with these problems) had much of the necessary remedial work already in progress. The mayor described Ballard as ill-informed of what the council had achieved

⁴³ *Report of the Town Council of the Borough of Wolverhampton to the Local Government Board on the Report of Dr Ballard, relating to the Sanitary Condition of the Borough, 24 May 1875.*

and continued to achieve. Nevertheless, the report had two major effects. In the first place, like the *Times* editorial of 1862, it constituted a powerful external criticism which eventually stung the council into action. Secondly, the facts which the report contained brought into sharp focus the wide contrast between living standards in the east and west of the town. Before the report, the immense disparity in life expectation, death rate, infant mortality, incidence of disease, etc. was known but was not widely publicised. Unfavourable statistics were either distorted or ignored.⁴⁵

Ballard analysed the relationship between population and housing in the eight wards of Wolverhampton and his results may be summarised as shown in Table 5.2. The poorest housing, as shown by average rateable value, was clearly in the eastern wards (St George's, St James's, St Mary's and St Matthew's). The figures for average persons per house in 1871 were not greatly different between east (5.25) and west (5.09), but the houses in the east were smaller and of much lower quality. The ratio of females to males in population in areas where there was no particular demand for female labour except in domestic service was taken by Ballard as an index of prosperity. The figures in Table 5.3 showed that in the western wards there was an excess of females over males, whereas in the eastern wards females were in the minority. This indication of greater prosperity in the west was heightened because it had occurred despite the appreciable demand for female labour for manufacturing in the east.

When the births and deaths registered between 1870 and 1874 were broken down into districts, the east-west difference became very obvious as shown by the figures in Table 5.4 taken directly from the report. Both general and infant death rates were much higher in the east where the population was 'least wealthy, most ignorant and worst lodged'. Omitting exceptional figures derived from outbreaks of smallpox, which were most prevalent in the densest built part of the town centre, Ballard derived average death rates for the four years 1870-1873 of 30.1 in the east and only 19.1 in the west. The diseases which had caused death were divided into two groups. Group 1 comprised those which spread mainly by personal contact, e.g. small pox, and group 2 consisted of those which were primarily caused by lack of hygiene and pollution both of water and of the atmosphere, e.g. cholera, typhoid. For both groups, the incidence of the diseases was shown to be directly linked to the standard of the housing and to the poverty of the inhabitants. Ballard's results are given in Table 5.5 and

⁴⁴ R.E.W. Berrington, *A short account of the Wolverhampton sewage works with some remarks on the pan system* (Wolverhampton, 18910).

⁴⁵ It is always important to remember that Victorian Wolverhampton was a divided town with massive differences in living conditions between east and west. Failure to make the necessary correction can give a false impression of overall urban health. For example, on Robert Millward's graph, 'Age Specific Mortality in 36 Towns in England and Wales 1870-1906' from 'Urban Government Finance and Public Health in Victorian Britain' (Urban History Group Conference, Leeds University, April 1998), Wolverhampton as a whole exhibited the average mortality in 1870-71 of about 25 deaths per thousand of population. West Wolverhampton was much better than average at 20.35, but the east was far worse with a death rate of 30.

showed that the only exception to this sequence was for Group 2 diseases in St George's which were less serious than expected, a result which was attributed to the many open spaces and lack of congested building in that ward.

Table 5.2 – Population Density and Housing Quality, 1871

	Wards	Total population	No. of inhabited houses	Average persons per house	Total rateable value	Average rateable value of each house
West	St John's	10,114	2,027	4.99	20,092	9.91
West	St Mark's	8,285	1,631	5.08	23,875	14.64
West	St Paul's	8,838	1,728	5.11	17,746	10.27
West	St Peter's	7,499	1,445	5.19	25,467	17.62
East	St George's	7,998	1,391	5.75	14,581	10.48
East	St James'	7,528	1,478	5.19	12,355	8.36
East	St Mary's	9,021	1,761	5.12	14,830	8.42
East	St Matthew's	9,008	1,761	5.12	11,272	6.40
	WEST	34,736	6,831	5.09	87,181	12.76
	EAST	33,555	6,391	5.25	53,039	8.30

Source: *Ballard Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Borough, 1874*

Table 5.3 - Proportion of Female Residents, 1871

	Wards	% of females in population
West	St John's	50.8
West	St Mark's	54.0
West	St Paul's	51.0
West	St Peter's	50.8
East	St George's	48.8
East	St James's	48.6
East	St Mary's	47.6
East	St Matthew's	48.6
	WEST	51.6
	EAST	48.4

Source: As Table 5.2

Table 5.4 – Death Rates for the Districts of Wolverhampton, 1870-73

		Deaths per thousand living at mid-year	Deaths under 1 year age as % of births
West Wolverhampton	1870	18.9	15.2
	1871	21.8	17.9
	1872	20.2	14.9
	1873	19.8	16.1
East Wolverhampton	1870	27.3	17.7
	1871	32.6	18.5
	1872	30.8	19.7
	1873	29.5	18.6
Total Wolverhampton	1870	23.6	16.4
	1871	27.8	18.2
	1872	26.0	17.3
	1873	25.0	17.4

Source: As Table 5.2

Table 5.5 – Death Rates for Disease Groups and Districts 1871

	Wards	Population 1871	Deaths per thousand living at mid-year		
			Group 1 diseases	Group 2 diseases	All specified diseases
West	St John's	10,114	10.7	6.8	13.5
West	St Mark's	8,285	9.3	4.1	13.4
West	St Paul's	8,838	15.2	7.8	22.9
West	St Peter's	7,499	12.9	8.4	21.3
East	St George's	7,998	11.4	9.0	20.4
East	St James'	7,528	17.1	9.4	26.6
East	St Mary's	9,021	14.5	8.3	22.8
East	St Matthew's	9,008	16.1	12.7	17.9
	WEST	34,738	12.0	6.8	17.9
	EAST	33,555	14.8	9.9	24.7

Source: As Table 5.2

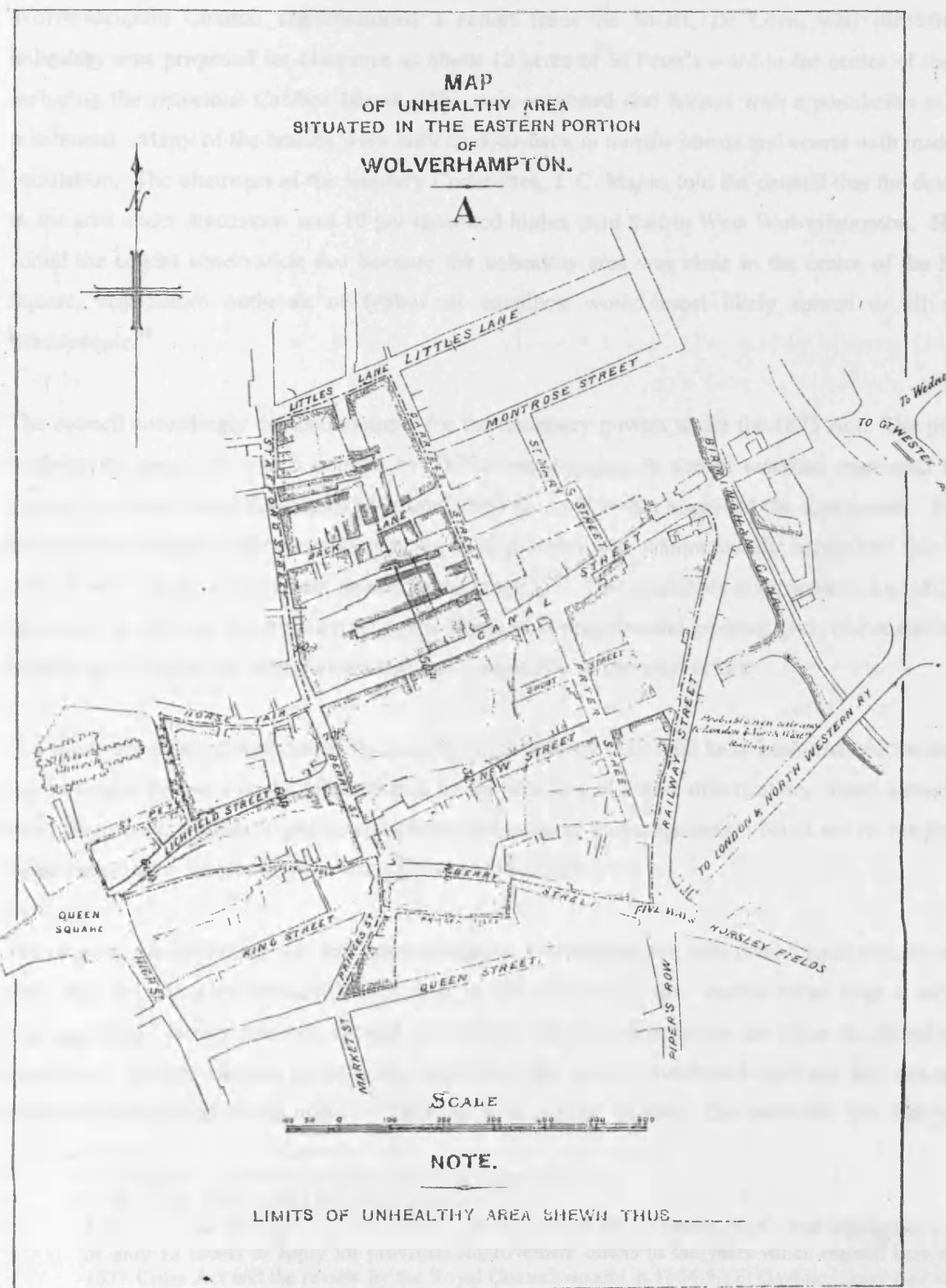
5.4 The Improvement Scheme

In his conclusion Ballard had recommended that Torrens's Artisans' and Labourers' Dwellings Act of 1868 should be used to deal with those houses which were hopelessly unfit for habitation. By 1875 this legislation had evolved into the Cross Act which conferred on local authorities the power to buy large areas of 'unfit' property for slum clearance. Obviously such 'wholesale demolition would increase homelessness' and the Act 'paid lip-service to the notion of rehousing as a public responsibility'.⁴⁶ The intention was that local authorities should propose schemes for slum clearance, should demolish the condemned housing, rebuild properly sewered streets and then seek private developers who would build new housing under conditions imposed by the local authority. The project was influenced by the Birmingham clearance scheme initiated by Joseph Chamberlain but even

⁴⁶ E. Gaudie, *Cruel Habitations: A History of Working Class Housing, 1780-1918* (London, 1974), 276.

Map 7 – 'The Unhealthy Area situated in the Eastern Portion of Wolverhampton'

Source: *Minutes of the Borough Council*, Book 7 (1877), 324-6.



in that case private buyers proved reluctant to purchase the cleared land for building development. There was therefore a large measure of failure to achieve Chamberlain's intention 'to reconstruct and rehouse the poor'.⁴⁷

Wolverhampton Council commissioned a report from the MOH, Dr Love, who identified the unhealthy area proposed for clearance as about 12 acres of St Peter's ward in the centre of the town including the notorious Caribee Island. The area contained 666 houses with a population of 3,385 inhabitants. Many of the houses were built back-to-back in narrow streets and courts with inadequate ventilation. The chairman of the Sanitary Committee, J. C. Major, told the council that the death rate in the area under discussion was 10 per thousand higher than that in West Wolverhampton. He then added the cogent observation that because the unhealthy area was close to the centre of the Market Square, any future outbreak of typhus or smallpox would most likely spread to all of the townspeople.⁴⁸

The council accordingly decided to apply for the necessary powers under the 1875 Act. The progress made in the extent to which council by 1875 were disposed to accept essential municipal reform without excessive opposition may be judged from the vote which approved the application. With an exceptionally high attendance of 46, the voting to proceed was unanimous (the mayor and four others did not vote, having declared an interest in the project).⁴⁹ This unanimity is remarkable and illustrates the extent to which a combination of powerful external pressure and growing civic responsibility was beginning to reduce the strength of ratepayers' opposition to essential reform.

The relatively calm acceptance of the improvement scheme may well have been assisted for some of the owners of property in the affected area by the prospect of high compensation. Some were treated very generously, leading to public complaint, but in many cases agreement could not be reached and these were finally resolved by the County Court at Stafford.

The original parliamentary Act had been granted to Wolverhampton only after a local enquiry lasting eight days followed by protracted discussion in the House of Lords. At this latter stage a condition was specified, namely that the council should provide accommodation for those displaced by the clearance. In their attempt to fulfil this condition, the council purchased land and laid out several streets at Springfield to the north of the town at a cost of £8,500. The intention was that private

⁴⁷ G. J. Barnsby, *A History of Housing in Wolverhampton*, 19.

⁴⁸ W. H. Jones, *Story of the Municipal Life*, 210-11.

⁴⁹ *Minutes of the Borough Council*, Book 7 (1877) 326 and *WC*, 7 March 1877. Wolverhampton was one of only 12 towns to apply for provision improvement orders in the years which elapsed between the 1875 Cross Act and the review by the Royal Commissioners in 1884-5. E. Gaudie, *Cruel Habitations*,

developers would buy land and build a total of 290 houses to accommodate 1,400 people. It was planned that rebuilding on the cleared central area would provide a further 110 houses so that altogether about 1,900 of the displaced 3,385 might be accommodated in the very unlikely event that they could afford the move.⁵⁰ The final result of the improvement scheme was that only 75 houses were built at Springfield. It proved extremely difficult to find buyers for the land which the council had purchased. It took 23 years to complete the land sale. The original estimated cost of the scheme was £162,000 but the actual cost was £228,237 - equivalent to an additional 5½d per £ on the rates.⁵¹

The three case studies on public health demonstrated that during the 1850s and early 1860s the council appeared to be indecisive and that this difficulty arose because of the conflict between those who advocated civic improvement and the 'economists', principally drawn from the shopocracy, who drew vociferous support from the frequent public meetings to which the council had recourse. From incorporation in 1848 onwards it was well known that the sanitary condition of the borough was very unsatisfactory, particularly in the eastern districts, and yet reluctance to accept increased rating ensured that little or nothing was done.

The circumstances under which this equilibrium of inertia was disturbed in the 1860s and overdue action was taken illustrate the growing importance of external influence upon governance. At that time of increasing civic confidence and pride, external criticism of the sanitary condition of the borough coupled to adverse comparison with neighbouring towns (especially Birmingham) was particularly effective and eventually broke the deadlock so that action began to be taken. Even so, it would be more than twenty years before the water supply and sewerage of Wolverhampton had been improved to a level which could have satisfied the criticisms of Robert Rawlinson reporting in 1849. Many of Rawlinson's original criticisms were still present in the Ballard report of 1874, particularly those relating to the central 'unhealthy area' which was not cleared until 1877.

278-9 recorded that 'Wolverhampton needed a loan of £207,330 to purchase slum property and drive new streets through it.'

⁵⁰ A. S. Wohl, *Endangered Lives*, 317 listed the 12 towns which applied for empowerment under the terms of the Cross Act and concluded that 'in only four of them was there any concerted effort to rehouse those evicted'. These four were Devonport, Liverpool Nottingham and Swansea.

Referring to slum clearance schemes in general, Wohl commented that 'at the root of the problem was the realization that if no buyers emerged for the cleared land the towns suffer considerably - thus slum clearance remained, in the words of one historian "economically unorthodox, politically embarrassing and of little direct electoral appeal".'

⁵¹ W. H. Jones, *Story of the Municipal Life*, 213.

Although Ballard's report received a very defensive response from the council, it nevertheless produced results. By the 1870s Wolverhampton had acquired a new sense of civic identity and pride which had to be defended so that there was much less resistance to necessary improvements. A landmark event in raising civic consciousness was the royal visit by Queen Victoria in 1866. This visit elevated Wolverhampton's self-image to a point at which the council were much more self-confident but also more vulnerable to external criticism. Therefore they strove to make the town cleaner and more respectable to justify the honour and re-validation conferred upon them by the royal visit. The influence of this new civic identity on governance cannot be over-stated.

Chapter 6 – The Creation and Evolution of Civic Identity

‘The position to which Wolverhampton has now risen must be a source of the highest gratification.’¹
The Mayor, James Walker (1871)

In 1792 Lord Torrington described Wolverhampton as ‘large, black, swelling with commerce’.² It was the blackness of the district, the result of intensive manufacturing based upon coal and iron, which later visitors singled out as the distinguishing feature of the area and from about 1850 onwards the colloquial name of the ‘Black Country’ came into common usage.³ Although the boundaries of the Black Country were never defined clearly, Wolverhampton at that time was considered by outside opinion to be within it and the external image of the town was essentially that of the manufacturing district to the east of the centre extending outwards through Bilston and Willenhall.⁴

External views of the Black Country and therefore, by implication, of Wolverhampton were generally negative and conformed to the stereotype of the ‘Industrial North’, an area characterised by ‘a harsh landscape ... an often smoke-obscured land of mines or manufacturing’.⁵ Charles Dickens passed through the Black Country from Birmingham to Wolverhampton and wrote of ‘this mournful place ... tall chimneys crowding on each other ... poured out their plague of smoke, obscured the light and made foul the melancholy air.’⁶ Disraeli set *Sybil*, subtitled *The Two Nations*, in the Black Country

¹ The mayor was speaking at the opening of the new Town Hall. See ‘Report of the Joint General Purposes and Public Works Committees’, 17 December 1871.

² Quoted in N. Pevsner, *The Buildings of England. Staffordshire* (Harmondsworth, 1975), 313.

³ Among the first writers to use the expression ‘Black Country’ were Walter White in *All round the Wrekin* (London, 1860) and Elihu Burritt in *Walks in the Black Country and its Green Border-land* (London, 1868).

⁴ The boundaries of the Black Country have always been debatable, particularly in relation to Wolverhampton. Burritt considered the Black Country to cover a 20-mile radius from Birmingham Town Hall which would include not only Wolverhampton but also Coventry and even Kenilworth and Warwick, which is obviously unrealistic. Most authorities have agreed that the Black Country is directly related to the presence of coal and iron: it can be defined as ‘a rectangular area bounded on the north by Wolverhampton and Walsall and on the south by Stourbridge and Smethwick’. This clear and concise definition from G. J. Barnsby, *The Working Class Movement in the Black Country 1750-1867* (Wolverhampton, 1977), 1, describes exactly the area shown as Map 1 in Chapter 2. As far as Wolverhampton is concerned the most informative statement is the official view that ‘Wolverhampton is not in the Black Country, but of it’. See *Industrial and Residential Handbook of the County Borough of Wolverhampton* published by Wolverhampton Industrial Development Association in 1938/9. For discussion on this endlessly controversial question, I am indebted to Stan Hill, Editor of *The Blackcountryman*.

⁵ D.C.D. Pocock, ‘The novelist’s image of the north’, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 4 (1979), 62-76. For a more specific view of the novelist, and the region, see L. J. Jay, ‘The Black Country of Francis Brett Young’, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* (1975), 58-72.

⁶ C. Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, ch. xlv, ‘Flight from the Blackened Town’ (London, 1868), II, 73.

near Wolverhampton using Willenhall as the fictional 'Wodgate' and described a brutalised society in which labourers struggled to survive in a hostile and ravaged environment.⁷

The newly-incorporated town of Wolverhampton had to establish its own civic identity which inevitably differed from the ultra-critical and superficial external image founded upon the debatable location of the whole town within the Black Country. Furthermore, the new civic identity would become a significant factor in governance because it would define what kind of town the council was attempting to create. Within this context it is important to examine the civic and social attitudes of the council members.

In this chapter, therefore, the conduct of council proceedings and the ways in which the council reacted to other towns are considered. The attitudes of the council to the over-arching authority of the county and of central government are evaluated. The external view of Wolverhampton is studied and shown to have undergone some modification between 1848 and 1888. However, Wolverhampton's self-image expressed in the civic identity is shown to have been changed very significantly, especially by events surrounding the royal visit of Queen Victoria in 1866. This visit conferred upon the town an enhanced civic consciousness which expressed itself in a heightened enthusiasm for municipal construction projects and a greater sensitivity to external criticism on such subjects as public health. Accompanying this new civic consciousness and pride came a quest for urban respectability illustrated by attempts to tighten control over social order and public space.

6.1 The Creation of Civic Identity 1848-1866

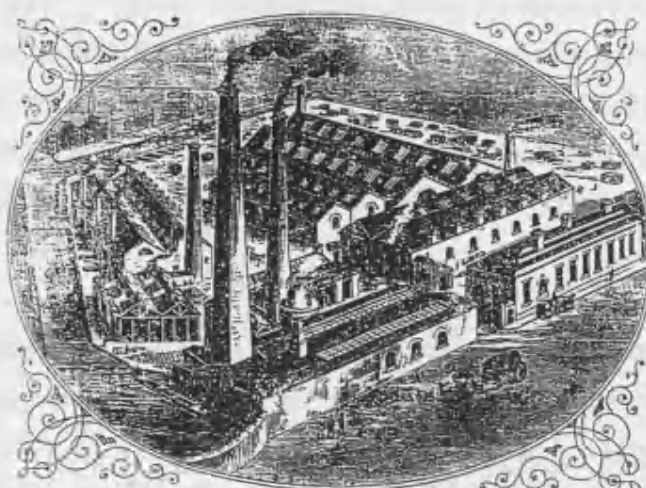
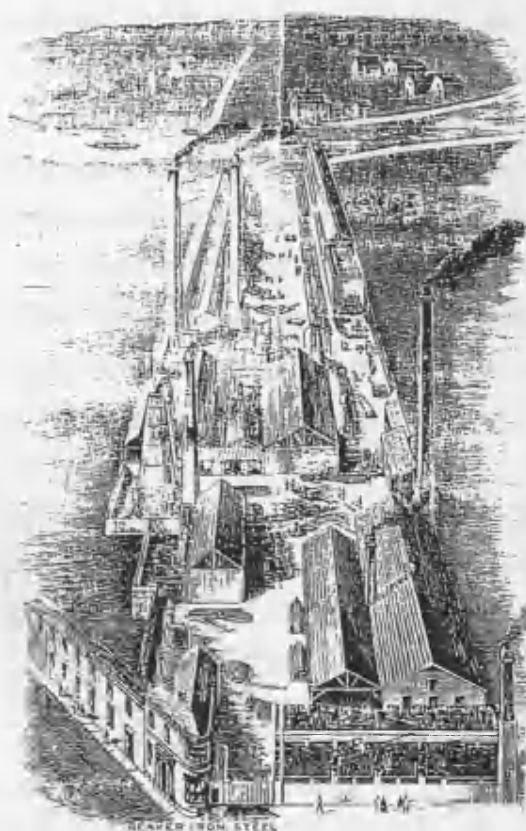
The elites of Wolverhampton at incorporation in 1848, of whom the wealthiest and ultimately the most influential were manufacturers, were mostly men who shared a number of common characteristics. Contemporary descriptions of their character stressed such virtues as being honest, moral, persevering, straightforward, self-made, successful in business, energetic and charitable. They were sometimes described in terms which suggested a measure of anti-intellectualism, for example 'not possessed of great talents', but this omission was amply compensated by the advantages of hard work and local origin.⁸ What mattered primarily in 1848 was profit. Concern for the welfare of employees would develop later in Wolverhampton towards the end of the third quarter of the nineteenth century and would appear principally among the Liberal and nonconformist manufacturers who operated the more highly-skilled processes such as galvanising, japanning and varnish-making.

⁷ See S. M. Smith, "'Willenhall and Wodgate': Disraeli's use of Blue Book Evidence', *The Review of English Studies*, XIII (1962), 368-384.

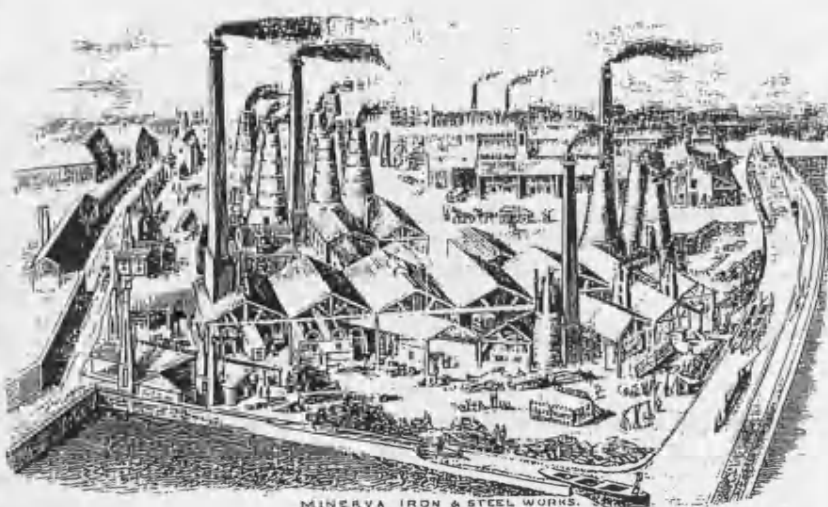
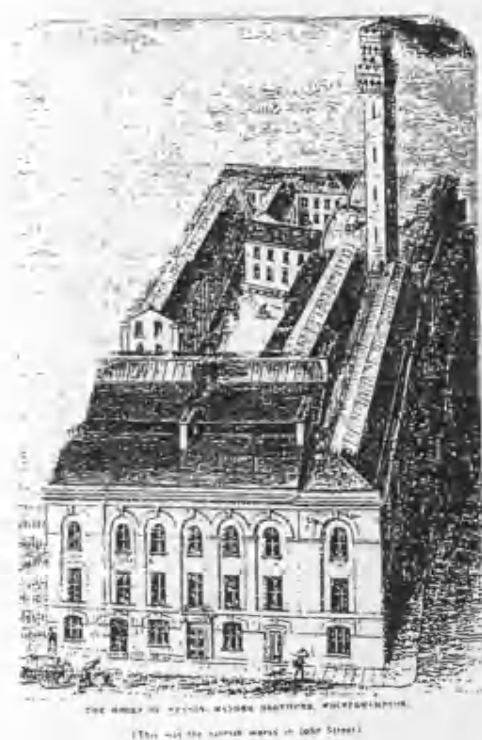
⁸ See J. Jones, *The Mayors of Wolverhampton*, Volume I 1848-80 and Volume II 1881-1909 for many examples of these descriptions. The attitudes in question are detailed and discussed very helpfully in W. E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870* (New Haven and London, 1957).

Figure 6.1: Wolverhampton factories

Source: Directories as listed in Bibliography



VICTORIA WORKS, MONMORE GREEN, WOLVERHAMPTON.



MINERVA IRON & STEEL WORKS.

Immediately after incorporation in 1848, the newly-elected council were unlikely to have felt anything but confidence about the perceived identity of Wolverhampton. The industries and trades of the town were highly profitable and constituted a fine example of the benefits of the Victorian work ethic. The principal factories were very large, often self-contained within high walls which would widen the separation of the owner from the people and would be conducive to respect for displayed power and authority.⁹ Examples of such factories are shown in Figure 6.1: they were 'enclosed and semi-private space, like many referred to simply as the "Works"'.¹⁰ In these circumstances, the environment was of little concern; profits were demonstrated by the density of smoke. The people of Wolverhampton had every right to be justifiably proud of the size and power of local industry. The American Consul in Birmingham, Elihu Burritt, wrote in 1868 following a visit to Wolverhampton: 'The Black Country, black by day and red by night, cannot be matched for vast and varied production, by any other space of equal radius on the surface of the globe.'¹¹

Although novelists such as Dickens and Disraeli emphasised the worst features of the Black Country, such leading artists as J.M.W. Turner were fascinated by the panorama of flames which lit up the sky at night to dramatic effect, as shown in the painting of Dudley Castle (Figure 6.2).¹² In 1863, the *Edinburgh Review* concluded that 'To the painter's eye, the Black Country has beauties of its own.'¹³ Thus, adverse opinion in novels was countered by artistic appreciation of the unusual landscape, particularly at night.

Furthermore the people of Wolverhampton were able to detach themselves in many cases from the taint of living in the Black Country. Burritt took the view that 'Wolverhampton is the border-town of the district. On its western outskirts the scene changes with surprising and sudden contrast.'¹⁴ Although many of the inhabitants of south and west Wolverhampton made their livings in the east, they resided in much more pleasant surroundings.

⁹ The major factory owners became the principal objects of local deference almost by default because there was no competition from the aristocracy. The Dukes of Cleveland and of Sutherland were the main landowners, but lived at considerable distances from the town. The Earl of Dartmouth and Lord Wrottesley both lived within 10 miles of the town centre, but neither of them was prominent in urban affairs. The principal urban interests of the Earl of Dartmouth were in West Bromwich. Lord Wrottesley was described as 'by no means a public man' and was 'scarcely ever seen at meetings of any kind in Wolverhampton', *WC*, 30 October 1867.

¹⁰ R. J. Morris, 'The Industrial Town' in P. Waller (ed.), *The English Urban Landscape* (Oxford, 2000) 191.

¹¹ E. Burritt, *Walks in the Black Country*, 1.

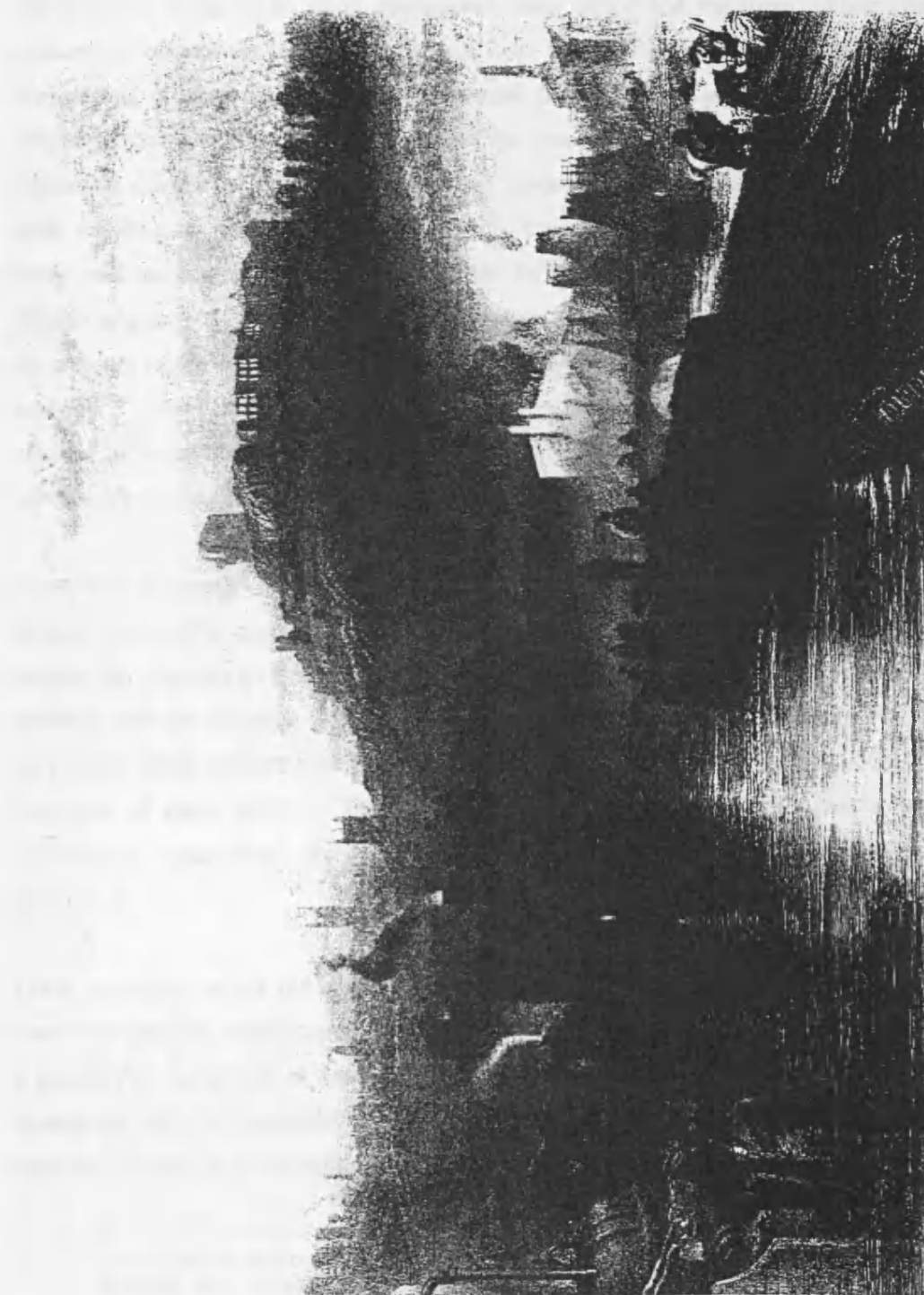
¹² The aesthetic attraction of this unusual landscape is emphasised by the irony that the painting was originally owned by the great critic of industrialisation, John Ruskin. See L. Herrmann, *Turner Prints: the Engraved Works of J.M.W. Turner* (Oxford, 1990) 132.

¹³ *The Edinburgh Review*, April 1863, 408.

¹⁴ E. Burritt, *Walks in the Black Country*, 182.

Figure 6.2 - 'Dudley, Worcestershire' by J.M.W. Turner, ca.1832

Source: L. Herrmann, *Turner Prints: the Engraved Works of J.M.W. Turner* (Oxford, 1990), 132.



Thus, at the mid-point of the nineteenth century, the urban identity of Wolverhampton was that of a self-contained town which concerned itself primarily and proudly with trade and in which the growing environmental contrast between eastern and western districts was apparently of little concern.

From incorporation onwards the new council set out to proceed in a dignified manner which was calculated to bring credit upon themselves, their office and the town. Their conduct displayed a mixture of respect for the ritual formality of the new corporation and a related commitment to maintaining an appropriate level of decorum in the council chamber. Any remarks which were considered to have lowered the standard of the proceedings drew immediate rebuke, and this occurred frequently during the early years. Various pejorative terms were ruled unacceptable and offenders were required to withdraw and apologise.¹⁵ One councillor was accused of using 'vulgar Bilston slang' and his accusers were in turn chided by another councillor who claimed to be proud of his Bilston origins.¹⁶ After one such scene, a correspondent to the *Wolverhampton Chronicle* described the conduct of the council as 'disgraceful' and suggested that 'the dignity of the Council must be at a low ebb'.¹⁷ There was clearly a tension operating between robust discussion on the one hand and a demand for dignity on the other. From the mid-1860s onwards there was less published evidence of intemperate exchanges, although they continued to occur.¹⁸

Disruption of council proceedings was exacerbated by the apparent consensus among members that decisions should be accepted without undue or heated debate. There had always been an intention to control the intensity of debate to what would be seen as a dignified level, and to reach decisions if possible without recourse to public meetings of ratepayers. This tendency was part of the wider movement which caused party politics to be eschewed in local government in order to avoid 'the bitterness of party strife'. When issues raised in council were thought to have party political significance, councillors objected and forced withdrawal of any resolutions which 'bore upon politics'.¹⁹

These constraints which the council imposed upon their official and public behaviour were much more restrictive than the conventions which applied to private behaviour. The conduct and views expressed at private functions such as inaugural or farewell dinners for the mayor presented a more informal and transparent view of councillors' loyalties and opinions. The speeches made at such functions were invariably loaded with sycophantic praise for the monarchy and for the aristocracy/gentry (especially

¹⁵ Unacceptable insults included 'lousy scoundrel', 'toady', and 'son of a white-livered bitch'. See, for example, *WC*, 5 November 1851, 17 November 1853, 10 October 1855 and 24 January 1856.

¹⁶ *WC*, 24 January 1866.

¹⁷ *WC*, 24 October 1855.

¹⁸ See, for example, *WC*, 16 January 1878.

¹⁹ W. H. Jones, *Story of the Municipal life of Wolverhampton*, 33.

if any of these latter were attending), and also with much mutual aggrandisement among the council members themselves.

Over and above the inevitable platitudes, a group of more specific attitudes may be identified. The desire to discount any possibility of revolutionary change and indeed the reassurance that this was certainly not a danger in Wolverhampton was a major feature of speeches made at this time. For example, the Tory solicitor George Robinson (mayor 1849), speaking at the inaugural dinner given in 1848 for his predecessor as mayor, G. B. Thorneycroft, reminded the council that

the largest and fairest portion of Europe was in a state of convulsion, and their first act, although returned by almost universal suffrage, was to assure the government of their attachment to the institutions of the country, and to call upon the executive to bring every agitator to condign punishment - and he doubted whether any portion of the community more approved of that step than the honest artisans of Wolverhampton.²⁰

Robinson went on to refer to the situation whereby civic policy was being constructed without what was seen as the damaging intrusion of party politics. He stated that 'Nor had the council been unmindful of public improvement, there had been a total absence of all party feeling amongst them; they had taken steps to economise the administration of local justice and at the earliest moment they had applied for the power to commence sanitary reformation – to give decency and cleanliness to the habitations of the poor as well as to the rich; and, so proceeding, he trusted they should greatly improve the town.' Leaving aside any justified criticism of the 20 or so years which elapsed before powers of sanitary reform were actually applied, the salient point in Robinson's statement is the disavowal of formal party politics in the cause of the greater good – the commonweal of Wolverhampton. This theme was referred to frequently throughout the early years of incorporated local government.

David Cannadine has pointed out the paradox that although the newly-elected councils represented a new political structure 'whose values were in many senses hostile to those of an aristocratic polity', aristocracy and gentry frequently maintained close ties, with urban affairs through such connections as land ownership in towns and participation in magistracy.²¹ Wolverhampton was such a society and exhibited close and constructive relationships between councillors and members of the local aristocracy or gentry. In 1848 this was a relationship of convenience in that both the landowners and the council had interests in the stability of the district: at the inaugural dinner for the new mayor G. B. Thorneycroft, George Monckton of nearby Somerford Hall, proposed a toast to 'The town and trade of Wolverhampton'. He described the town as 'the capital of South Staffordshire – the busiest district of busy England'. He then identified his interest as a major landowner with those of the local

²⁰ WC, 9 August 1848.

²¹ D. Cannadine, *Lords and Landlords: the Aristocracy and the Towns 1774-1967* (Leicester, 1980) 27.

manufacturers: 'There was not a whisper that came across the Atlantic to the detriment of the interest of the manufacturer which was not felt by the landlords ... Gentlemen, we are all brothers.' Monckton added, speaking directly to the mayor, 'It always gives me delight, Mr Chairman, when I see those bright fires of yours – and I hope the time will never come when I shall got to bed without being lighted by them.' The Liberal manufacturer Joseph Walker (mayor 1850) responded to these remarks by agreeing that 'agriculture and commerce were indeed brothers'.²²

Quite apart from such examples of apparently close personal relationship between some councillors and local gentry, there was also a bond arising from natural deference. There existed, as T.H.S. Escott wrote in 1897, 'the civic association of the titular aristocracy with the new democracy of England'.²³ Cannadine argued that this inter-class relationship was the formal expression of a traditional and persistent deference: 'a bourgeois nonconformist businessman might feel bound to his fellow entrepreneurs by civic pride and religious loyalty one day and then defer to aristocratic leadership in matters of party politics the next. Yesterday's radical businessman became today's deferential voter.'²⁴ Although incorporated urban society was growing in confidence, it was at the same time 'diffident and divided in its attitude towards the patricians'. Wolverhampton was such a society, although arguably it was less divided in its attitude 'towards the patricians' than Cannadine might have argued, and retained traditional deference to aristocracy across all social classes.

Thus, in the early years following incorporation, Wolverhampton council developed an identity which was open, non-political and eclectic in its reception of views from a wide range of sources including those of the local gentry. There was a growing sense of responsibility for the welfare of the town but the choices for action would depend upon a fine balance between the impulse towards reform on the one hand and economy on the other. However, the new councillors, many of who had little formal education, were entering as relative novices upon the daunting task of municipal administration.

²² I am indebted to Alan Monckton D.L. of Stretton Hall, Staffordshire for discussion regarding his ancestor. George Monckton was unusual among local gentry in being directly active in land management. He wrote a treatise on drainage and promoted an Act of Parliament on this subject. It is therefore not surprising that he had a closer affinity with the manufacturers of Wolverhampton than might otherwise have been expected. For details of the Monckton estates see *Victoria County History of Staffordshire*, 4, 164-66.

²³ T.H.S. Escott, 'Social transformation of the Victorian age' (1897) quoted by D. Cannadine in *Lords and Landlords*, 32. Furthermore, Geoffrey Best has argued that even working-class culture was 'peer-respecting'. See G. Best, 'The Making of the English Working Class', *Historical Journal*, vii (1965), 278.

²⁴ D. Cannadine, *Lords and Landlords*, 39. The complex and pluralistic relationships between the elites of Black Country towns and the remainder of local and regional society from aristocracy to working class were discussed by R. H. Trainor in *Black Country Elites: The Exercise of Authority in an Industrialised Area* (Oxford, 1933), 354-84. Trainor described a society in which some wealthy manufacturers became widely popular and commented that inter-class boundaries were 'highly permeable'. Black

Looking back in 1902, W. H. Jones (mayor 1873-4 and a council member for 40 years) reflected that from incorporation onwards the council 'had ever been a school in which men have been trained in the principles of self-government and the higher duties of public life'.²⁵ It was implicitly acknowledged that councillors required training and a period of gaining experience before they could be expected to participate effectively in the work of the council. It is therefore hardly surprising that in the early years, the newly-formed council was uncertain and sometimes defensive in its external relationships. The councillors' own internal image of Wolverhampton was usually that of 'the good old town' always spoken of with affection and also pride justified by the obvious success of local manufacturing.²⁶ Nevertheless, between 1848 and 1860, there was little evidence that councillors regarded Wolverhampton as part of a national urban system and therefore subject to external criticism and even to judgement by central government. Instead, they saw Wolverhampton in relative isolation and their reaction to external comment tended to be one of indifference or hostility.

In 1848 the MP C. P. Villiers had predicted that incorporation 'will tend to elevate the character of this town'.²⁷ Arguably this had happened by 1860 in that a functional system of elected government had been established. However, Villiers' further expectation that Wolverhampton would be 'taking rank with the other great corporate towns of this country' had not been realised by the early 1860s. The town was almost inevitably over-shadowed by Birmingham to which great city 'little sister Wolverhampton' looked habitually for comparison and guidance in all aspects of civic conduct.²⁸ The defining event which transformed this situation and confirmed the civic identity of Wolverhampton on a national basis was the royal visit by Queen Victoria in 1866.

Country leaders had 'firm ties to the aristocracy but overall there was 'a sense of "civic unity" transcending class lines'.

²⁵ W. H. Jones, *Story of the Municipal Life of Wolverhampton*, 293. The comment is from the 1902 speech in which Jones thanked the council for making him an honorary freeman of the borough. It is a significant indication of the high civic pride which the town later acquired that at the same ceremony, the freedom was also conferred upon the Lord Mayor of London whose state visit to Wolverhampton was the central feature of the occasion.

²⁶ 'The good old town' was a frequent usage. For, example, W. H. Jones, *Story of the Municipal Life of Wolverhampton*, 151.

²⁷ *WC*, 2 August 1848. Charles Pelham Villiers was the Liberal MP who held one of the two Wolverhampton seats for more than 60 years from 1832 to his death in 1898. During his long tenure of the seat, he was opposed on only two occasions. Villiers rarely visited Wolverhampton; his notes of apology became the customary response. Nevertheless he was accorded great local popularity especially because of his campaign for repeal of the Corn Laws. In 1879 a marble statue of Villiers was bought by public subscription and erected in a prominent position on Snow Hill, near the town centre (later removed to the West Park). There was undoubtedly a genuine affection for Villiers derived from a mixture of political empathy, traditional deference and a recognition of his considerable contribution to the welfare of Wolverhampton. See J. Lawrence, *Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England 1867-1914* (Cambridge, 1998) 92 and W. O. Henderson, *Charles Pelham Villiers and the Repeal of the Corn Laws* (Oxford, 1975).

²⁸ *WC*, 21 April 1869.

6.2 The Royal Visit and the Evolution of Civic Identity

Wolverhampton had been one of the first towns to commission a statue of the Prince Consort after his death in 1861. Public subscriptions were raised and the London sculptor Thomas Thornycroft was commissioned to produce a bronze life-size equestrian statue to be erected on a granite pedestal in the centre of the town. When the Queen was invited to unveil the statue, the council had little hope of success because the Queen had remained in secluded mourning for five years. They were both surprised and gratified when the invitation was accepted. It was to be Queen Victoria's first public engagement since the death of Prince Albert.²⁹

From the announcement of the Queen's acceptance onwards, Wolverhampton came under extreme and irrational criticism both from some sections of the London press and from the journals of other boroughs who felt slighted by the Queen's choice of venue for her return to public life. Liverpool, whose invitation the Queen had declined, referred to Wolverhampton as 'that dirty little coalbox'. Manchester's invitation had also been declined.³⁰

The sharpest criticism was in the pages of *Punch* where shortly after the visit an anonymous poem was published which drew upon all the stereotypical views of the industrial north and went so far as to question the morality of Wolverhampton's manufacturing tradition.³¹ The poem, entitled 'The Queen in the Black Country', opened as follows:

GRACIOUS QUEEN VICTORIA, Wolverhampton greets you:
Pranks her unlovely face in smiles, with homage as she meets you:
Underneath her Arch of Coal loyally entreats you,
Wreaths nails locks and bolts, and near the iron trophy seats you.

²⁹ The reasons for the Queen's choice of Wolverhampton are not entirely clear. W. H. Jones, writing in 1903, claimed that the Queen had been very touched by a message of sympathy sent by 'the widows of Wolverhampton' following the death of the Prince Consort. According to Jones, the Queen said 'If ever I go out again, my first public appearance shall be in Wolverhampton, for the love and sympathy of the widows have confronted me in my darkest hour.' See W. H. Jones, *Story of the Municipal Life of Wolverhampton*, 125. Surprisingly, however, there appears to be no record of this message or of the Queen's promise either in the contemporary press or in the Queen's collected letters.

The sculptor Thomas Thornycroft was particularly favoured by the Queen: he had been employed by Prince Albert on many projects and was generally considered to have produced particularly good likenesses of the late Prince Consort. For approving comment on the original choice of Thornycroft, see *WC*, 26 March 1862. The Wolverhampton statue was based on an earlier version placed in Liverpool and this kept the cost down to £1,200.

The unusual and controversial feature of the Wolverhampton statue was that Prince Albert was depicted uncharacteristically in military dress at the instruction of Queen Victoria who took a close interest in the work, lent her late husband's uniform and saddle cloth to the sculptor and visited his studio on several occasions. The Queen also gave Thornycroft access to the royal stables. This close personal interest and involvement by the Queen may well provide an alternative explanation for the decision to travel to Wolverhampton for the unveiling. For an account of these events and an assessment of the statue in the general context of the commemoration of Prince Albert, see E. Darby and N. Smith, *The Cult of the Prince Consort* (New Haven and London, 1983) 74-5.

³⁰ *WC*, 26 November 1866, 1 December 1866, and 16 January 1867.

³¹ *Punch*, 8 December 1866.

Grimy labour washes and puts on its Sunday clothes:
 For holiday unwonted forges cool and smithies close:
 Pale toil-stunted children leave their nailing for the shows;
 The stream of subterranean work, idly, above ground flows,

A later verse expressed criticism of local industrialists who were accused of blighting the region and its people in the search for excessive profit. Thus:

Where greed has gone upon its quest, with naked hand and brow –
 Naked and not ashamed – bent to gain, not caring how:
 Blighting man's life, even as it blights the blossom and the bough:
 Over souls and over bodies driving its iron plough.

In the following week *Punch* received many complaints from the people of Wolverhampton but remained unrepentant and widened the criticism to include Birmingham, Dudley, Bilston and the entire Black Country. Extracts from the Children's Employment Commission Report of 1864 were selected to demonstrate the appalling conditions which were prevalent in the district. *Punch* finally conceded that these conditions were nevertheless somewhat better than those which applied at the time of the earlier Children's Employment Commission Report of 1841 which had been the source of much of the content of the original poem. Any improvement was attributed to 'the influence of enlightened minds and lives of Christian effort, like the PRINCE CONSORT'S.' *Punch* also retreated into the claim that its purpose had always been to improve local conditions by arousing justified indignation.³² After a further fortnight and many more complaints from Wolverhampton, *Punch's* criticism of the town was beginning to be softened and there was a new acceptance that efforts were being made to ameliorate the condition of the working classes.³³ The final instalment in this sequence of criticism was published by *Punch* after a further fortnight and sought to compare conditions in the Black Country adversely with those in an industrial area in France. It is difficult to conceive of a more effective method of arousing an aggressive pride in the towns of the Black Country.³⁴

Despite all of these external criticisms the royal visit was in fact very successful. The Queen arrived by train and entered the highly-decorated town by passing beneath an arch made of lumps of coal, bars of iron, and picks and shovels chosen to represent the source of Wolverhampton's wealth. The processional route, four miles in length, was wide-ranging in response to the Queen's request to follow a route which would not be confined to the better streets.³⁵ In due course the Queen unveiled the

³² *Ibid.*, 15 December 1866.

³³ *Ibid.*, 29 December 1866.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 12 January 1867. The town in France with which Wolverhampton was compared adversely was Le Creusot in the Department of Saône-et-Loire, a foundry and mining town of 25,000 inhabitants.

³⁵ *The Royal Visit to Wolverhampton* (Wolverhampton, 1867) 22 confirmed that 'Her Majesty wished to take such a route as should not restrict her visit to appearing in the principal and the better streets of the town'. The route which was adopted was described in *The Royal Visit* and included Salop Street, a slum area. The Queen wrote in her journal 'We drove back through quite another and the poorest part

statue, expressed herself well-pleased, and knighted the mayor John Morris. Later that day Sir John said 'that while I feel a signal honour has been conferred upon myself, I also feel that it is a mark of great respect towards our town.'³⁶

The London daily press reported the visit in generally approving terms.³⁷ *The Times* commended the people of the town for their decorations and enthusiasm and also commented on their orderly behaviour: the latter praise was marred by the observation that there were fears 'that the population of the Black Country, though well disposed and thoroughly loyal, might prove unruly in such a crowd.' Therefore, concluded the writer, 'all were on their best behaviour.' The *Daily News*, *Daily Telegraph* and *Morning Herald* expressed complete approval for the visit. The *Morning Post* reminded readers that Wolverhampton had succeeded where 'Liverpool and other places of greater note had failed'. It was 'no small feather in its cap' that the town had induced the Queen to break her retirement. The *Standard* wrote that the citizens of Liverpool and Manchester were 'unfortunate enough to lose the honours which was frankly accorded to Wolverhampton'.

The *Illustrated London News* reported the visit in considerable detail and congratulated the townspeople on their efforts and enthusiasm.³⁸ It was noted that the processional route had passed through the 'Irish quarter'; the 'poor people' therein were praised for their loud enthusiasm and apparent sincerity. Readers were provided with a brief history of the town which, because of the royal visit, had acquired 'so large a share of public notice'. Wolverhampton admittedly had 'a smoke-begrimed aspect', but it was 'a handsome town having a fair church ... and pleasant suburbs'. The manufacturing activities were described with approval and it was noted that the full parish of Wolverhampton (which included Bilston, Sedgley, Wednesfield and Willenhall) had a population of about 100,000 in aggregate, of whom two-thirds were 'engaged in the fabrication of hardware'. The writer noted that 'the enormous development of the manufacturing resources of the locality is rapidly bringing Wolverhampton into a degree of commercial importance second only to its busy neighbour, Birmingham, 'the toyshop of Europe ... It has been well remarked that if Birmingham had not existed, Wolverhampton would have been Birmingham'.

of the town ... and though we passed through some of the most wretched-looking slums, where the people were all in tatters and many very Irish-looking, they were most loyal and demonstrative.' See *Letters of Queen Victoria*, vol.1, 380, 30 November 1866.

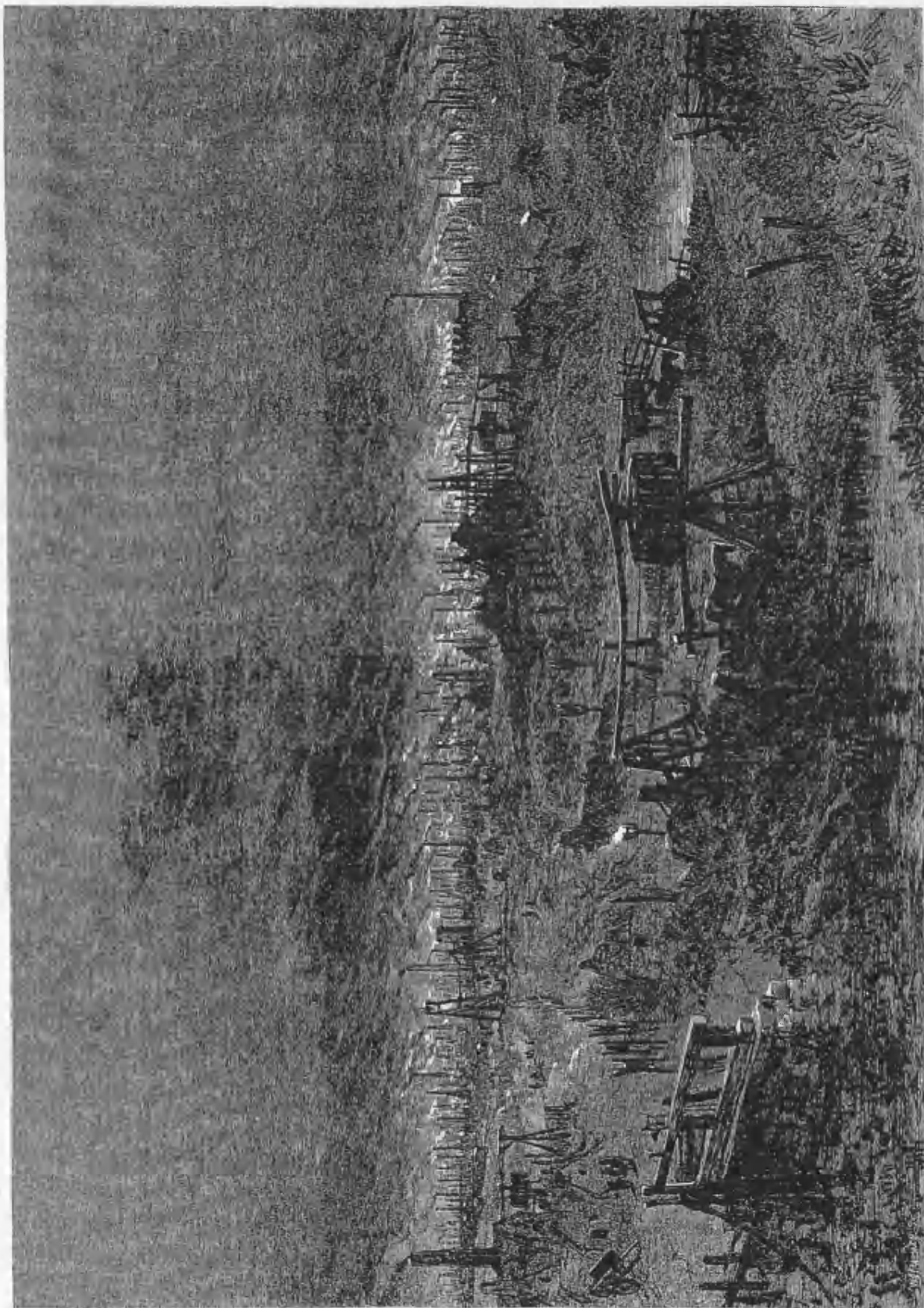
³⁶ *The Royal Visit to Wolverhampton*, 64-5.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 89-90.

³⁸ *Illustrated London News*, 8 December 1866. This issue included the engraving 'The "Black Country" round Wolverhampton' which is shown as Figure 6.3.

Figure 6.3 - 'The "Black Country" round Wolverhampton'

Source: *The Illustrated London News*, 8 December 1866.



This commentary, which emphasised the industrial strength of the district, was illustrated by a drawing entitled 'The "Black Country" round Wolverhampton', shown as Figure 6.3. It is significant that the accompanying description was not critical of the ugliness of the landscape, but stressed the unusual visual effect of the scene, 'a remarkable spectacle' described as follows:

The lurid smoke and flame of the countless furnaces and forges, with the fire of many heaps of burning refuse thrown up at the mouths of the pits, fill the sky with a fierce glare, which throws out in gigantic shadow the shapes of the buildings, tall chimneys and machines, or of passing workmen, carts and horses, railway-trains, and barges on the canals, rendering the scene one of the most fantastic that can be witnessed anywhere.³⁹

The *Illustrated London News* concentrated upon the unusual artistic attraction of such a colourful display of industrial power. The urban identity which was inherent in this viewpoint was not the negative one of a ravaged and dispirited community but rather the very positive one of a hard-working town of major industrial importance.

The net effect of the royal visit and its associated publicity was that the civic pride of Wolverhampton was greatly increased. Not only did the town regard itself as having been honoured individually but it was raised to a much more significant position within the national urban hierarchy. The criticism was soon forgotten and 'the good old town was not a penny the worse'.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the town drew strength from its accepted achievement in organising such a successful visit and thereafter regarded itself as an important and recognised manufacturing centre with enhanced self-confidence.

There was, however, a widening gulf between civic identity, i.e. the view that the council wished to propagate, and urban identity, i.e. the view held by the people as a whole. Although the urban identity remained centred on the manufacturing image, the civic identity was changed by the royal visit which had given the much-criticised council a remarkable new legitimisation. The council had organised an outstandingly successful event which had been denied to much larger cities. Thereafter, the revitalised council exhibited their confidence through increased civic intervention and in particular by a drive for public respectability and a higher level of esteem for the corporation of the borough as expressed in construction projects and various forms of civic ritual. The new Town Hall, originally commissioned in 1865, and severely criticised on grounds of expenditure which could have been better used for essential sewerage,⁴¹ was completed and opened in 1871. It was described as 'the handsome and spacious edifice ... an ornament to the town'. (See Figure 6.4)⁴²

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ W. H. Jones, *Story of the Municipal Life of Wolverhampton*, 151.

⁴¹ See *WC*, 18 July 1866 for a letter from 'a ratepayer' which raised the question of 'a new town hall or sewerage' and objected to an 'enormous cost to add to the comfort of a few working officials compared with discomfort and loss of health for the mass'.

⁴² J. Walker (mayor) speaking at the opening of the new town hall: See *Report of the Joint General Purposes and Public Works Committees*, 17 October 1871. Walker concluded his speech by congratulating 'the Mayor, Aldermen and Burgesses of this Borough on the economy which has limited

Figure 6.4 - The New Town Hall 1871

Source: W. H. Jones, *Story of the Municipal Life of Wolverhampton*



its cost to £20,000'. In fact, as W. H. Jones later revealed in *Story of the Municipal Life of Wolverhampton*, 137-9, the total cost of the new town hall was £38,251-12-0 which exceeded the £37,000 borrowed to finance the sewerage scheme in 1863.

At the time of the Queen's visit, the council demonstrated loyalty and also commemorated the royal approval which it had received by renaming two of the principal thoroughfares. As shown in maps 8 and 9, the market place became Queen Square and Cock Street became Victoria Street.⁴³ With King Street, Queen Street and Princess Street already in existence before the visit, the town centre was very royally named and the message which this was intended to convey was one of dignity and respectability.⁴⁴

The renaming of the market place as Queen Square was very significant: it amounted to a transformation of the town centre and a municipal intervention in the control of public space. Under its previous names of High Green and Market Place, the square was the most historic and important meeting place in the town, the site of all forms of public gathering, even riots.⁴⁵ It had accommodated the Fair since the thirteenth century and was regarded as a place for carnival and mis-rule, as illustrated by J.M.W. Turner's painting of 1796, shown as Figure 6.5. The traditional market drawn by Rowlandson in *ca.*1800 (Figure 6.6) was claimed to be 'not surpassed in extent by any other town of similar size and population'.⁴⁶ In short, Market Place was a very public space which the people viewed as their traditional territory.

⁴³ *WC*, 16 January 1867. The voting in council for the name changes was 40 against only 2 objectors, one of whom was the ratepayers' champion, Robert Sidney.

⁴⁴ The enthusiasm for royal street names had abated somewhat by 1887 when a proposal to change the name of Lichfield Street to Prince Albert Street was defeated. See *Minutes of the Borough Council*, Book 11, 18 April 1887.

⁴⁵ There were political riots in the square in 1832 and 1835 which subsided only after a reading of the Riot Act and use of military force, as described in W. H. Jones, *The Story of the Japan, Tinsplate Working and Iron Braziers' Trades, Bicycle and Galvanising Trades and Enamel Ware Manufacture in Wolverhampton and District* (London, 1900), 16.

⁴⁶ J. B. Hardcastle, *Old Wolverhampton, Sixty Years Ago: Its Hotels, Inns and Taverns* (Wolverhampton, 1888) from chapter on The Swan Hotel - document held by Wolverhampton Archives and Local Studies Collection.

Figure 6.5 - 'Wolverhampton', by J.M.W. Turner, 1796

Source: Wolverhampton Art Gallery.



Figure 6.6 - Market at High Green, Wolverhampton, ca.1800

Source: The original drawing, attributed to Thomas Rowlandson, is in the collection at Wolverhampton Art Gallery. The illustration below is from a copy made by the writer's father, John Sherwood Smith, who was a teacher at the Municipal School of Art.



Map 8 - Wolverhampton in 1827



Map 9 - Wolverhampton in 1870



Figure 6.7 - Statue of the Prince Consort in Queen Square.

Source: *The Royal Visit to Wolverhampton, 1867*.



When the statue of the late Prince Consort was placed in the centre of the square and surrounded protectively by an ornate railing,⁴⁷ (see Figure 6.7) the council were invading the space of the townsfolk in the cause of respectability and the desire for greater civic dignity. It was clearly not intended that Queen Square should continue to be the public space of carnival which Market Place and High Green had represented, and this transformation would generate considerable tension when the council later attempted to ban the Fair from taking place in the square, as described in Chapter 8.

What was happening in Wolverhampton at this significant juncture was that the newly-confident council were setting out in a direction which would change the civic identity to that of a more orderly, dignified and respectable town. A contemporary comment in 1888 that the difference which was then becoming apparent between 'the past and present of our good old town' was 'in conformation to the more cultivated taste which has of late years sprung up'.⁴⁸ Although the writer was concerned principally with the design of public buildings, there was no doubt that the quest for a more dignified civic identity which would reflect the perceived importance of the town had become council policy. The corollary of this argument was that the council would become even more vulnerable to external criticism of their new town as was the case in 1874 when the Ballard Report had such a sharp impact in promoting sanitary measures including slum clearance.

The mechanism by which the governance of Wolverhampton could engender an elevated sense of civic identity would inevitably involve the council in attempting measures which could be defined as 'social control', that is to say 'the imposition of opinions and habits by one class upon another'.⁴⁹ Outside the direct authority of local government lay two areas in which opinions and behaviour might be influenced to good effect. These two were, on the one hand, religion which came to be regarded more as an education-linked power base than as a spiritual resource, and on the other hand the complex and extensive matrices of social, cultural and recreational life. These two areas, which may in this context be regarded as structures of control, form the subjects of the next two chapters.

⁴⁷ The cost of the railing was defrayed by the mayor, Sir John Morris, as described in *The Royal Visit to Wolverhampton*, 55.

⁴⁸ J. B. Hardcastle, *Old Wolverhampton, Sixty Years Ago*, introductory chapter.

⁴⁹ F.M.L. Thompson, 'Social Control in Victorian Britain', *Economic History Review*, Second Series, Volume xxxiv, No.2 (May 1981), 189.

Chapter 7 – Structures of Control: I. Religion

‘The conflict between church and dissent was fundamental to the political arena for most of the nineteenth century.’

D. Fraser¹

In 1845, commenting on contemporary Manchester, Engels wrote ‘All of the writers of the bourgeoisie are unanimous on this point, that the workers are not religious, and do not attend church.’² Writing in 1967 Inglis observed that there was only one occasion on which it was possible to subject the views of the bourgeoisie as expressed by Engels to a quantitative examination.³ This opportunity arose from the census of 1851 which included questions enquiring into the customs of religious worship in England and Wales.⁴

There has been some criticism and re-assessment of the census results in recent years, but the broad conclusions remain unchallenged.⁵ These were as follows:-

- (i) On the day of the Census, Sunday 30 March 1851, the average attendance of those aged 10 or more at a place of worship was 47-54 per cent, a figure which would be quite remarkable today but which dismayed the Victorians who had expected a much higher figure.
- (ii) The average attendance was higher in rural districts than in the large towns, which suggested that there was a reduced tendency towards worship in those areas where the working classes predominated.
- (iii) The distribution of religious attendance throughout England and Wales was unequal. In many cases, local factors had a considerable effect, especially the relative strengths of particular denominations.

The conclusion that religious attendance was lowest in areas containing large numbers of the working classes was unavoidable and very worrying. At a time when there were real fears of revolution, it was hoped by the middle and upper classes that the church would be able to influence the working classes in the direction of restraint and tolerance. Moreover, the reputation of the nation as a God-fearing society was becoming questionable. The urban working classes were evidently rejecting organised worship in increasing numbers even if they often retained a fundamental religiosity.⁶ This residual

¹ D. Fraser, *Urban Politics in Victorian England: the Structure of Politics in Victorian Cities* (Leicester, 1976), 265.

² F. Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (Oxford, 1993), 136.

³ K. Inglis, *The Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England* (London, 1963), 1.

⁴ Parliamentary Papers, House of Commons 1852-53, (1690), lxxix.

⁵ D. M. Thompson, ‘The 1851 Religious Census: Problems and Possibilities’, *Victorian Studies*, XI, No.1 (1967), 86-97 provides a review of the ways in which the census results were evaluated.

⁶ This working class religiosity has been described as ‘a sturdy and inarticulate culture of religious belief’. See E. R. Norman, *Church and Society in England 1770-1970* (Oxford, 1976), 124.

faith usually consisted of an unexpressed belief in God combined with a traditional and often Bible-based morality. However, there was some small comfort in that Christianity had not entirely 'lost the urban masses'. As Best wrote in 1971, 'It was indeed not absolutely true that church-going diminished in proportion as industrial towns ... got larger.'⁷ Bristol and Wolverhampton were quoted as examples of very large towns with populations exceeding 100,000 and yet 'their attendance figures were quite heartening'. Nevertheless, such large towns with high attendance rates were exceptional.

The overall situation was summarised effectively by Inglis who wrote that

Attendances were lowest in London and in large manufacturing towns. The areas in which worship was least popular included every large cotton town, the two greater woollen towns Bradford and Leeds, every large coal town except Wolverhampton, the two great hardware towns Sheffield and Birmingham, and every large town in Lancashire except Wigan and Rochdale. In a score of the largest towns in England, less than 1 in 10 according to estimates in the report attended any place of worship on census Sunday.⁸

Starting from the observation that Wolverhampton had an unusually high religious attendance for an industrial town, it is proposed to examine the details and effects of this phenomenon. The main denominations are defined and compared for relative strength and influence. The effect of these denominations on governance is to be studied, not only in relation to the roles played by their members as councillors, but also to the ways in which a specific denomination, the Congregationalists, urged their members to seek municipal office and influence as a Christian duty. It is particularly necessary to investigate the importance of denominational conflict in the struggle for control of the School Board in Wolverhampton following the Education Act of 1870. In a town where party politics was in theory excluded from council proceedings, the fiercely-contested elections to the School Board provided a unique opportunity for identifying the religious, political and occupational interest groups which contended with each other in the governance of Wolverhampton.

7.1 Religious Attendance and Denominations

The religious attendance in Wolverhampton was exceptionally high, especially for an industrial town closely associated with coal and iron. When the total claimed attendances at all three religious services held on census Sunday are added together and divided by population for each municipal borough, an approximate index of religious attendance may be derived. This index is admittedly imperfect in many ways but does give a rough guide to rates of attendance.⁹ Wolverhampton shows

⁷ G. Best, *Mid-Victorian Britain 1851-75* (London, 1979), 198. The other large towns with 'heartening' attendances were Derby, Huddersfield, Nottingham, Rochdale, Warrington and Wigan. Leicester and Northampton were 'better still'.

⁸ K. Inglis, *The Churches and the Working Classes*, 102.

⁹ The simple method used in this work whereby the index of attendance is taken as total attendance divided by total population was also used by K. S. Inglis in 'Patterns of religious worship in 1851', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 11 (1960), 74-86 and by Richard Dennis in *English Industrial Cities of the Nineteenth Century. A Social Geography* (Cambridge, 1984), 29-32. Dennis criticised the more

an index of 53.1 which is unusually high for an industrial town. As shown in Table 7.1, most industrial towns gave results below 50.

Table 7.1 – Religious attendance in selected towns, 1851

	Population (thousands)	Index of attendance	Anglican	Catholic	Nonconformists
			figures are % of attendance)		
Birmingham	233	36.1	47	6	47
Blackburn	47	37.7	44	11	45
Bolton	61	37.3	42	13	45
Bradford	104	42.7	23	9	68
Bristol	137	56.7	45	7	46
Coventry	36	40.2	45	15	40
Derby	41	59.0	40	10	50
Dudley	38	55.3	25	6	69
Gateshead	26	32.9	40	9	51
Halifax	34	41.4	57	-	44
Huddersfield	31	59.6	43	4	53
Hull	85	49.6	31	5	64
Leicester	61	62.3	45	4	52
Liverpool	376	45.2	41	33	27
Manchester	303	34.7	34	23	42
Newcastle upon Tyne	88	40.0	42	14	44
Northampton	27	63.4	39	-	61
Nottingham	57	57.7	31	7	62
Oldham	53	31.7	37	5	58
Preston	70	25.5	20	36	44
Salford	64	36.6	42	15	43
Sheffield	135	32.1	34	9	56
Stockport	54	42.8	36	9	55
Stoke on Trent	84	40.9	32	5	63
Sunderland	64	48.5	29	3	68
Walsall	26	43.3	42	17	41
Wigan	32	53.2	46	28	26
Wolverhampton	120	53.1	36	7	57

Source: *1851 Census*

Index of attendance = Total attendance/population (thousands)

The principal source of the high index in Wolverhampton was not the established church but rather the prevalence of Nonconformist worship which accounted for 57 per cent of total attendance compared

complicated method employed by Herbert Mann, the Registrar General responsible for the original survey who 'allowed for churchgoers who attended more than one service by halving the attendance for afternoon services and counting only one-third of evening worshippers, but this formula worked to the disadvantage of Nonconformists who were more likely to worship in the evening, although there were also more double-attenders among Nonconformists than among Anglicans.' The application of Mann's method would be liable to distort the results for Wolverhampton with its high Nonconformist attendance.

with 36 per cent for the Church of England and 7 per cent for Roman Catholicism.¹⁰ The breakdown of attendance is shown in Table 7.2. It is notable that Wesleyan Methodists were the largest Nonconformist denomination, amounting to nearly half of the dissenting total.

Table 7.2 – Religious Accommodation and Attendance in Large Towns

Religious denomination	No of places of worship	Number of sittings			Number of attendants at public worship on Sunday 30 March 1851 (including Sunday Scholars)		
		Free	Appropriated	Total	Morning	Afternoon	Evening
TOTAL	97	25,363	22,892	48,455	27,015	11,919	24,650
PROTESTANT CHURCHES							
Church of England	23	11,328	10,735	22,263	11,578	2,455	8,966
Presbyterian Church in England	1	-	100	100	28	-	42
Independents	6	1,765	1,700	3,465	1,986	475	1,367
Particular Baptists	9	1,760	2,146	3,906	1,494	1,052	1,644
Baptists (not otherwise defined)	1	200	-	200	130	-	130
Society of Friends	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Unitarians	2	346	200	546	340	280	58
Wesleyan Methodists	26	4,891	4,787	9,678	7,140	3,507	7,118
Methodist New Connex.	7	860	1,084	1,944	1,178	1,207	1,413
Primitive Methodists	14	2,661	1,086	3,747	1,481	1,697	1,937
Welsh Calvinistic Meth.	1	180	-	180	-	150	150
Ly Huntingdon's Connex.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Isolated congregations	1	350	-	350	-	-	-
OTHER CHRISTIAN CHURCHES.							
Roman Catholics	4	862	1,034	1,896	1,645	1,040	1,750
Latter Day Saints	1	150	-	150	-	44	55
Jews	1	10	20	30	15	12	-

Source: As Table 7.1

Despite the relatively high levels of religious attendance, Wolverhampton was listed among the 50 towns which provided the least accommodation for worshippers. The results in Table 7.3 show that the total accommodation identified by the 1851 Census amounted to 39,132 sittings equivalent to 37.6 per cent of the borough population. It was suggested that a further 21,280 sittings were required. In fact the provision of sittings by the Church of England in Wolverhampton was outnumbered by those of other churches in the ratio of 46 to 54. As shown in Table 7.4 the Roman Catholic Church had four places of worship which provided 1,896 sittings representing 1.6 per cent of the borough population, but equivalent to 32 per cent of the Irish community living in the town centre.

¹⁰ High Nonconformist attendance was a common feature of industrial towns. The figures in Table 7.1 indicate that with the exception of Wigan, all of the towns shown as having an index of attendance exceeding 50 had a Nonconformist majority.

Table 7.3 – Examples of Districts with least Religious Accommodation

District	Population 1851	Total sittings all religious bodies	% sittings to population
St George's in East London	48,376	10,039	20.8
Liverpool	258,236	80,239	31.1
Birmingham	173,951	54,319	31.2
Salford	87,523	27,775	31.7
Manchester	228,433	75,817	33.2
Newcastle on Tyne	89,156	31,018	34.8
Sheffield	103,626	38,036	36.7
Wolverhampton	104,158	39,132	37.6
Bolton	114,712	43,517	37.9

Source: As Table 7.1

Table 7.4 - Accommodation provided by the Roman Catholic Church in certain large towns

Town	Number of places of worship and sittings		Proportion % of sittings to population
	Places of worship	Sittings	
London	35	24,355	1.0
Liverpool	16	14,532	3.9
Manchester	7	6,850	2.2
Birmingham	4	1,549	0.7
Leeds	2	1,220	0.7
Bristol	6	2,254	1.7
Sheffield	1	950	0.7
Wolverhampton	4	1,896	1.6
Bradford	1	380	0.4
Newcastle	2	1,744	2.0
Hull	1	628	0.7
Bath	3	770	1.4
Brighton	1	400	0.6
Oldham	1	490	0.9

Source: As Table 7.1

The unusually high incidence of religious worship may be expected to have been of considerable influence in Wolverhampton. The nature of that influence will be examined by addressing the following questions:

- (i) What denominations were present and how had they developed?
- (ii) What was the size and importance of their respective following?
- (iii) What effect did these denominations have upon the civic conduct and policies of their followers?

The last question is clearly the most significant in relation to governance.

7.2 The Denominations and their Civic Influence

In 1830 it was written that 'Respecting the churches, it has been observed that in a place of such extent, it was rather remarkable that there were only two Protestant churches.'¹¹ St Peter's, the principal church, dated back to the tenth century and occupied a dominant position in the town centre. St John's church was opened in 1760 and was situated on what was then the western margin of the town. The Church of England had been slow to expand but during the 1830s and 1840s six new churches were built, and St Peter's was renovated in 1851. Later, as new housing areas were established, further churches were built.¹² St Peter's, however, remained the principal church, the *de facto* cathedral of the aspiring town. As such, it became the centre of activity after incorporation on those occasions when it was appropriate that civic ceremonies should be conducted in a religious setting. Moreover it was the parish church of many councillors, aldermen and mayors. They frequently held lay office as sidesmen and churchwardens. These were men of high social status and, as G. W. Jones has demonstrated, 'Anglicanism and Conservatism went together'.¹³ The connection was well exemplified by the first mayor G. B. Thorneycroft who was a Tory and supported the Corn Laws and the Church Rate. He was a churchwarden at St Peter's and led the campaign to raise funds for renovation. Three of the first six mayors, including Thorneycroft, were both Conservatives and regular worshippers at St Peter's church.

The Tory Anglican faction was very strong in the years immediately after incorporation. Its members had supported retention of the church rate and had come into conflict with the Liberal Nonconformist group. These latter had campaigned against the church rate under the leadership of the ironmaster John Barker who later became an alderman of the borough and eventually High Sheriff of Staffordshire. After a lively public meeting in 1838 at which ratepayers expressed emphatic objections, the church rate was abandoned and never collected again.¹⁴

During the third quarter of the nineteenth century, the influence of the established church in general and of St Peter's in particular, was progressively diminished by the changing structure of power within the council. Local government was increasingly influenced by Liberal manufacturers whose religious affiliations were almost entirely Nonconformist, principally Methodist or Congregationalist. This trend towards Nonconformity generated considerable tension because the precedence which St Peter's church had acquired as the religious centre for local government ceremony was not always accepted without question. The first potential problem arose when the Roman Catholic John Hawksford was

¹¹ W. West, *Picturesque Views and Descriptions of Cities, Towns, Castles, Mansions and other Objects of Interesting Features in Staffordshire and Shropshire* (Birmingham, 1830), 17.

¹² These included St Mark's and St Matthew's (both 1849), St Luke's (1861) and St Jude's (1869). Of these four, only St Matthew's was in the eastern district.

¹³ G. W. Jones, *Borough Politics: A Study of the Wolverhampton Town Council, 1888-1964* (London, 1969), 138.

appointed mayor in 1863. Hawksford declined to attend the civic installation service at St Peter's and in this case there appears to have been no objection raised. In 1869, however, when the Congregationalist Thomas Bantock was offered the mayoralty, he was informed by a deputation from the council that participation in the civic service at St Peter's was a condition of appointment. Bantock replied that he was willing to attend St Peter's in a private capacity, but that if required to attend in civic state, he would withdraw. This response generated a heated debate in council. Some Church of England councillors proposed one of their number as an alternative and Bantock was accused of religious bigotry. Eventually, more tolerant views prevailed and Bantock was appointed mayor. He emphasised that he intended to conduct the business of council 'free from all bias, either in religion or politics; he should represent the inhabitants as a whole.'¹⁵

The conflict re-emerged in 1898 when Price Lewis, a member of the Methodist New Connexion church, was mayor-elect. In advance of his election, Lewis sent a letter to the council in which he declined to attend what had become the traditional installation service at St Peter's. He wrote 'I have always publicly protested against a Nonconformist being expected to attend the Established Church. Should the council do me the honour to elect me, I shall not ask for a church parade, but would attend my own place of worship in the usual way, inviting such of the Council and citizens as would care to join with me in worship.'¹⁶ Price Lewis was unanimously elected mayor and re-elected for a second term when his successor died in office.

These developments suggest that by the turn of the century the traditional opposition between the Church of England and Nonconformity in Wolverhampton was beginning to soften slightly, if not in all matters, then at least in those affecting local governance where the common good of the town was of increasing importance. It has been argued that in Wolverhampton between 1830 and 1870, there was a considerable degree of mutual tolerance and selective cooperation between Anglicans and dissenters.¹⁷ On a national basis this accommodation was not at all unusual. Geoffrey Best commented that Anglican Evangelicals 'retained their liberty to join in the worship of the Invisible Church with other evangelicals, no matter from what church or sect at home or abroad they might come.'¹⁸

¹⁴ W. H. Jones, *Story of the Municipal Life of Wolverhampton* (London, 1903), 47.

¹⁵ Ibid., 161-3. The later Congregationalist mayors W. H. Jones (1873) and Samuel Dickinson (1876) also declined to attend the civic service at St Peter's church.

¹⁶ Ibid., 251.

¹⁷ J. D. Walters, 'The Evangelical Embrace: Relations between Anglicans and Dissenters in the period 1830-1870', *West Midlands Studies*, 14 (1981) 32-8.

¹⁸ G. Best, 'The Evangelicals and the Established Church in the Early Nineteenth Century', *Journal of Theological Studies*, X (1959), 71.

There were several instances of cooperation between Anglican and dissenting ministers in order to further municipal projects of a religious character such as the Wolverhampton Town Mission set up in 1855 as an inter-denominational body designed to organise missionary activity aiming at new conversions. The mission was supported actively by several prominent council members with affiliations both to the Church of England and to Wesleyan and Baptist chapels. However, it must be stressed that this type of cooperation was highly selective and it should be noted that the powerful group of Congregationalists were less frequently involved in such mutually tolerant activity, especially if they were from the older and more traditional branch of Congregationalism. Another important reservation which applied to the relationship between Anglicans and dissenters was that although they sometimes had identical objectives, they often acted independently to achieve them. The most notable example of this independent action towards the same end lay in the unrelenting opposition of both denominations to Roman Catholicism.

In respect of the council between 1848 and 1888, the Roman Catholic community of Wolverhampton did not make any significant impact. They provided only one notable council member, John Hawksford, who became mayor in 1863. During his 20 years service on the council, Hawksford's political inclinations were generally favourable to reform, but these were personal views rather than any position endorsed by his religious persuasion. The town's Roman Catholic leaders concentrated their efforts on providing for the spiritual and temporal requirements of their own community, the majority of whom were the rapidly expanding population of poor Irish immigrants. Swift has argued that 'The Catholic Church played a vital role in the development of the Irish community locally, and by 1870, Irish Catholic loyalty to the Catholic faith was matched in political terms by a growing identification with the Irish Home Rule movement and the rising Liberal Party.'¹⁹ Thus, although there was a growing Catholic identification with Liberalism, the political stance of the Catholic community was essentially marginal.

The Irish community in Wolverhampton was unusually large, amounting to 12 per cent of the population in 1851 and rising to 17.5 per cent by 1871.²⁰ it was an obvious target for Protestant anti-Catholic movements. The town was often visited by anti-Catholic speakers who addressed meetings which frequently degenerated into mob violence with the inevitable backlash from the Irish. Moreover, anti-Catholic resentment was also directed at those Church of England clerics who were suspected as guilty of 'Romish practices'. In 1870 the vicar of St George's was accused of ritualistic tendencies: he had also infuriated most of his parishioners by his egregious statement that 'the people

¹⁹ R. Swift, 'Another Stafford Street Row: Law, Order and the Irish Presence in mid-Victorian Wolverhampton' in R. Swift and S. Gilley (eds), *The Irish in the Victorian City* (London, 1985), 199.

²⁰ Census returns 1851 and 1871. The figures include English-born members of Irish families.

are nothing - they are a mere assemblage of units'.²¹ In 1876 the vicars of Christ Church and St Andrew's were criticised for 'ritualism' in an editorial in the *Wolverhampton Chronicle*: the writer reminded the vicars that the Queen was the head of their church and quoted eight examples of unacceptable Romish practices.²² Thus, from a local political point of view, the Roman Catholic church and those who supported it or even appeared to sympathise with it acted more as a focal point to attract and reinforce Protestant hostility than as a force in their own right.

Swift has argued that the Irish community not only provided a target for Protestant hostility but also represented a convenient scapegoat for all forms of civil disorder. The Tory *Wolverhampton Chronicle* frequently commented on the appearance in local courts of drunken, disorderly and violent Irishmen, and by implication accused the Irish of having a criminal record out of all proportion to their actual numbers. Swift has demonstrated that 'between one-fifth and one-quarter of all crimes presented by the authorities ... were suspected of having been committed by members of an ethnic group which comprised only one-eighth of the population'.²³ Despite the prevalence of anti-Catholic feeling in the town, Swift found little evidence of actual conflict between the Irish and the local population. Even the backlash against incited anti-Catholic rioting was judged by Swift to have been 'essentially defensive in character'.²⁴ Swift identified two phases of anti-Irish activity which drew a defensive response, firstly police harassment in 1848-9 and secondly the activities of anti-Catholic lecturers in 1858 and 1867. Philips has suggested that in the Black Country as a whole, 'the police found in the Irish a natural target for their attentions and the Irish reciprocated with attacks on the police'.²⁵ Swift has concluded also that the Irish were 'resented nationally for their alien habits, religion and politics and for the cheapness of their labour, which threatened to keep down the general level of working-class incomes'.²⁶

In the context of religion, Wolverhampton was always considered to be a stronghold of dissent and this view was confirmed by the relative attendance figures for Census Sunday. There was a long history of dissent. John Wesley preached in the town and founded a chapel in 1787. In 1791 the Priestley riots spread from Birmingham to Wolverhampton and local dissenters were attacked. A wide range of Nonconformist denominations established chapels or meeting houses around 1800, including Congregationalists, Irvingites, Quakers, Trinitarians and Unitarians. These dissenting groups were often supported by local manufacturers and were firmly established in 1830 when the Church of England still had only two central churches even though the population of the town was approaching

²¹ *WC*, 6 July 1870.

²² *WC*, 23 February 1876.

²³ R. Swift, 'Crime and Ethnicity. The Irish in Early Victorian Wolverhampton', *West Midlands Studies*, 13 (1980), 1.

²⁴ R. Swift, 'Another Stafford Street Row', 198.

²⁵ D. Philips, *Crime and Authority in Victorian England* (London, 1977), 274.

30,000. Eric Hopkins has demonstrated that dissent was strong in the Black Country generally by the mid-nineteenth century with an overwhelmingly working class following. By contrast, the Church of England was seen as 'the employers' church'.²⁷

Methodism was easily the largest dissenting group in Wolverhampton: its total attendance figures in the 1851 Census exceeded those of the Church of England. The principal Methodist chapel was in Darlington Street and was built in 1825 and extended in 1848. The chapel congregation has been shown to have been chiefly composed of artisans. From 1850 through to 1900 the artisan proportion remained roughly constant at 40 per cent; semi-skilled employees declined from 30 to 17 per cent, and intermediate non-manuals (clerks, retailers, teachers, etc.) increased from 15 to 35 per cent.²⁸ The percentage of major figures such as ironmasters and leading professionals, was about 4 per cent but they were often men of great local importance. They included the Liberal solicitor H. H. Fowler (mayor 1860 and later MP and the first Lord Wolverhampton) and four other mayors - John Hartley (1858), Isaac Jenks (1872), John Brotherton (1883) and J. G. Wright (1895). The surgeon Dr E. H. Coleman who contributed to the Chadwick Report was also a member of the Darlington Street congregation.

It has been suggested that during the second half of the nineteenth century, Wesleyan Methodist worship became more formal and restrained and lost much of the evangelical spontaneity with which it had originated.²⁹ Methodism had been caught up in the desire for middle class respectability. Some ambitious Methodists left and joined the more prestigious Church of England. The first mayor of Wolverhampton, G. B. Thorneycroft, retained both loyalties; he attended morning service at St Peter's, but was often to be seen in the evening at the Wesleyan chapel, having been a Methodist in his youth.³⁰

Although Methodism had followers who were powerful figures in the town, it did not develop a specific civic policy. H. H. Fowler, whose father was a Methodist minister and a friend of John Wesley, derived his social conscience and Liberal politics from his upbringing and his own moral convictions. He believed in acting under the principles of Christianity in general, rather than those of

²⁶ R. Swift, 'Crime and Ethnicity'. 4.

²⁷ E. Hopkins, 'Religious Dissent in Black Country Industrial Villages in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 34, 3 (1983), 411-24. A correspondent to *WC*, 29 January 1862 asked 'Is it not one of the greatest scandals of our age and country that the Church of England with all her untold wealth has done so little for the poor in our populous towns?'

²⁸ C. A. Hellyar, 'Nonconformist Elites in Wolverhampton between 1848 and 1914' (University of Wolverhampton MA thesis, 1993), 11-22.

²⁹ R. Leese, 'The Impact of Methodism on Black Country Society 1743-1860' (University of Manchester PhD thesis, 1972), 133.

³⁰ W. H. Jones, *Story of the Municipal Life*, 39.

Methodism in particular, and for Fowler the denomination was of less importance than the overall faith.³¹

This distinction was not so evident with the smaller but much more influential denomination of Congregationalists. Although their total attendance figures on Census Sunday were only 21 per cent of the Wesleyan Methodists, they nevertheless exerted an influence on Wolverhampton council out of all proportion to their membership. This influence was latterly driven by a concerted campaign to gain municipal representation which was successful in that between 1868 and 1888, there were eight years in which the mayoralty was held by a Congregationalist.

The Congregationalists, also known and classified in the 1851 Census as Independents, opened their first chapel in Temple Street, west of the town centre, in 1782. From the start, their mission was directed towards social improvement. For example, Congregationalists founded the town library in 1795. The Priestly riots of 1791 operating with the slogan of 'Church and King' generated attacks on Congregationalists and it was considered correct behaviour by the upper classes, the Church Party, to ridicule and despise such nonconformists.³² When the Congregationalists attempted to establish a chapel at Stockwell End in the fashionable outlying district of Tettenhall, the plan was defeated by the Church Party.³³

In 1846, the Congregationalists split amid disputes over the settlement of a new minister.³⁴ The dissatisfied members joined up with the Temple Street group and in 1849 the combined group opened a new chapel west of the town centre on Snow Hill. The remainder, who were generally the poorer members, stayed on at the Queen Street chapel which had opened in 1813. The congregations of Snow Hill and of Queen Street developed differences not only in liturgy but also in social status. Snow Hill accommodated 'The fashionable folk': the deacons included such prominent citizens as the ironmasters John Barker and E. B. Dimmack and the manufacturer Sidney Cartwright. All three men were county magistrates whilst Barker and Dimmack became High Sheriffs of Staffordshire (1851) and Monmouthshire (1852) respectively. The five Jones brothers, that remarkable civic dynasty whose members included three mayors, also attended Snow Hill but appear to have maintained some connection with Queen Street where their names were shown as contributors to fund-raising events.

³¹ E. H. Fowler (Hon. Mrs R. Hamilton), *The Life of Henry Hartley Fowler, First Viscount Wolverhampton*, GCSI (London, 1912), 48-49.

³² W. H. Jones, *History of the Congregational Churches of Wolverhampton 1662-1894* (London, 1894), 20-21.

³³ Ibid., 144. H. A. May, *The Century of Queen Street Congregational Church, Wolverhampton. The Story of a Hundred Years 1809-1909* (Wolverhampton, 1909) 102-14 referred to the Stockwell End objection and also described a similar incident at Pattingham nearby in 1872 when 'the work met with strong opposition'.

³⁴ The split of 1846 is described in W. H. Jones, *History of the Congregational Churches*, 52-78 and in H. A. May, *The Centenary of Queen Street Congregational Church*, 13-16.

Because of its relatively wealthy membership, the Snow Hill chapel was able to pay off its mortgage debt by 1870. Funds were then raised to build a subsidiary chapel in Blakenhall near the main road to Dudley, an area described at that time as 'the working man's West End ... fast increasing in population and accordingly in need of religious activity'.³⁵ The Snow Hill chapel became a centre for improving the condition of the working classes. The Pleasant Sunday Afternoon movement started there in 1889. Temperance pledges were often signed at the conclusion of meetings.

Those Congregationalists who remained at Queen Street were generally less prosperous, mostly working class. Their liturgy was more fundamentalist and their discipline, attributed to the text 'By their fruits, ye shall know them', was severe. Members could be 'separated from membership' for such offences as drunkenness, failing to pay creditors in full or being seen at the theatre. Holding a family dance at home was unacceptable as also was marrying or even courting 'unconverted persons'.³⁶

These austere standards were relaxed somewhat in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. A new chapel was opened in 1864 on the original site and Queen Street attracted a number of important local figures. Thomas Bantock, a member for over 40 years, became in 1869 the first mayor from Queen Street. Another important member was Samuel S. Mander, principal of the paint and varnish manufacturers who was a reticent man and did not seek civic office but was an effective organiser and contributor in fund-raising campaigns. The gas engineer John Annan, mayor in 1884, also attended Queen Street chapel.

From the incorporation in 1848 through to the mid-1860s, Nonconformists sought council office by virtue of their positions, political commitments (unstated, of course), and sense of social or civic duty. The idea of seeking office as a religious duty arose in Wolverhampton after the intervention of Rev R. W. Dale, a Congregationalist minister from Carr's Lane chapel in Birmingham, who had previously preached at both Queen Street and Snow Hill. In a seminal sermon delivered in 1867, Dale instructed his congregation that prosperous members should accept an obligation to become involved in civic affairs across the whole spectrum of municipal administration. Thus:

They ought to feel 'called of God' to act as 'Guardians of the Poor'. They ought to work on the Committees of Hospitals. They ought to be Aldermen and Town Councillors. They ought to give their time as well as their money to whatever improvements are intended to develop the intelligence of the community. They ought to be reformers of local abuses. They ought to see to it that the towns and parishes in which they live are well drained, well lighted, and well paved; that there are good schools for every class of the population; that there are harmless public amusements; that all parochial and municipal affairs are conducted honourable and equitably. In nearly every part of the country I hear that prosperous manufacturers and

³⁵ W. H. Jones, *History of the Congregational Churches*, 126.

³⁶ H. A. May, *The Centenary of Queen Street Congregational Church*, 19.

merchants are leaving public duties in the hands of men of lower position and culture than themselves. They shrink from the roughness of local elections, and from the alleged coarseness of language and manners of the actual leaders of local parties. But this is to forget that self-denial must be endured in the discharge of nearly every duty. And if they were more active and energetic, the power which is now in inferior hands would be their own. Even the mob prefer a gentleman to a blackguard in the long run. When the prosperous people of a free nation cease to take an active interest in the public life of the towns and cities in which they live, the political greatness and stability of their country are exposed to the most serious dangers.³⁷

Dale's clarion call marked a complete change in the policy of Congregationalists in respect of external involvement. Up to this point, Congregationalists had regarded themselves as simply a group of like-minded believers who had consciously set themselves apart from an evil world. They were not an organised church. They did not recognise the authority of the state or of any other external organisation. Membership was by invitation and could be terminated by the members if they thought fit. It was exclusive, limited and very local.

Dale intended that this policy of salvation through isolation should be brought to an end. By 1884 he had gone much further in his encouragement of municipal involvement. In a sermon delivered under the general title 'The Laws of Christ for Common Life', Dale advocated 'municipal action, not the gospel only, to improve the homes of the poor'. He suggested that if Christian Londoners had supported effective local government then 'The Bitter City of Outcast London' need never have been heard. The new departure in this sermon, amounting to a considerable extension of his previous remarks, was to argue that failure to assist the poor or to participate in enlightened local government was a grave sin of omission. Dale stated that 'the terrible rebuke "Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of these least, ye did it not unto Me" will condemn the selfishness of those who refused to make municipal government the instrument of a policy of justice and humanity.'³⁸ The ultimate argument, which Dale referred to as his main point, was that civil authority was a divine institution and that therefore 'the man who holds municipal office is a "minister of God" and may "have just as real a Divine vocation to become a town councillor ... as another to become a missionary to the heathen".'³⁹

It is difficult to establish accurately the magnitude of any direct effect arising from Dale's encouragement of Congregationalists to take up municipal office. The information given in Tables 7.5

³⁷ R. W. Dale quoted in E. P. Hennock, *Fit and Proper Persons. Ideal and Reality in Nineteenth-Century Urban Government* (London, 1973), 158.

³⁸ Ibid., 162.

³⁹ Dale's views were familiar to the people of Wolverhampton. In 1869 the Congregational Union of England and Wales met in the town under Dale's chairmanship. Seven hundred ministers were present at meetings centred on Queen Street and Snow Hill chapels. The concluding session held in the Agricultural Hall was said to have been attended by 3,000 working men. See W. H. Jones, *History of the Congregational Churches*, 99. In later years Dale's views were propounded in Wolverhampton by his close associate Rev C. A. Berry who became minister of Queen Street chapel in 1883. See J. S. Drummond, *Charles A. Berry DD* (London, 1899), 46-51.

and 7.6 include those council members whose religious affiliations were verifiable either from chapel registers or from press reports. Therefore these men were sufficiently important to be classified as a Nonconformist elite and it may be that less important, unregistered Nonconformists joined the Council at the lower level: the results in the tables accordingly represent a minimum figure for Nonconformist involvement in the work of the council.

Table 7.5 – Nonconformist members of Wolverhampton Borough Council
(figures are percentages)

	1848-1859	1860-1869	1870-1879	1880-1889
Councillors	16	20	26	12
Aldermen	20	15	39	50
Mayors	33	22	33	56
Total Council	21	24	39	35

Source: *Minutes of the Borough Council, Chapel Registers, and Wolverhampton Chronicle.*

Table 7.6 – Nonconformist Chairmen of Council Committees
(figures are percentages)

	1855	1865	1870	1875	1880	1887
Congregationalist	-	23	-	9	46	46
Methodist	12	8	10	9	-	7

Source: As Table 7.5

The results in Table 7.5 suggest that there was an increase in the proportion of Nonconformist councillors after 1870, but the proportion fell back in the 1880s. However, a much more significant effect concerns the extent to which Nonconformists acquired the senior positions such as alderman and mayor. The results also show that in the 1880s Nonconformists occupied half of the aldermanic seats and provided more than half of the mayors.

In terms of municipal authority an equally important advance made by Nonconformists was in the powerful position of chairing council committees. The results in Table 7.6 demonstrate the increased hold which Congregationalists in particular obtained over council committees in the 1880s: they included such notable figures as the mayors John Annan, A. B. Bantock, Samuel Dickinson, S. T. Mander and James Saunders from Queen Street chapel, and William Edwards, John Jones, Joseph Jones and W. H. Jones from Snow Hill chapel.

The principal external effect of the doctrine of municipal involvement preached by Dale and others was to heighten overall awareness of the importance of civic concern in relation to social duty. When Dale was speaking in 1867 the idea that in Wolverhampton social improvement was both necessary

and *désirable* was gradually gaining acceptance, particularly in questions related to public health. Furthermore, the concept of necessary improvement was increasingly accepted across denominational divisions. In fact, in so far as sectarianism survived in 1870 as a serious source of tension in the civic affairs of Wolverhampton, its last major battleground was the School Board election.

7.3 Sectarianism and the School Board

After Gladstone's government passed the Education Act in 1870, there was much opposition from Conservatives who feared that education of the working class would cause them to become dissatisfied with their lot, to refuse menial work and to demand equal rights. In Wolverhampton where there was a large working class population, the arguments engendered by the Act were more related to a perceived requirement for improved education on the one hand, and a fear of education becoming sectarian on the other. It was well known in Wolverhampton that England had fallen behind both Germany and America in standards of education, especially that of the working classes.⁴⁰ The deficit was particularly pronounced in the field of technical education and for an overwhelmingly industrial town this was a very threatening situation. The danger was compounded by the decline of the old heavy industries based on coal and iron. The new industries would be founded on the manufacture of smaller finished products which demanded a higher level of technical education from the workforce.

Wolverhampton was one of the first towns to establish a School Board as permitted by the 1870 Act. The council meeting which reached the decision was heavily influenced by the eloquence of H. H. Fowler who reminded members that one third of the town's children never attended school and there were 3,000 children for whom no provision was made. He cited the recent Franco-Prussian war as having demonstrated that the Prussian army had prevailed largely because of their superior technical education. He concluded by arguing that

If Englishmen are to retain their commercial supremacy the children must be educated to fit them in future life to meet the fierce commercial competition they must have from Germany and America. Further, we do not wish to waste our time. The evil is too great. We want to grapple with the deadly emergency. Give us powers and we will put them in force, believing the best results will follow.⁴¹

Fowler's eloquence was praised and the council resolved that a School Board should be elected.

Although it was accepted that implementation of the 1870 Act would empower an elected School Board to promote wider and better education, the unusual strength of sectarian commitment in

⁴⁰ Works displayed at the Great Exhibition of 1851 'came as a revelation' to the manufacturers of Wolverhampton who realised that their products were falling behind those of France and Germany in particular. See J. Jones, *Historical Sketch of the Literary Institutions of Wolverhampton 1794-1897* (London, 1897), 146-7.

⁴¹ W. H. Jones, *Story of the Municipal Life*, 169-70.

Wolverhampton made many electors anxious about how the new educational powers would be applied. There was much concern that education should be freely available and not divided into sectarian channels. There were also those who felt strongly that town funds should specifically not be directed towards financing either Roman Catholic or Nonconformist education.

The election became a battleground between religious factions. For the first time in a town election the candidates stood not as independents but under labels of religious or political affiliation. The town voted as a whole and not by wards and the Board was elected for three years, after which all members stood down and the election was repeated. As G. W. Jones commented, 'Education was an issue which touched off violent passions and religious prejudices and aroused public interest'.⁴² Certainly the School Board elections were contested much more keenly than council elections. There were far more willing candidates (44 nominated, reduced down to 27) and the polling levels were higher. It was reported that two-thirds of the electorate voted compared with one half at the council elections.⁴³

The results of the election demonstrated clearly that the voters were becoming disillusioned by the sectarian squabbling. The japhanner Harry Jones, who had stood as an independent with the slogan 'An open bible, unsectarian education and economy' was easily top of the poll with over 10,000 votes, 45 per cent more than the runner-up, the japhanner Harry Loveridge also standing as an independent. The Church Party, who had put up seven candidates, won only four places.⁴⁴ At the bottom of the elected group and receiving the last two places were the only two elected candidates who stood on a political affiliation; these were the Liberals Sir Rupert Kettle and Thomas Bantock. The results amounted to a victory for Nonconformity with five of the eleven seats and for the independence of education from sectarian influence.

The Board elected H. H. Fowler as chairman and devised a resolution which would clarify their policy on education and sectarianism. They agreed that the bible should be read with 'explanation and instruction in the principles of religion and morality', but that no attempt should be made 'to attach children to any particular denomination'. These measures seemed to have resolved the problems arising at the interface between religion and education.⁴⁵

The townspeople, however, were becoming more disaffected by the sectarian conflict which, for all its fervour, seemed to be excessively concerned with doctrinal detail. Correspondents to the

⁴² G. W. Jones, *Borough Politics*, 40.

⁴³ *WC*, 23 November 1870.

⁴⁴ The Church Party was an alliance of Tories and Anglicans which included vicars among its candidates. There are accounts of the election in *WC*, 23 November 1870 and in W. H. Jones, *Story of the Municipal Life*, 170-3.

⁴⁵ W. H. Jones, *Story of the Municipal Life*, 173.

Wolverhampton Chronicle urged the local denominations to try and reach some form of mutual agreement.⁴⁶ The question was asked 'Why cannot Episcopalians and Nonconformists sink their paltry theological differences?'⁴⁷ Nevertheless, sectarian disputes of various kinds continued to smoulder. There were meetings of the Liberation Society formed to promote disestablishment of the Church of England: supporters included the Liberal Congregationalists T. A. Bantock, S. S. Mander and the Jones brothers. In 1871 Sir John Morris proposed a motion criticising 'Romish teaching and practice' in the Church of England at a conference attended by the Bishop of Lichfield.⁴⁸ Leading Congregationalists and Liberals raised objections to the use of ratepayers' money to finance Roman Catholic schools.⁴⁹ The Methodist journalist A. C. Pratt wrote that Nonconformists were opposed by 'the glare and glitter of the ecclesiastical war paint of the establishment'.⁵⁰ The Church of England Young Men's Association held a meeting at which Rev C. Lee of Bilston warned of the dangers posed by Nonconformity: he drew an analogy with Leicester which he described as 'the very hot bed of dissent' and stated that 'dozens' of Nonconformist chapels in the respectable neighbourhood of London Road had been closed, sold off and then used as hosiery warehouses. He urged that the church must be defended against dangerous dissenters such as T. A. Bantock.⁵¹

By the time the second School Board election was held in 1873, something of the original fire had gone out of these arguments. The election was fought vigorously but there were only thirteen candidates to contest the eleven seats. Those elected consisted of four Liberal Nonconformists, one Liberal churchman, five Tory churchmen (two of whom were vicars) and one Roman Catholic. The Liberal Congregationalist mayor W. H. Jones was at the top of the poll. Surprisingly H. H. Fowler failed to gain election, a defeat which was variously attributed to overconfidence on the part of his supporters and plotting by the Church Party.⁵²

Thus, although complicated by the peripheral involvement of other denominations, the principal religious conflict in Wolverhampton between 1848 and 1888 was that between the Church of England and Congregationalism. Roman Catholicism was a marginal feature except in so far as it provided a

⁴⁶ *WC*, 11 October 1871.

⁴⁷ *WC*, 27 July 1871.

⁴⁸ *WC*, 5 April 1871.

⁴⁹ *WC*, 4 October 1871.

⁵⁰ *WC*, 4 October 1871. Pratt wrote that Methodists were 'unwelcome to the middle and upper classes'. See *Black Country Methodism* (London, 1891), 10.

⁵¹ *WC*, 29 January 1873. This was a bitter argument in which the Church of England attacked Nonconformity as 'the spit and malice chapel'.

⁵² W. H. Jones, *Story of the Municipal Life*, 190-1.

focal point for doctrinal opposition from the Church of England and, via the Irish community, a convenient scapegoat to be blamed for crime and disorder.

The Church of England had its power base at St Peter's and its political sympathies were with the Tories; its leading lay members included wealthy manufacturers who were either occupied in or retired from the older heavy industries derived from coal and iron. The Congregationalists, who were based at Queen Street and Snow Hill chapels (of which the former congregation held more extreme views) were generally of Liberal political sympathy and included many of those manufacturers who operated in the later-established and more technically-skilled industries such as enamelling, galvanising and varnish-making. Although Congregationalism was originally remote from urban politics, its followers were later exhorted by their ministers to seek involvement in the work of the council as a Christian duty and this new policy heightened the intensity of opposition between the Congregationalists and the Church of England in urban governance.

The main conflict between the two denominations was the fight for control of education through the School Board established after the 1870 Education Act. As J.H.S. Kent observed, 'the struggle between religious institutions in the towns over the education of the children of the poor was not primarily about education, but about social power ... they fought one another for social and cultural control.'⁵³ Particularly prominent in the struggle for control were the Congregationalists who had much local influence and held the mayoralty in half of the years between 1870 and 1888. Although they had great commitment to the welfare of the town, they sought to achieve this on their own terms by directing the attitudes and behaviour of the townspeople towards a more religious, respectable and restrained demeanour. This policy caused Nonconformists in general and Congregationalists in particular to be regarded as puritans and kill-joys. In their ill-judged attempt to abolish the Fair (to be described in the following chapter), the Nonconformists seriously disregarded public opinion and acquired a reputation as enemies of the people's pleasure. As a result of these restrictive policies, Nonconformism and particularly Congregationalism began to lose some popularity, especially among the working classes. In 1887, Rev R. W. Dale looked back on this period and wrote that 'there are many amusements which our people now take delight in without any scruple which were then altogether avoided, on the principle that it was desirable to surround the moral life with a certain environment favourable to the development of the graver and more serious virtues.'⁵⁴

⁵³ J.H.S. Kent, 'The Role of Religion in the Cultural Structure of the later Victorian City' in R. J. Morris and R. Rodger (eds), *The Victorian City: A Reader in British Urban History 1820-1914* (London, 1993), 335.

⁵⁴ R. W. Dale included these comments in a sermon given in 1887 published in *British Weekly*, 23 May 1895 and quoted by K. S. Inglis in *The Churches and the Working Classes*, 74.

In order to develop a wider view of the influence of sectarian conflict on the governance of Wolverhampton, it is necessary to study those areas of municipal activity in which strong religious convictions on the part of civic authority could be brought to bear upon the secular life of the townspeople. The structures of control which applied to the areas of education, association and cultural recreation are not only of interest in relation to sectarianism but also have much wider implications regarding local governance. The investigation into these areas forms the basis of the following chapter.

Chapter 8 – Structures of Control II: Education, Culture, Recreation and Association

‘By the end of the [nineteenth] century, control was increasingly mediated, at one remove, through institutions.’

A. P. Donajgrodski¹

From incorporation in 1848 through to the late 1860s, the town council occupied itself with a range of activities which in effect were not dissimilar to a continuation of government by commissioners. The council was principally concerned with the regulation of public and private space and was deterred from taking steps directed towards improvement of public health and welfare by the ‘economist’ faction: these latter opposed any increase in rating required to finance improvement in conditions for a working class population which was largely resident out of sight and out of mind in the slum districts to the east of the centre. Although most councillors were familiar with the conditions in the east, there was no effective pressure for remedial action in the 1850s. The economists, whose cause was assisted by exploitation of the public meetings to which the council frequently resorted, usually succeeded in blocking progress. The consequent inertia did not, at that stage, appear to present an intolerable moral dilemma to the councillors. Although most of them lived in the western districts and were diligent in their attendance at various places of worship, they were able to make a mental separation between public and private morality.²

By 1870, however, the governance of Wolverhampton had entered upon a new and evolved phase in which the council took a wider view of its responsibilities, especially in relation to public health and social welfare. Civic pride, confirmed and strengthened by the visit of Queen Victoria in 1866, had given the council a new legitimation but had simultaneously made it more sensitive to external criticism and adverse comparison with other towns. Wolverhampton had acquired a ranking within the urban hierarchy but this new status brought with it obligations to provide appropriate civic amenities for health and welfare. The growing trend towards improved civic facilities, usually financed by increased rating, required the council to justify their actions by stimulating civic consciousness and higher standards of behaviour among the citizens. Therefore the new amenities had to be subject to measures for control of the working classes so that improved behaviour was effectively guaranteed, or so it would have appeared to the outside observer. At the forefront of this drive for civic respectability came the Nonconformist elite, especially the Queen Street Congregationalists, inspired by Rev Dale’s message of civic duty and with an increasing tendency to be regarded as the enemies of popular pleasure.

¹ A. J. Donajgrodski (ed), *Social Control in Nineteenth Century Britain* (London, 1977), 21-2.

² This mental separation, described as ‘the utter divorce between practice and profession’, is discussed in W. E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870* (Yale, 1957), 405.

As Donajgrodski identified in the title quotation of this chapter, the social control which was an integral part of this new civic environment was increasingly exerted through the indirect agencies of education, cultural and recreational facilities and a wide spectrum of associational activity. The development and significance of this new cultural landscape will be examined by studying the main facilities which were established and considering the associated arguments. The intended purpose of each facility will be examined together with an assessment of support, both financial and personal. There is a further important aspect of this subject which is to consider how cultural facilities and associations acted as matrices of contact through which civic groups with political, religious, social and other interests could meet and expand their influence. These questions will be addressed by dividing the cultural features of the town into four groups:

1. Education – schools, institutes and the Free Library;
2. The Art Gallery/Museum;
3. Parks, baths and public space;
4. Associations and societies.

Finally, the attempt to abolish the Wolverhampton Fair in 1876 is analysed and used to illustrate the tensions which were increasingly evident between the Tory/Anglican and Liberal/Nonconformist factions.

8.1 Education

8.1.1 Schools

In late Victorian England, competing religious institutions regarded educational policy as ‘a convenient and natural way of expressing conflict’.³ In Wolverhampton, education was a very divisive subject indeed, riven continually by tension between religious denominations contending with each other for the hearts and minds of children. By 1870 when the first school board was elected only 45 per cent of children aged 5 to 13 attended school and all children received a total of 3¾ years schooling. Although this record was better than those of neighbouring Black Country communities such as Bilston, Wednesfield and Willenhall, it was unacceptable in national terms.⁴ The new school boards, generally dominated by Nonconformists who favoured unsectarian education, made creditable progress and standards improved steadily through the fourth quarter of the nineteenth century. Between 1870 and 1899, the figures for attendance and standards almost doubled. By 1899 80 per cent of children aged 5 to 13 attended school and all children received 6½ years at school. Compulsory attendance had been introduced in 1872 and the greatest educational progress was made

³ J.H.S. Kent, ‘The Role of Religion in the Cultural Structure of the later Victorian City’ in R. J. Morris and R. Rodger (eds), *The Victorian City: A Reader in British Urban History 1820-1914* (London, 1993), 335.

⁴ G. J. Barnsby, *A History of Education in Wolverhampton 1800-1972* (Wolverhampton, 1990), 6.

in the 1880s. Barnsby claimed that by 1885, the Wolverhampton board schools had better results than the national average and this advantage was still evident in 1898.⁵

The School Board was in existence from 1870 to 1902 when the control of elementary education passed to the County Borough Council. During the lifetime of the Board, educational standards were much improved, particularly for the working classes. Furthermore, as Barnsby noted 'the restricting influence of religious control of education was largely eliminated'. In 1891 all of the Board Schools became free and by 1905 fees had been abolished for all elementary schools, both Board and voluntary.⁶ The situation with regard to secondary education was much less straightforward. Fees and endowments were involved and although the schools were not directly controlled by the council, nevertheless the school trustees frequently appealed to the council for funds. The principal school was Wolverhampton Grammar School which became a focal point for the polarisation of social and political differences. The Grammar School was established by Sir Stephen Jenyns for the Merchant Taylor's Company in 1512 and was intended to be a free school 'for the instruction of boys in good manners and learning'.⁷ At that time grammar schools were intended to provide for 'the relatively poor, the poor relations of the upper classes, the middle classes, whether country or town, the younger sons of the nobility and farmers, the lesser landowners, the prosperous tradesmen'. Although the school was mainly intended to benefit the people of Wolverhampton, there was no clear limit placed on the distance from which pupils could be drawn. All of these conditions had been vulnerable to the passage of time. In 1852 there were only 50 pupils, most of whom were from some distance away and the school was clearly of little direct benefit to Wolverhampton. Accordingly Joseph Walker (mayor 1850) organised the town council to petition the Court of Chancery to approve reorganisation with new trustees recommended by the borough. This request was accepted and improvement began with the school firmly linked to the town and better placed to serve the middle classes of Wolverhampton.

The school premises, situated in the town centre, were judged to have become unsuitable. The Inspector of Schools for Stafford wrote to the *Wolverhampton Chronicle* that the existing site was 'hemmed in with houses and manufactories': boys needed open air and space if the school was 'to provide sound healthy manly education for the children of the middle class'.⁸ The headmaster gave his opinion that parents would not send children to 'such an objectionable part of town'.⁹ In 1860 it was known that the school was planning to move to the western outskirts, and it was felt that the move

⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁷ G. P. Mander, *The History of the Wolverhampton Grammar School* (Wolverhampton, 1913), 29.

⁸ *Wolverhampton Chronicle* [hereafter *WC*], 11 April 1860.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 21 March 1860.

by up to three miles would deter many pupils from the town.¹⁰ This was regarded as against Jenyns' original wishes and would only 'suit those who do not wish their sons to mix with commercial boys and the sons of shopkeepers, the class for whose benefit there is no doubt the school was founded'.¹¹ Some correspondents defended a measure of social exclusivity and insisted that this was not a school 'for the mere mob'.¹² For a time, the curriculum also came under debate. The headmaster Rev Thomas Campbell suggested that the school needed to be able to give a commercial education; the predominantly classical education was 'only adapted to high classes of the town'.¹³ Councillor Sidney also wrote that the classics were too dominant and emphasised that the school must be free. Correspondence in the *Wolverhampton Chronicle* made adverse comparison with Birmingham which was claimed to have 'good free schools for the people'.¹⁴

By 1865 a new headmaster, Thomas Beach, was appointed and the classical tradition was saved. Beach was a Tory Church of England supporter of very strong convictions; actively opposed to Nonconformity, he set the tone of the school through to 1889. Beach continued the campaign to move the school and wrote in 1868 to the trustees 'I do not complain of the present buildings as being unhealthy but they are unfit and incommodious to a degree which is scarcely credible to those who have no daily experience of them'.¹⁵

In 1872 a new governing body was appointed for the school, giving a close formal linkage to the town council. The mayor and the chairman of the school board became ex-officio governors: two members were elected from each of three bodies – the school board, the council, and the magistrates. Four additional members were co-opted.¹⁶ The mayor W. H. Jones then convened a meeting of all interested parties to raise funds for the school and £1,000 was subscribed immediately by those present. Thus the council led by its Congregationalist mayor became the central source of school funding which was expanded very successfully. In 1874 the school was moved to its present position one mile west of the town centre on Compton Road at a building cost of about £25,000. Under the

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 29 February 1860.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 10 April 1861.

¹² *Ibid.*, 8 May 1861.

¹³ G. P. Mander, *History of Wolverhampton Grammar School*, 245. See also *WC*, 21 March 1860.

¹⁴ *WC*, 22 and 29 May 1861. In *Going to Markets and Grammar Schools*, Vol.II (London, 1870), 604-15, George Griffith reviewed the debate about the future of Wolverhampton Grammar School. Griffith made extensive comparison with other schools and concluded by supporting a mixture of classical and commercial education and by opposing the imposition of fees. Griffith proposed these views at a public meeting in Wolverhampton Town Hall on 27 May 1864, at which Sidney also spoke.

¹⁵ G. P. Mander, *History of Wolverhampton Grammar School*, 253.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 391. Mander wrote that with the establishment of the new governing body 'Democratic control continued to increase'. Mander also noted contemporary correspondence which stressed that the governing body should be free from 'local prejudice and influences' but should be 'in sympathy with the community among whom the foundation works'.

headship of Beach the school flourished; by the end of the nineteenth century, the number of pupils had risen to 230.¹⁷

The moral dilemma for dissenting members of the town council was that they were directly involved in raising support for a school whose headmaster Thomas Beach was a high Tory Church of England man violently opposed to Nonconformity.¹⁸ The problem, if indeed it existed at a personal level, was solved by the pragmatic approach which was becoming a characteristic of Wolverhampton's burgeoning industrial society. The Grammar School had always provided an education which was capable of elevating the status of its pupils. In 1854, of the 66 pupils (the parents of all but seven being resident in Wolverhampton) not more than three of the fathers had been educated at the school. However, the school provided a first-rate education and many Nonconformists took advantage of this opportunity for their sons. The school register from 1830 to 1887 shows over 60 sons of councillors or senior municipal officials as pupils including at least twelve sons of prominent Nonconformists. Furthermore, the two Jones Brothers, William H. and Joseph, who were senior members of the Snow Hill Congregational chapel and also magistrates and mayors, were both governors of the school.¹⁹

There was a distinction between Congregationalists from Snow Hill such as the Jones brothers and their fellow Congregationalists who attended Queen Street and whose religious observance was of a more fundamental kind. The Queen Street men do not appear to have been involved either as trustees or latterly as governors, and did not send their sons to the school. Instead they were concerned from 1862 with the promotion of a new school, Tettenhall College, which was to be a Free Church school dedicated 'to provide a Liberal education for the sons of Non-conformists'.²⁰ The founders saw this project as the only means of educating their sons into better prospects without running the risk of them being influenced to desert the Nonconformity of their parents.

Tettenhall College was established in 1863. The founders included the Shaw brothers, who were successful local merchants and bankers, Thomas Bantock (mayor 1869), Samuel Dickinson (mayor

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 262.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 259 recorded that Beach was scornful of any education which he deemed to be modern or commercial. One old pupil wrote 'I remember asking if I could learn shorthand. His reply was that that was the worst of having a father who was a miserable Radical and that I should be a disgrace to the School if I could not employ some miserable creature to write shorthand for me.'

¹⁹ *Wolverhampton Grammar School Register 1515-1920*, edited by J. Ryan and H. R. Thomas and published at Kendal in 1926 is fairly comprehensive for the period under study and was the source of the above information. The background of pupils was further described by an earlier headmaster Rev W. Tindall who wrote in 1819 'there was a fashion in education and that all the gentry who could afford it sent their sons to Rugby ... many disliked to send their sons to Wolverhampton on account of its being a manufacturing town and ... the school was generally frequented by the sons of respectable tradesmen in the town.' (See Mander, *op.cit.*, 216.) The Register and other relevant papers were consulted in the school library, and I should like to express my gratitude for being given access to this collection.

²⁰ C. V. Hancock, *The History of Tettenhall College* (Wolverhampton, 1963), 36.

1876) and the manufacturer S. T. Mander. All these men were senior members of Queen Street chapel. The minister at Queen Street Rev T. G. Horton was a founder and the leading Congregationalist Rev R. W. Dale of Birmingham was closely involved. Wealthy sympathisers in London, Birmingham and Manchester also gave assistance.

The founders raised finance by issuing share capital which was mostly taken up by the merchant classes and tradesmen of the West Midlands.²¹ The school was established two miles west of the town centre in what the initial advertisement described as 'the picturesque and highly salubrious village of Tettenhall'. It was only on sectarian terms, however, that Tettenhall College was able to compete with the Grammar School. The headmaster of the latter school, Thomas Beach, was totally opposed to any organisation with perceived radical connections and took a personal interest in ensuring that the Grammar School remained overwhelmingly superior in education and also in sporting achievement. It was not surprising that those Nonconformists who could overcome their sectarian scruples preferred to send their sons to the Grammar School.

Both the Grammar School and Tettenhall College received municipal support either directly or indirectly from prominent council members. By contrast, the Royal Wolverhampton School, originally founded in 1850 as the Orphan Asylum, did not receive significant municipal support. The declared purpose of the founder, John Lees, was

to afford suitable relief to destitute orphans or fatherless children, to preserve them from the walks of vice and profligacy, to provide them with clothing and maintenance, to engender habits of industry, to train them up in the paths of religion and virtue agreeably to the formularies of the Church of England, and ultimately to place them in situations where their principles would not be endangered.²²

Both sexes were to be provided for and at the opening ceremony a minister expressed the hope that the school would soon attract support from the town and its inhabitants. Despite the worthy aims of the school, the municipal support for which hopes had been raised, was not forthcoming. The Corporation refused to make any grant to the new school except a nugatory £16 in 1896. It is ironic that despite this parsimonious attitude, the town council often included the Orphan Asylum, as it then was, in their annual listing of successful charitable and public institutions. Fortunately, however, there was much support from private individuals and from freemasons.²³ The school remained largely dependent upon

²¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

²² F. L. Steward, *History of Royal Wolverhampton School 1850-1950* (Wolverhampton, 1950). I am grateful to Mr D. R. Penn, the Bursar, for providing much helpful information.

²³ External supporters included, for example, the Duke of Cleveland, the Earl of Dartmouth and the Bishop of Lichfield.

From the late nineteenth century onwards 'Freemasons acquired increasing influence over the school' both as governors and as parents of pupils. See M. W. Greenslade and D. A. Johnson (eds), *A History of the County of Stafford*, VI (Oxford, 1979), 180.

charity but this was sufficiently generous to finance success; pupil numbers rose from 13 in 1850 to 250 in 1892. Royal patronage was granted in 1900.

The two schools that received the greatest benefit from municipal support, Wolverhampton Grammar School and Tettenhall College, represented for the most part the Church of England and old Dissent respectively, the latter denomination being centred upon Queen Street Congregational chapel. Both schools provided a traditional classically-based form of education. Any practical or scientific type of education was disdained and this attitude came to be regarded as a threat to the technical skills of the town. The fortunes of Wolverhampton were largely dependent upon trade and industry, especially skilled industry such as enamelling, for example, and a more technical form of education was essential. This came to be provided by new structures of adult education including mechanics' institutes, working men's colleges and evening classes organised at the new Free Library. In the founding and control of this adult education, Nonconformists were prominent.

8.1.2 Adult Education – Mechanics' Institutes and the Free Library

The original Mechanics' Institute was founded in 1827 by a group consisting of bankers, manufacturers and dissenting ministers. Their objective was to improve the education of the young men of the town, clerks, shop assistants, etc. mainly through provision of a library. Later, in 1835, a sale of shares financed the move to larger premises in Queen Street. Leading members at this stage included Rev John Roaf (minister at Queen Street Congregational chapel), the iron master John Barker (later High Sheriff of Staffordshire), the nail manufacturer Joseph Walker (mayor 1850) and the japanner Edward Perry (mayor 1855-57). However, after a promising start, enthusiasm faded and by 1845 the library and newsroom had fallen into disuse and been closed.²⁴ Interest was not completely dead, however, and in 1847 a meeting attended by young men and others resolved 'to form a society for the diffusion of useful knowledge among its members by the delivery of lectures, circulation of books, public discussions, etc.' It was agreed that a fresh start should be made and more than 100 young men paid their first annual subscription of 10 shillings. At the opening ceremony G. B. Thorneycroft, soon to become the first mayor, stated that 'It was intended to provide reading rooms and deliver lectures, in order to afford the young men in Wolverhampton an opportunity to spend their evening, or any other leisure time, in the acquirement of useful knowledge, instead of devoting it to other pursuits from which they could not possibly derive the same advantage.' The Rev J. B. Owen of Bilston saw the new Institute as 'an honest conspiracy against mental insolence and social barbarism – a noble rival to the beershop and the gambling table': the development was particularly welcome at a time when 'temptations to sensuality and excess' were 'within reach of all classes'.²⁵

²⁴ J. Jones, *Historical Sketch of the Literary Institutions of Wolverhampton 1794-1897* (London, 1897), 36-47.

²⁵ *WC*, 1 April 1847.

The revitalised institute was to be known as 'The Wolverhampton Athenaeum and Mechanics' Library' conveniently shortened to 'The Athenaeum' with Dr E. H. Coleman as the first President. The new committee, which was numerous and broadly based, inherited a debt of £80 from the previous institute but pronounced themselves to be 'sanguine of success'. A new code of laws was devised, the first of which was that in order to avoid undesirable controversy 'divinity and party politics shall be rigidly excluded'. By 1848 the Athenaeum enjoyed some success but appealed for more members, the figure having dropped from 280 to 274 in the first year.²⁶ By 1849 the figure was down to 253 and the appeal was renewed for more young men who were capable of 'appreciating the importance of self-culture'.²⁷ By 1850 numbers had risen to 289. By 1851 membership was up again at 371 and both reading room and lectures were well attended.²⁸ Rev J. B. Owen of Bilston returned to speak and urged support for the Athenaeum; he claimed that 'a similar institution had effected a great improvement in the habits of the people in his own beloved town of Bilston'.²⁹ Despite these early encouragements, the Athenaeum did not prosper. Membership declined and by 1857 the Secretary was reporting with 'regret that the institution was not receiving that support from the public which it deserved'. Thereafter prospects continued to decline until eventually in 1869 the assets of the Athenaeum were transferred to the new Free Library.³⁰

Apart from declining enthusiasm, another important factor in the demise of the Athenaeum was in a sense self-inflicted in that it initiated the formation of a Working-Men's College and thus divided its own potential membership. The idea arose in 1856 when at the annual meeting it was suggested that such a college would be of great benefit, complementing the occasional lectures at the Athenaeum by a systematic course of instruction in literature, science and art. Accordingly a number of leading clergymen, professionals and businessmen advertised their intention to set up the Wolverhampton Working-Men's College.³¹ The students had to be over 16 years of age, able to read and write, and possessing a simple understanding of arithmetic. The subjects to be taught would include natural history, philosophy, geometry, political economy and logic. The old Grammar School building in John Street was rented as the home of the new college.³² Through preliminary meetings in churches

²⁶ WC reported on the annual meeting held on 3 January 1848 and stated that a lecture had been given during the previous week on 'The Geological Evidence of the Earth's Antiquity'. This must have been a very controversial subject in religious Wolverhampton. The speaker, Mr W. R. Lowe, alluded to the 'storm of opposition with which ... science had had to contend'. He concluded with 'an earnest defence of Geology against the charge of leading to Atheistic or loose theological opinions, arguing that on the contrary, it not only proves the existence of a Great First Cause, but that uniformity of design and operation forms one of the most striking of the divine attributes.'

²⁷ WC reported thus on the annual meeting held on 1 January 1849 and commented that the Athenaeum was hopeful of instituting a school of design because 'one of the staple trades of this town is intimately connected with drawing and painting'.

²⁸ WC, 6 January 1851.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 20 January 1851.

³⁰ J. Jones, *Historical Sketch*, 62.

³¹ WC, 9 September 1857.

³² J. Jones, *Historical Sketch*, 65-74.

and chapels, working class support was encouraged and introductory classes were organised for those who could not meet the admission standards. At the inaugural meeting in October 1857 the Chairman Rev Dr Newman, rector of St Peter's church, defined the aim of the college which was 'to provide for the working-classes the means of education and practical mental improvement on such a basis as would, they hoped, tend to bridge over the gulf that at present divided the different classes from each other, and weld them together in one common bond of union'.³³

The college opened with 100 students and thirteen different classes. The governing board was principally drawn from those associated with the Church of England. The President was Lord Wrottesley who, after two years, was succeeded by the Earl of Dartmouth. The students, mostly from working class and artisan backgrounds, were quite successful in external examinations. Unfortunately by 1864 the numbers of students and of the voluntary teachers were both falling. By the end of 1864, the total number of students was down to 45 and their fees added to the other sources of income were insufficient to meet the running expenses of £60 p.a. The inevitable collapse of the college after just eight years was attributed to students finding that 'the road to learning was not as easy as they anticipated' and also to young men being attracted away to the newly-formed Companies of Rifle Volunteers.³⁴

Although both the Mechanics' Institute and the Working Men's College had failed by the mid-1860s, there remained a great thirst for education among working men and this was eventually satisfied by the establishment and continued success of evening classes attached to the new free library opened in 1870. By that time, the public attitudes to education had become more favourable, resistance from ratepayers was crumbling and 'an eloquent and resourceful individual, the Liberal Methodist A. C. Pratt, had convinced a public meeting and the council that a free library was urgently required. Pratt's work was yet another illustration of the significant role of Nonconformists in promoting adult education in Wolverhampton.

8.2 Libraries and the Art Gallery/Museum

8.2.1 Libraries

Wolverhampton acquired a subscription library in 1795. It was established by a group of bankers, manufacturers and merchants and the first president was the Radical banker Richard Fryer. As the membership and book stock increased, the library moved from King Street to Queen Street and then in 1861 (financed by a share issue) to a new building in Waterloo Road. At this time the number of

³³ *Ibid.*, 67. Dr Newman conceded that the 'bond of union and sympathy which ought ever to exist between the promoters and teachers of such institutions and those whom they desired to benefit' had been insufficient and this had been a main contributor to the failure of mechanics' institutes.

³⁴ J. Jones, *Historical Sketch*, 73. See also J. & J. Rowley, 'The Promotion of Adult Education in Wolverhampton, 1827-1869', *West Midlands Studies*, 8 (1975), 1-16.

subscribers was 321 and the library had 12,000 books. At the end of the period under study, 1888, the library remained in Waterloo Road and was well equipped and reasonably financially stable.³⁵ The subscription was one guinea, and in addition there was a joining fee for new members which was variously between two and three guineas. These relatively high costs meant that membership was confined to the well-off middle and upper classes. Certainly membership was well beyond the wages of the working classes.³⁶

Throughout the mid-nineteenth century there was a rising tide of opinion in Wolverhampton that the town needed a free library. After 1850 the comparison with other towns which already provided this facility was used by correspondents to the local paper urging Wolverhampton not to fall behind. 'A merchant's clerk', writing in 1854, made the comparison with Birmingham, Edinburgh, Liverpool and Manchester. Although his main contention was a plea for Saturday to become a half-day holiday, as these other towns had granted, he also referred to libraries together with 'debating societies, and mutual instruction classes then gymnastic grounds and a variety of associations formed to call forth all the noble attributes implanted in man by his maker.'³⁷ On a more practical level it was known that national organisations based in London were sending many documents to Wolverhampton as a matter of course and that they were inadequately stored. A new free library would provide a suitable repository.³⁸

The first attempt by the council to address the question of a free library became confused by being coupled with the separate problem of how to rescue the failing School of Art in Darlington Street. This school, established in 1854, was running out of funds and could not attract local support. Councillor C. B. Mander proposed that by taking advantage of the permissive Free Library Act of 1855 the council would be permitted to impose a 1d rate which would yield £500 p.a. This sum would not only rescue the School of Art through an extended financing scheme, but would also be sufficient to provide £220 towards establishing a free library. This proposal was agreed in council but with misgivings as to whether it would be acceptable to the ratepayers.³⁹ The controversy continued in the *Wolverhampton Chronicle* correspondence columns. There was support for rescuing the School of

³⁵ J. Jones, *Historical Sketch*, 1-35. In 1842, the library encountered serious political antagonism between Conservatives and Whigs/Radicals over a proposal to accept a memorial bust of a founder who was also a prominent Unitarian. This storm in a teacup subsided when the offer of the bust was withdrawn. However, the incident serves to emphasise the divisive potential of religious/political affiliation in Wolverhampton.

³⁶ G. J. Barnsby, *Socialism in Birmingham and the Black Country 1850-1939* (Wolverhampton, 1998), 25 and 34-6 suggests that local wages for a working man at this time were variable between about 15 and 25 shillings per week. Only a limited number of 'labour aristocrats' would earn as much as £2 a week. Even the original 1847 Athenaeum subscription of 10 shillings for the year represented an appreciable cost for the working man.

³⁷ *WC*, 11 January 1854.

³⁸ J. Jones, *Historical Sketch*, 75-7.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 77-81.

Art. Towns in north Staffordshire were claimed to have good schools of art and Wolverhampton was accused of being '50 years behind Birmingham in all things which go to make a great and good people'.⁴⁰ Advocates of a free library for 'only a penny on the rates' asked the questions 'What will the Queen and her intelligent consort think?'⁴¹ Is our town to be renowned both far and near for its standards of mammon and ignorance?' Councillor Sidney as usual demanded economy and gave his views on a free library: 'I hear of no class who ask for it.'⁴²

The mayor, Benjamin Hicklin, convened a public meeting of ratepayers to decide on the question and this took place on 26 June 1860 with a large and unruly attendance. The previous mayor, John Hartley, supported by Hicklin proposed that 'a Free Library in connection with the School of Art would add greatly to the commercial prosperity of the town'. They were shouted down in conditions described by the *Wolverhampton Chronicle* as 'lynch law'.⁴³ Alderman G. L. Underhill opposed the motion, his speech being received without interruption. The mayor put the motion to the meeting amid cries of 'No, no, we don't want it, and we won't have it.' Inevitably, defeat was overwhelming.⁴⁴ Writers to the *Wolverhampton Chronicle* were very dismayed by the conduct of this meeting. Even opponents of the motion wrote to protest that supporters did not receive a fair hearing and asked whether it was 'a meeting of bulldogs or ratepayers'.⁴⁵ The editorial reminded readers that the Free Library and School of Art were not required by the wealthier classes but by the poorer and some middle classes. Nevertheless these unruly proceedings brought an end to the free library project for a further eight years.

In 1868, when a group of men met to consider how to re-open the free library campaign, both the Athenaeum and the Working Men's College were fading fast. The committee of the Athenaeum had agreed in principle that their books and other assets would be handed over to the corporation as a gift to assist in setting up a free library and reading room. The time seemed to be opportune, although in 1867 the mayor Sir John Morris had given his view that the free library movement would be rejected again.⁴⁶ Nevertheless the Methodist journalist A. C. Pratt understood that the way forward was to appeal to the people – the working classes, to visit factories and workplaces and to obtain support before requesting the necessary public meeting of ratepayers. Pratt and his supporters soon identified many articulate working men who were keen to help, and thirteen of these were co-opted on to the committee. Pratt then visited a range of other towns that already had free libraries; once again the comparison with elsewhere would provide a powerful argument in the context of civic identity and

⁴⁰ WC, 30 May 1860.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 6 June 1860.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 20 June 1860.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 4 July 1860.

⁴⁴ J. Jones, *Historical Sketch*, 82-3.

⁴⁵ WC, 4 July 1860.

pride. Four Midland towns of different sizes had free libraries which were well accepted by their inhabitants. The relatively small neighbouring towns of Kidderminster and Walsall represented particularly cogent examples of the benefits of having such a library.

Pratt and his committee then decided that they should determine the magnitude of their support within the town before asking the Athenaeum to confirm their willingness to transfer assets. They re-visited factories and workplaces all over Wolverhampton confirming that they had massive support. A petition addressed to the mayor asking him to convene a public meeting of ratepayers to re-open the question of a free library received over 900 signatures. The Athenaeum committee formally approved the transfer of assets. Extensive canvassing around the town resulted in Pratt's petition attracting many more signatures from across all social classes. The final tally of names included 7 borough magistrates, 12 leading ministers of religion, 29 members of the town council, 22 of the principal merchants and manufacturers, 15 professional men, 94 shopkeepers, clerks and private residents, and 980 artisans and mechanics.⁴⁷

This impressive confirmation of support was exhibited at the public meeting called by the mayor Alderman Ironmonger on 8 February 1869. The mayor asked for a fair hearing to be given to all speakers and this was observed without exception. Sir John Morris, who had originally been lukewarm when approached by Pratt, had become convinced and said that 'Wolverhampton ought no longer to be behind other towns in placing within the reach of the inhabitants generally the means of self-improvement and moral and social elevation which the legislature had in view when these important Acts were placed upon the statute book.' He proposed the motion 'That the Free Libraries Acts (1855) be and are hereby adopted for the municipal Borough of Wolverhampton'.⁴⁸ Notably the motion was seconded by Thomas Whittall, a carpenter, who said that

the question before the meeting was essentially a working man's question; it had been largely supported by working men so far, and he asked the working men present in that hall that night to show their appreciation of what was so important to the future well-being of themselves and their children by holding up both hands in support of the adoption of the Acts.⁴⁹

The atmosphere this time was totally different to that of the 1860 meeting. There was great enthusiasm for the motion which was carried almost unanimously. Once again the energy and eloquence of one resourceful individual had brought about a sea change in the affairs of Wolverhampton. This success was celebrated by the group who had campaigned for the free library with a festival at which 'between four and five hundred working-men and their wives sat down to a bountiful tea'. Speeches delivered on this occasion were congratulatory but also made much of the

⁴⁶ J. Jones, *Historical Sketch*, 87.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 100.

advantage which the new library would bring to local industry by extending scientific and technical knowledge.

The first library committee was elected and included the mayor (Alderman Ironmonger) together with nine other members of council.⁵⁰ A. C. Pratt was elected to the committee together with a clergyman, two teachers and three representatives of the working class. James Walker (mayor 1870) was elected as chairman, a position which he held for 15 years until his death in 1883. After some refurbishment of premises, the new library was officially opened on 30 September 1870 with the customary ceremony and speeches. The new inclusion of the working class in the affairs of the town was signified by the mayor who invited over 1,100 working men and their wives to 'a substantial tea in the Agricultural Hall'. The working class were addressed by local dignitaries who gave them 'some excellent advice as to how they might most profitably use those advantages for their own mental improvement, for making their homes brighter, and for elevating their condition in the social scale'.⁵¹

By the end of 1870 the library had 8,000 books and was very well supported: 2,150 people were registered borrowers and the weekly issue of books was averaging 2,000. The library committee became much concerned with the choice of books and debated whether controversial political or religious works should be available.⁵² Eventually the enlightened decision was taken that such works should be included. This decision marked a very significant advance in political and religious tolerance especially when considering that such works would be freely accessible to the working classes. It represented a small indication that the religious and political conflict which had hindered the progress of governance during the early years of incorporation was beginning to abate by the 1870s.

⁵⁰ The first Free Library Committee consisted of: Alderman James Walker (Chairman), the Mayor (Alderman Ironmonger), Aldermen T. Bantock, H. H. Fowler, J. Langman and Sir John Morris, Councillors J. W. Barker, W. H. Jones, F. Turton and J. E. Underhill. The general body of ratepayers were represented by the additional members Rev J. H. Iles, Mr T. Beach (headmaster of the Grammar School), Mr R. A. Kettle, Dr J. N. Langlely (schoolmaster), A. C. Pratt, R. Markland, Joseph Shaw and William Stanford (the last three named were representatives of the working class). *WC*, 19 November 1879, reported the comments of the Library Committee Chairman, Alderman James Walker, that 'the Council took the wise precaution of placing a few respectable working men on the committee' and also that the committee had made an 'excellent choice of Elliott' (as librarian) although Walker admitted to having opposed the appointment of Elliott 'on grounds of his having been a working man'.

⁵¹ J. Jones, *Historical Sketch*, 110. On the subject of working class education it may be noted that the MP Sir Charles Villiers commented that it was 'desirable that the people for whom free libraries were established should know as much as those above them in the social scale, or at least to have no restriction placed.' See *WC*, 5 January 1876.

⁵² J. Jones, *Historical Sketch*, 113-5 under the heading of 'controversial literature' listed 'Essays and Reviews' (1960) which took a broad view critical of Church of England doctrine and 'Tracts for the Times' (1833) published by the Oxford Movement which had Anglo-Catholic views. Both of these works would have been anathema to the strict Anglican and Nonconformist alike.

In 1880 the premises were extended considerably with a new reference library and improvements to reading rooms and teaching areas. Loan rates for all books were rising steadily but in the year 30 September 1879 to 30 September 1880 the number of books issued fell by 5 per cent. In his annual report as chairman, Alderman Walker drew comfort from his observation that the decline was mainly in works of fiction. Walker asserted that these figures pointed 'to the very cheering fact that not only is the number of persons borrowing books from the lending library largely increasing, but that the increase of persons using the library for the purpose of making themselves acquainted with substantial and useful literature is still larger'.⁵³ He failed to mention, however, that fiction was easily the largest single category loaned out at 69 per cent of the total.⁵⁴

The analysis shown in Appendix 4 demonstrated that the library was patronised by a wide range of mainly working class borrowers; the most numerous single group was that of clerks and bookkeepers. Evening classes across 20 subjects attracted an average of 28 students to each class.⁵⁵ The choice of reading by borrowers indicated a remarkable desire for self-improvement. The literature selected by young working men as shown in Appendix 4 needs no further comment. The fact that volumes of *Punch* were the predominant choice from the Reference Library is almost reassuring evidence that some relaxation was possible for these earnest readers.⁵⁶

The library continued to prosper and moved to larger premises in Garrick Street which, in particular, enabled more evening classes to be held. After the death of James Walker in 1883, Alderman Joseph Jones (mayor 1887) was appointed as the second chairman. Jones was a corrugated iron manufacturer and encouraged the practical teaching of science with the addition of chemical laboratories opened in 1888. By 1902 the library was conducting 78 classes for 1,359 students and was again in need of larger premises. The required move came in 1902 when the library was transferred to its present site on Snow Hill.⁵⁷

⁵³ See Wolverhampton Free Library Committee, *Eleventh annual report*, 25 October 1880.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ The Free Library classes which began in 1873 were a remarkable innovation, among the first evening classes for adults to be held in the country. It has been claimed that in the beginning they were certainly the most extensive. Previous attempts to institute adult education in Wolverhampton had always failed; rival classes set up by the School Board also failed. The Free Library classes, however, went on to achieve stability and success. They offered a wide range of studies often with vocational subjects, e.g. domestic economy and typewriting. They provided a continuity of learning for both men and women. See P. A. Quirke, 'The Wolverhampton Free Library and its Adult Evening Classes 1873-1902', (University of Birmingham MEd thesis, 1983).

⁵⁶ The preponderance of fiction in the early months of the library at 73% of the stock attracted some criticism from ratepayers. A correspondent for the *Wolverhampton Chronicle*, 1 March 1871, accused the Committee of 'flooding the library ... with the most trashy and unwholesome literature'. 'No more three-volume novels' was the plea. A. C. Pratt replied in the issue of 22 March 1871 stating the policy of providing 'books of all classes for all classes of readers saving and excepting the actually immoral'. He added that in his experience 'people graduate from fiction upwards'.

⁵⁷ The opening of the new library in 1902 was accompanied by an ambitious Arts and Industrial Exhibition. Sir Henry Fowler MP commented at the ceremony that 'Wolverhampton was of greater

8.2.2 The Art Gallery/Museum

From the mid-nineteenth century, the idea of the 'Palace of art' to be built in leading provincial cities and towns gained wide acceptance.⁵⁸ It was considered that paintings and other cultural exhibits should be placed in special buildings whose function would be readily identifiable from their external appearance. The Great Exhibition of 1851 generated interest in assembling collections of objects which had either a cultural or an educational value or more usually a combination of the two. The Museums Act of 1845 and the Museums and Libraries Act of 1850 enabled local boroughs to charge a proportion of rates in order to establish these public amenities, but moves to implement this provision were slow in coming. The more likely method of establishing such facilities was by acquiring existing buildings and collections which had often been amassed by wealthy collectors or by local societies. Many of these collections did not contain many works of art but were primarily scientific, especially in such subjects as geology. Interest in exhibiting art, especially British art, built up in the second half of the nineteenth century. Sometimes, private collections were bequeathed to civic galleries and often became the foundation (and also the decisive factor in choice of theme) for provincial collections.

In the north of England there was a movement directed towards the creation of new art galleries in the poorer areas of cities showing paintings provided on temporary loan.⁵⁹ The movement was supported by John Ruskin; leading artists either lent or gave pictures and also gave financial assistance and generous bequests. At the opening ceremonies of these galleries, speakers emphasised the desirability of so educating the masses and giving them the opportunity of achieving greater sensibility through art. The results of the movement were mostly confined to large cities such as Glasgow, Birmingham and Sheffield where there was much civic pride invested in the arts.

It must have appeared unlikely in 1880 that Wolverhampton council would recommend the establishment of an art gallery/museum as an additional expense on the town rates. However, in common with some other urban centres, a private donation enabled the town to acquire an excellent art gallery. A wealthy local builder, Philip Horsman, who had been the contractor for the new town hall opened in 1871, gave £5,000 for the construction of an art gallery on condition that the council provided a suitable site. The cost of the project eventually rose to £8,500 which Horsman paid in full.⁶⁰ The gallery was built to a classical Grecian design on a site in Lichfield Street close to the town centre and was opened on 30 May 1884. At the opening ceremony H. H. Fowler (by then Sir Henry and MP) spoke of the civic progress which had been made and of the educational value of the new

importance ... as a commercial centre than ever before.' See W. H. Jones, *Story of the Municipal Life* (London, 1903), 260-2.

⁵⁸ G. A. Waterfield, ed., *Palaces of Art: Art galleries in Britain 1790-1990* (London, 1991).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

amenity. The mayor provided lunch for 500 guests. A few days later there was a large demonstration of support by local friendly societies who walked to the gallery in procession and were received by the mayor. H. H. Fowler spoke again, looking forward to a golden age in which every man would be 'educated and sober'; there would come then 'such a scene of national prosperity as the world had never yet witnessed, and the English people would be "the heir of all the ages"'.⁶¹

The gallery was fortunate from the start in having sufficient suitable exhibits including 650 pictures. There were examples of needlework sent by the Queen and the royal family. Industry was very well represented with 400 exhibitors showing iron, steel and metal goods across all local trades. The brothers John and Joseph Jones, mayors in 1878-1880 and 1887 respectively had given £1,000 towards purchasing works of art.

In 1883 Alderman Sidney Cartwright had died and left to the art gallery his extensive collection of paintings valued then at £17,000.⁶² With the addition of a further large bequest willed by Horsman and received after his death in 1890, private donations placed the art gallery in a remarkably fortunate position. By contrast, for example, Bristol Art Gallery opened in 1905 and paid for by Sir W. H. Wills had only twelve pictures and had no funds to buy more: it became an expensive building of little value which was rarely visited.⁶³ The Wolverhampton Art Gallery, on the other hand, was popular with all classes from the start. In 1896 the Art Committee reported a daily average of 445 visitors.⁶⁴

The building of the art gallery and its associated museum also had a valuable side effect in that it enabled the council to resolve at last the problem of the School of Art. Originally based in Darlington Street and opened in 1854, the school was then regarded as an essential centre to promote 'excellence in workmanship and design' in the face of increasing industrial competition from Europe and the United States.⁶⁵ This purpose was emphasised at the opening ceremony by Earl Granville. Rev J. B. Owen, vicar of St Mary's Bilston, pointed out that Manchester had to pay £40,000 p.a. to buy designs

⁶⁰ Horsman also gave £5,000 for building the new Eye Infirmary and made several other contributions to charitable causes. See *History of the Wolverhampton and Midland Counties Eye Infirmary* (Wolverhampton, 1931).

⁶¹ J. Jones, *Historical Sketch*, 142-4.

⁶² Cartwright, a toy manufacturer, deacon of Snow Hill Congregational chapel and a county magistrate, had specialised in collecting 'Cranbrook School' paintings which generally show an unrealistic impression of the 'respectable' poor living in relatively idyllic surroundings. This artistic preference was in ironic contrast to his ruthless record as an employer. His great wealth was generated by a factory which employed children at two shillings per week and he publicly deplored what he described as the 'interfering' activity of the Children's Employment Commission - See *WC*, 30 January 1867. I am indebted to my former colleague Dr Pedro Lorente, now of Saragossa University, for drawing my attention to the prevalence of Cranbrook School paintings in the collection at Wolverhampton Art Gallery. The work of the Cranbrook artists is described in J. Maas, *Victorian Painters* (London, 1969), 232-4.

⁶³ H. E. Meller, *Leisure and the Changing City, 1870-1914* (London, 1976), 70.

⁶⁴ J. Jones, *Historical Sketch*, 145.

from France and Germany which those countries did not make available until they had been exploited to the full. The Wolverhampton artisan was regarded as easily capable of being educated to generate his own designs.

From 1854 the School of Art prospered for a few years but by 1860, support was flagging and financial difficulties were threatening. This was the time at which the motion to utilise the Library Act to combine salvation of the School of Art with founding a free library was so decisively and noisily rejected by the ratepayers. The committee and subscribers thereafter strove to keep the school alive and ultimately succeeded in maintaining the institution. The construction of the new art gallery and museum gave the opportunity to re-house the School of Art on the same new site and this was done with private subscriptions raising the required £5,575. Thereafter the School of Art continued successfully. By 1896 there were 383 students and examination results were commendable.⁶⁶

8.3 Parks, Baths and Public Space

8.3.1 Public Parks

By the end of the 1870s 'most of the major urban centres had acquired parks'.⁶⁷ These parks differed significantly not only in the amenities which they contained, but also in the amount of space which they provided. Some towns and cities had several parks so that all areas were served by some public space within easy reach. Other urban locations had just one major park, ideally, but not always, placed in a position which was relatively accessible from the town centre. One measure of public park provision was to quote the open space per head of population. In 1878, Bradford, with five large parks and one acre of open space to every 755 inhabitants, was regarded as 'our model city'.⁶⁸ In Liverpool the figure was 'one acre per 1,011 people, in Birmingham it was 1,665, in Sheffield 3,665 and Wolverhampton had no open space at all' wrote a contemporary observer.⁶⁹ Thus, Wolverhampton was once again condemned externally as a town which was deficient in making provision for the health and welfare of its inhabitants.

There had been several phases of permissive legislation which empowered councils to acquire land for recreational areas, and by the 1850s many urban centres had laid out parks and gardens.⁷⁰ In Wolverhampton there was a movement in favour of a park from the early years of incorporation. In 1851, a correspondent to the *Wolverhampton Chronicle* asked for the town race course to be converted

⁶⁵ WC, 18 April 1860.

⁶⁶ J. Jones, *Historical Sketch*, 162.

⁶⁷ H. Conway, *People's Parks: the Design and Development of Victorian Parks in Britain* (Cambridge, 1991), 208.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 208.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 208. With the opening of the West Park in 1881, Wolverhampton achieved a similar aggregate figure to Birmingham with one acre per 1,515 people although by that time Birmingham had seven parks.

into a people's park so that everyone would be enabled 'to reach a green field to breathe something like a pure atmosphere'.⁷¹ In 1852 the council was asked to open the cemetery to the public on Sunday so that they might walk there and gain some respite from 'The Tartarean atmosphere of the fumes and smoke of the North East Suburbs'.⁷² The appeal was rejected. Sunday opening was said by the council to have been tried previously and 'property had been considerably injured'.⁷³ not enough police were available to supervise Sunday opening. Inevitably comparison was made with other boroughs. In particular one writer drew attention to the splendid new park opened in Macclesfield and set up as a tribute to the memory of Sir Robert Peel.⁷⁴

None of these entreaties had much effect in Wolverhampton and interest in having a public park appeared to die out until being revived in the 1870s. In 1872, a correspondent to the *Wolverhampton Chronicle* complained that there was 'no people's park, neither any prospect of one'.⁷⁵ Furthermore, it was pointed out that trees had been cut down on the main roads leading south and west to Penn, Compton and Tettenhall, which were popular routes for recreational walks. The council was accused of acting 'as if health was of very minor importance': when there was no provision for healthy exercise, the working classes would congregate in 'pubs and such-like dens', whence came their 'low moral appearance'.

The issue of the people's park acquired some urgency in 1873 because it was known that the lease of the town racecourse owned by the Duke of Cleveland was about to run out. It was considered to be 'high time that a town of such importance as Wolverhampton, the capital of the Black Country, should have a public park' and the racecourse would be a suitable site.⁷⁶ The arguments surrounding the park issue developed into a mixture of civic consciousness and public health in both a general and moral sense. 'A working man' wrote to the *Wolverhampton Chronicle* asking for a people's park and pointing out that he and his group had to go out somewhere and that their only available resort was to the public house. It was 'all very well for upper classes to talk about abolishing the fair and races': their lack of support for a people's park was seen as consistent with their general policy of attacking working class pastimes.⁷⁷

This was the time of the Ballard Report which had delivered such a damning criticism of the state of public health in Wolverhampton when published in May 1874. Although the initial reaction of the

⁷⁰ The main legislation is summarised in H. Conway, *People's Parks*, 224-7.

⁷¹ *WC*, 20 August 1851.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 16 and 23 June 1852.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 16 June 1852.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 25 October 1854.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 21 February 1872.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 19 March 1873.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 19 August 1874.

council to Ballard was defensive and equivocal, as described previously, there were nevertheless clear signs of an increasing level of concern among some councillors regarding the need for better recreational facilities, especially in the industrial eastern district.

In late 1874, the wealthy manufacturer and Congregationalist S. T. Mander wrote to the *Wolverhampton Chronicle* with a remarkable expression of concern for his less fortunate fellow-citizens. He described the conditions in the east as 'smoky, dreary and hard'. The people living there had 'only the pub or the music hall'. He asked the people of West Wolverhampton, 'Who of them would like to live there? ... the pure air of Tettenhall [the best part of West Wolverhampton in which Mander himself lived] gave people little or no excuse for the use of stimulants'. Mander maintained that the council had an obligation to the working class in the east who were 'generally as law-abiding as others'. He recommended the following measures:

- (i) smoke nuisance must be reduced;
- (ii) in the eastern wards of St George's, St James' and St Matthew's three 20 acre recreation grounds should be constructed. It was envisaged that they would cost about £20,000, or 1d on the rates.

Mander summarised the unsatisfactory situation with the memorable statement, 'the possessors of the wealth have retired from the desolation'.⁷⁸

Mander's intervention attracted support from an unlikely quarter. St George's Church had the reputation of being high church and high Tory in its attitudes. The vicar, Rev Edward Geare, wrote to the *Chronicle* expressing sympathy with Mander's views. Referring to his poor parishioners, he claimed that 'they have sunk to that state through past selfishness and neglect on the part of their employers. He recommended that employers and workers should be conciliatory towards each other and advised a turning of the other cheek in biblical terms: 'Though they curse you, bless them. Be not overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good.'⁷⁹

This growing tension over the issue of a public park may well have been exacerbated not only by the inactivity of the council over the previous 20 years but also by the dearth of public information about the council's intention regarding the expiry of the lease for the race course. In 1875 the town clerk wrote in his report to the General Purposes Committee that 'the subject ... has been before the public more or less prominently for the last three years' but admitted that it had 'not been discussed at any meeting of the Town Council'.⁸⁰ The town clerk, Henry Underhill, went on to report that two years previously negotiations had been opened with the agent for the Duke of Cleveland, owner of the race

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 18 November 1874.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 25 November 1874.

⁸⁰ *Public Parks: Report of the Town Clerk to the General Purposes Committee*, 26 April 1875.

course. At that stage the race course was one of three possible sites for a public park and the town clerk's comments on the project in general give an insight into the council's attitude towards the overall question of a public park. Underhill's report also shows how the east-west divide was regarded, both geographically and socially. Underhill wrote as follows:

It appeared clear that it would be most undesirable to seek any site in the South Eastern or Eastern sides of the Town, as although sites might be purchased on the Old Coalfields at a comparatively small sum, it was obvious that such sites were altogether inapplicable for the purposes of a Park, in which it would necessarily be expected that trees and shrubs should grow and should become an ornamental as well as a useful and agreeable place for recreation for all classes within the Borough. It also appeared undesirable to select a site on the North Eastern side of the Borough, owing to that boundary being more or less intersected by railways, and not having such approaches as would be desirable, and also from the fact that manufacturing premises and artisans' [sic] dwellings were being extended in that direction, and whilst such a site might be convenient to the operatives residing in those localities, it would be almost prohibitory to the residents on the South West and North West sides of the Borough.⁸¹

The cost of the new park was estimated at £25,000. Because it was intended for use by 'all classes of the community',⁸² it was proposed that the general public should pay the costs of purchase and laying out the gardens. For any ornamental or additional features, it was intended to seek subscriptions from 'the wealthier portion of the community'.⁸³ The report concluded by reminding its readers that most of the population of more than 70,000 had 'no means of healthful and free relaxation from their labour except what they may gain by a walk on the public roads in the outskirts of the Borough'.⁸⁴ The new park would 'tend as much to the elevation of the working classes as any of the many noble efforts now progressing for the amelioration of their social condition'.⁸⁵

The burden of carrying through the vote for a public park in council and, most importantly, gaining acceptance by the ratepayers fell to the mayor Samuel Dickinson, a wealthy ironmaster and metal broker. Dickinson had been the leading figure in the negotiations with the Duke of Cleveland for purchase of the race course. The offer which emerged via the Duke's agent was to let the Corporation have the required 50 acres at a rental of £300 p.a. for 42 years and £350 p.a. for 21 years, with the option of outright purchase for £20,000 after 63 years.⁸⁶ When Dickinson put his proposal forward there was great opposition from some members of the council and many ratepayers who considered the terms on offer to be exorbitant. It was demanded that Dickinson should call a public meeting of ratepayers, but he declined to do so. The opposition therefore called their own public meeting which

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ W. H. Jones, *Story of the Municipal Life*, 214-5. The £20,000 purchase price was a very small figure when finally paid in 1942.

was very well attended. Both factions, for and against the park proposal, were present. The meeting was most unruly and was abandoned without any formal result.⁸⁷

Dickinson placed his proposal before the council and it was accepted by 26 votes to 6. The cost of the park, to be constructed on the race course site half a mile west of the town centre, was to be £25,000, but the consequent increase in the rates continued to cause concern, especially as the second half of the 1870s was a time of trade depression in Wolverhampton and, with the local economy feared to be under serious threat, not surprisingly an increase in rates to finance the park or any other measure of civic welfare was met with powerful opposition.

In 1879, when the park was at the design stage, the mayor John Jones was obliged to call a public meeting of ratepayers to discuss the vexed question of civic expenditure. The mayor had received a petition which read as follows:

We, the undersigned ratepayers, taking into consideration the extreme depression in trade and manufactures existing in our town for the last five years and the rapid increase that has taken place during that time in the improvement rate, poor rate, etc., desire you to call a town's meeting to consider the whole subject and to take all legitimate measures to prevent any further outlay until this depression is removed.⁸⁸

The meeting was not as well attended as had been expected, but the opposition was vociferous as usual.

One of the main complaints was that the increased expenditure for the park would not yield a financial return; it was a purely philanthropic cost which was inappropriate in those difficult times. 'A park was not a necessity but a luxury and they did not want luxuries in hard times. They would rather the Corporation paid off some of their already large debts (applause).'⁸⁹ There was the sewerage question looming, which would be another heavy charge on the rates. The poor rate had risen sharply from 9d in the £ in 1865 to 4s 4d in the £ in 1879, and higher costs in that cause would be likely to ensue from the depression of trade. The School Board rate was said to be higher than necessary at 7d in the £. The only rate which received general approval was the Free Library rate of 1d in the £. When discussion reverted to the issue of the park any mention of the name of Dickinson was greeted with hissing.

On the general issue of rating, one speaker raised a very controversial and important question. John Southall, an opponent of the park scheme, objected to the fact that because of the rising tendency for wealthy council members to migrate westwards, the rates for Wolverhampton were increasingly set by

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 215.

⁸⁸ *WC*, 21 May 1879.

those who resided outside the borough in areas of much lower rating. Southall pointed out that 'of six aldermen chosen recently, five of them lived out of the borough and only one lived in the town and these were the men that imposed the burdens. They made the excuse that they had to pay rates for their works. 'True, but then the poor working man had to pay both on his workshop and house. These gentlemen went to reside at Tettenhall and Compton where the rates were only about 5d or 6d in the £ and then met together in the council chamber and put 4s 6d on the people here.'⁹⁰

In principle, the ratepayer had the power to redress this injustice by voting council members out but Southall asserted that the municipal elections were a charade vulnerable to bribery and organised cliques. The final effect of this lively meeting was that motions were passed which were critical of the council and proposed limits on further municipal expenditure while the trade depression continued. However, the cost of the park was already committed and the work proceeded. The Wolverhampton Tradesmen's Association took the optimistic view that the park 'would prove not only an immense advantage to the physical and moral well-being of the people, but also to the trade of the town. It will be the means of drawing large numbers of people here and it invariably follows that where people congregate in great numbers, business is greatly improved.'⁹¹

In early 1879 tenders for design of the park were invited from landscape gardeners with a first prize of £50 plus the contract to carry out the work. The winner from 27 entries was R. H. Vertegans of Chad Valley Nurseries, Edgbaston, Birmingham whose design is shown in Figure 8.1. The park was surrounded by railings with two gatehouse lodges. There was a large lake, space set aside for volunteer drill, archery, bowling and cricket. Refreshment rooms were provided. For the formation of the gardens, 20,000 trees and shrubs were planted. The *Gardener's Chronicle*, which had run the advertisement for landscape proposals, was very approving and congratulated Wolverhampton on 'following the example set by Birmingham.'⁹²

When the park was opened with full civic ceremony on 6 June 1881, there was some concern that the behaviour of working class visitors might be unacceptable and that the railings and park keepers would be insufficient to maintain control. The programme for the opening ceremony shown as Figure

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* WC gives a full account of the meeting which involved constant criticism.

⁹⁰ As reported in WC, 21 May 1879, Southall was raising an important question which was a developing source of tension at this time. The problem was summarised as follows by Avner Offer 'One of the persistent features of Victorian urbanisation was the increasing reluctance of many manufacturing and commercial magnates to reside in the toiling and poverty-stricken urban neighbourhoods where their fortunes were made. Removal to the suburbs and beyond released them from irksome social and municipal obligations and also from the localised tax burdens of poor law expenditure.' A. Offer, *Property and Politics 1870-1914: Landownership, Law, Ideology and Urban Development in England* (Cambridge, 1981), 175.

⁹¹ Wolverhampton Borough Council, *Wolverhampton West Park 1881-1981* (Wolverhampton, 1981).

⁹² WC, 12 May 1880.

8.2 concluded with the statement: 'The Park being Public Property, it is hoped that all will assist in protecting it from damage'. It was reported that 'the gates were widely opened sufficiently early to prevent a crush and several thousands of persons entered the park in the first part of the forenoon, the majority being working people of the better class in holiday garb'.⁹³ Despite the euphoria, however, there were clear indications that the park was regarded as a specifically West End amenity. During the project stage of design from the mid-1870s onwards, it had often been referred to significantly as 'the West End Park'. The *Gardener's Chronicle* observed that the area surrounding the park would 'in the nature of things become a favourite spot for residences of the better class'.⁹⁴

From the start the West Park, as it soon became known, was a great success. Dickinson was given a civic banquet and congratulated on his achievement. In the face of doubts and highly personalised opposition, he had persevered and eventually 'a dismal swamp was transformed into a beautiful park'.⁹⁵ The park was very popular with a visitor figure of 20-40,000 per week, a very large number indeed for a town with a population of about 76,000. The final cost to the ratepayers had been brought down to about £16,000 and the project had been completed without adding to the rates as had once been feared. In reporting upon these achievements, the *Evening Star* diverged significantly from the accepted reason for constructing the park by pointing out that 'property in the immediate neighbourhood has been increased in value'.⁹⁶ This acclaimed success must have appeared very remote from the continuing problems of the east end.

Dickinson had remained chairman of the Parks and Baths Committee and did not lose sight of the requirements of the poorer people living in the east end of the town. After discussion with Dickinson, the owners of the abandoned Chillington Colliery estate, the Duke of Sutherland and Sir Alfred Hickman, each gave 25 acres to the town to be converted into a new park. The site of the old colliery ground was one mile east of the town centre. As before the design was put out to competitive tender but the estimate for cost of layout was to be within £3,000 rather than the £6,000 which had been paid for the West Park. The ten entries received exceeded the estimate and were rejected. The borough engineer was then asked to design the layout with advice from landscape gardeners and staff from the West Park who had worked with the original contractors.

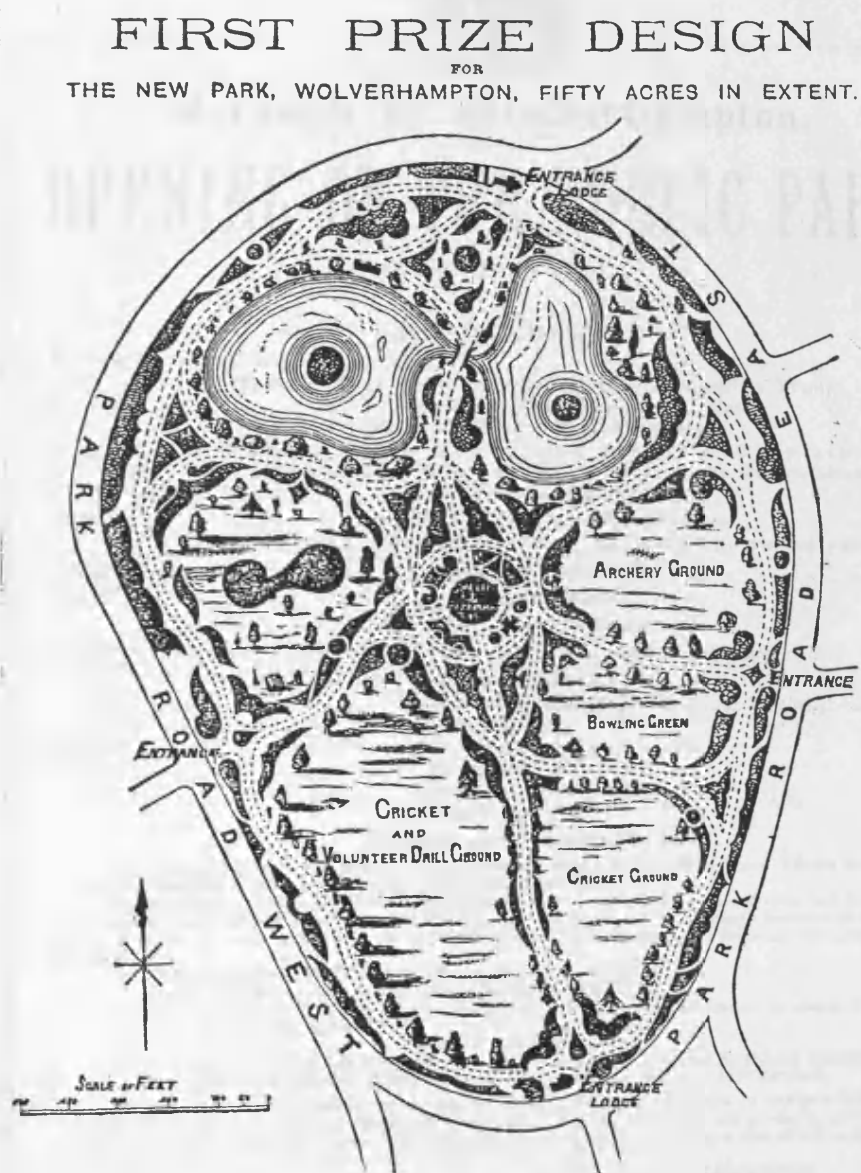
⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Evening Star*, 22 July 1882. The West Park continued to flourish with many additional features donated by wealthy individuals. The Liberal MP Charles Villiers gave a bandstand in 1882 and regular concerts were held. The £1,500 proceeds of the 1893 Floral Fete enabled a large conservatory to be built.


⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

Figure 8.1 - The Design adopted for the West Park



Birmingham, June, 1879.

Figure 8.2 - Programme for the Opening of the West Park



Borough of Wolverhampton.

OPENING OF THE PUBLIC PARK,

JUNE 6TH, 1881.

Programme.

The Order of Procession will be as follows:

Queen's Own Royal Yeomanry (Wolverhampton Troop).
4th Staffordshire Rifle Volunteers' Band.
4th Staffordshire Rifle Volunteers.

TO ASSEMBLE IN—
Mayor, Town Clerk, and Mayor's Chaplain.
Mr. Alderman Dickinson with Key of Park for Presentation.
Town Council.

County and Borough Magistrates.
The Clergy and Ministers of all Denominations.
Board of Guardians.
School Board.
The Borough Band.
Merchants, Manufacturers, and Tradesmen.

Willenhall Band.
United Brothers' Society.
Odd Fellows.
Free Gardeners.
Drum and Fife Band.
Foresters.
Hearts of Oak.
Bostock and Wombwell's Band.

The Friendly Societies will proceed along Cleveland Road, Cleveland Street, and Victoria Street, and will join the first part of the procession at the top of Darlington Street.

The procession will leave the Town Hall punctually at 11 o'clock, and the line of route will be by way of Darlington Street, Chapel Ash, Tettenhall Road, Connaught Road, and to the South Entrance of the Park, making a detour by way of the lake on to the Volunteer Ground, where the following ceremony will be performed:—

THE MAYOR'S CHAPLAIN to offer up prayer.
TOWN CLERK to read Address to His Worship the Mayor.
CHAIRMAN OF THE PARK'S COMMITTEE (Mr. ALDERMAN DICKINSON) to present Key of the Park to the Mayor.

THE MAYOR to reply.
H. H. FOWLER, ESQ., M.P. | To make | Mr. COUNCILLOR THORNE.
Mr. ALDERMAN WILCOCK, | Speeches. | MAJOR LOVERIDGE.

A display of Fireworks provided by the Mayor, will be exhibited in the Park at half-past Nine in the Evening, and for this purpose a large stage will be erected, so that the Fireworks will be seen to much greater advantage by those outside the Park. The Park being Public Property, it is hoped that all will assist in protecting it from damage.

H. UNDERHILL,
Town Clerk.

Town Hall,
June 1st, 1881.

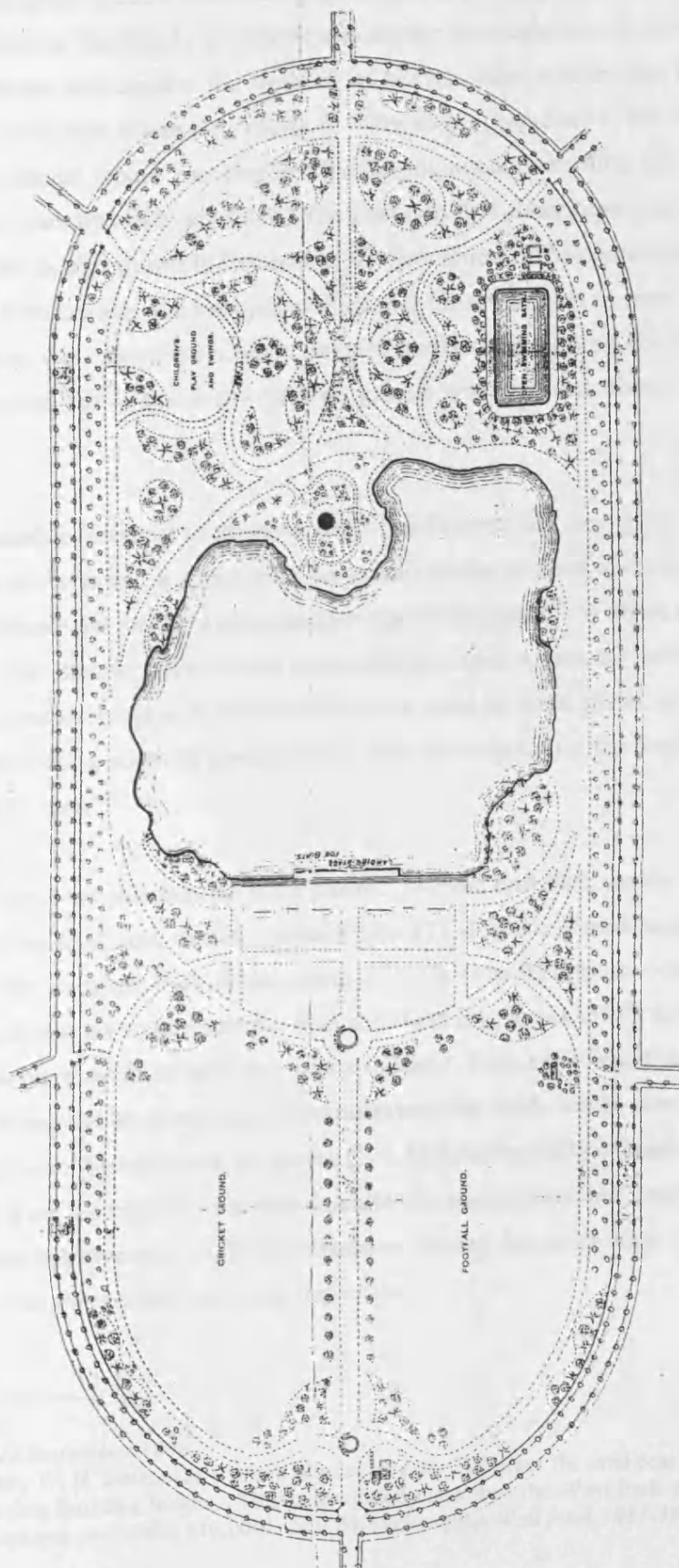
Cattle Market,
Cleveland Rd.,
at 10 a.m.

Council Chamber
at 10.30
Vestibul.
Town Hall
Magistrates' Court
School Board Office
Newman's Court

Figure 8.3 - The Design of the East Park

EAST END PUBLIC PARK, WOLVERHAMPTON.

PROPOSED PLAN.



Scale 2 Chains to the Inch.

BOROUGH ENGINEER'S OFFICE,
TOWN HALL,
7th March, 1894.

For the east end park the terms of reference were somewhat different from those which had been used to define the layout of the West Park. The intention in the east, according to the *Wolverhampton Chronicle*, was 'to make the place more a recreation-ground than in the strict sense of the term a park – a resort where the dwellers in the thickly-populated and smoky thoroughfares of the east end may enjoy a refreshing promenade, and breathe the fresh air of heaven, after inhaling the hot and close atmosphere of the streets and courts where they reside.'⁹⁷ 'The rough character' of the reclaimed land meant that a great deal of manual labour was required for digging out and levelling and this provided much work at a time when there was little available. The East End Park, later known as the East Park, was opened in 1896 with the design shown in Figure 8.3. The intentions of the corporation were good. The park had a large lake with boating and fishing facilities, and there was even an open air swimming bath. The sporting facilities were more specifically directed towards the working class: there was a cricket ground as in the west, but in the east a football ground was provided instead of archery or bowls.

The local press gave favourable reactions to the new park. The *Express and Star* stated that 'So much as it is on the eastern side of the town, in which the poorest and hardest worked of the burgesses of the town are resident, it will mainly be for the welfare and service of the poor.'⁹⁸ Without a trace of irony the editorial continued 'Too often in large centres of population, open spaces are provided for those who are well off, whose circumstances in life are such that the need for such places is not so pressing as with others. It is a good thing when Wolverhampton feels sufficiently for the poor as to layout a Park primarily for the poor's use.'

Nevertheless Dickinson had every justification to be pleased with the East Park. In the year before the opening he thought that the total cost would eventually be £11,12,000, considerably less than the West Park and 'perhaps the cheapest Park in the country'.⁹⁹ He even thought that 'in time the Park would be as beautiful and perhaps more romantic than the West End resort. Hills would be planted, walks intersected and the place made to look very pretty indeed.' Dickinson hoped that the new park would generate sufficient revenue to cover much of its costs and that roads would soon be built around it as had happened in the west. Shortly after the mayor C. T. Mander formally opened the East Park in 1896, Dickinson retired from the council. He was undoubtedly one of the small group of individuals who brought about major improvement in Wolverhampton, having forced through two parks in the face of intense opposition at times when trade was depressed.

⁹⁷ *WC*, 12 June 1895.

⁹⁸ *Express & Star*, 22 September 1896.

⁹⁹ *WC*, 12 June 1895. W. H. Jones, *Story of the Municipal Life*, 217 gives the total cost of the east park at £14-15,000 including building lodges. This is marginally less than the West Park which was said 'to have cost the ratepayers just under £16,000'. See *Wolverhampton West Park 1881-1981*, op.cit.

Sadly, the fortunes of the two parks diverged rapidly. The West Park went on to great success, but the East Park was beset with problems. In 1899 it was reported that the East Park had been well patronised during the past year, but ‘wretched approaches to it militate considerably against its perfect success’.¹⁰⁰ No proper roads had been built. In fine weather the approach was said to be ankle deep in black dust and in wet weather even deeper in mud. In 1906 it was reported that the park was ‘only the east end and nobody cares. During the closing years its best flowers have gone, its lake has gone and with it the boating.’¹⁰¹ The lake had been drained after it proved too expensive to stop water leaking out. Many of the planned features were never built and within ten years the East Park had been reduced from the high hopes of Dickinson’s vision to the low level of a basic recreation ground. Perhaps that had always been thought sufficient for the east end.

8.3.2 Public Baths

Parallel to the campaign for a people’s park ran the agitation for public baths to be available at an affordable charge. The original town baths opened in 1851 were privately financed at a cost of £3,000. The charges for bathing were prohibitive to the working classes: a hot bath cost 1s 6d at a time when most working men were earning less than 20s a week. In 1855 a correspondent to the *Wolverhampton Chronicle* requested that civic public baths should be established which would fulfil the obligation ‘to elevate the habits of the poor and depressed’, adding that the public bath should have only one class because ‘we have had enough of caste’.¹⁰²

The possibility of having public baths re-emerged in the early 1870s by which time there was a growing depth of opinion in favour of environmental improvement. Such schemes as the clearance of the ‘unhealthy area’ and the promotion of a people’s park were in progress. The health of town was, as a correspondent to the *Wolverhampton Chronicle* wrote in 1873, ‘of acknowledged importance ... baths not only conduce to, but greatly aid public health, and therefore, tend to low rates.’¹⁰³ Moreover, it was becoming widely accepted that ‘poverty and uncleanly habits are too often companions and it is from the abodes of these that infectious diseases have mostly their rise and their power to invade and travel setting aside all barriers’.¹⁰⁴ The writer continued, ‘in no class of society are baths more essential than in our lowest districts and amongst our very poor; and their influence would not but be felt by all classes so that, indirectly, they would more than reimburse the cost of their establishment.’ This correspondent was not only raising concern across all classes but also paying attention to what

¹⁰⁰ *Parks Committee Report*, November 1899.

¹⁰¹ F. Mason, *Yesterday’s Town* (Wolverhampton, 1982) 30.

¹⁰² *WC*, 27 June 1855.

¹⁰³ *WC*, 19 March 1873.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* One correspondent described the projected baths as ‘schools for cleanliness ... most essential in the poorest districts’.

was always a cogent argument in Wolverhampton, namely that the cost could bring a commensurate return.

The time was ripe for the baths question to re-emerge and it was suggested that the problem could be resolved by purchasing the existing private baths which had experienced varied fortunes. The council had previously taken shares in the bath company but they had not yielded a satisfactory return. It was not disputed that 'a large town like Wolverhampton ought to be provided with bathing accommodation at a reasonable cost'.¹⁰⁵ There was, however, much disagreement about whether to buy the existing baths with their poor financial record, or to start afresh. In the event, the baths were bought by the council in 1875 for £2,435 and rebuilt.¹⁰⁶

The new swimming baths had two classes – a first class bath described as 'the centre of attraction' and a second class bath with facilities of a more basic quality, especially for changing.¹⁰⁷ The whole idea of a public bath caused the council great anxiety, principally over hygiene. The Parks and Baths Committee assured the council that 'the strictest order will be enforced'.¹⁰⁸ Access to tickets was not completely open but was controlled in various ways: in 1878 concern was expressed that tickets were getting into the hands of 'exceedingly dirty people'.¹⁰⁹

The Borough Surveyor summed up the early experience of running a public bath with the following advice to the Parks and Baths Committee:

In any baths which your committee may hereafter decide to built in the 'condemned area' or other situation convenient to the working classes, your object should be to provide the maximum accommodation at the least possible costs in order that the prices of admission may be fixed on so low a scale as to induce and foster the habit of bathing among the poorer classes. With this end in view external decoration will be considered of less importance than the comfort and convenience of the interior.¹¹⁰

Once again, a delicate balance had been negotiated between civic consciousness, public health, the improvement (albeit separately) of the working classes, and of course the cost.

All of the major cultural developments which resulted in the establishment of such facilities as adult education, the free library, public parks and baths were initiated for a complex variety of reasons. These included civic pride and inter-urban competition, response to external criticism, a growing sense

¹⁰⁵ WC, 14 April 1875.

¹⁰⁶ WC, 12 May 1875.

¹⁰⁷ WC, 15 February 1878.

¹⁰⁸ Mixed bathing was not permitted until 1927.

¹⁰⁹ *Minutes of the Parks and Baths Committee*, 29 April 1878.

of responsibility towards the working classes and a feeling that they needed a better level of education in order to maintain and improve the technical strength of local industry. However, the middle classes who controlled the decision-making process were not comfortable with schemes which would benefit the working classes if in so doing the two classes were brought into proximate contact. Some measure of segregation was considered to be desirable when this was possible. For example, the public baths were divided into first and second classes: the two parks were designed differently as judged to be appropriate in each case for that part of the town. When segregation was not possible, as in the early years of the West Park, the participation of the working classes was anticipated with anxiety and acceptable behaviour on their part was welcomed with obvious relief. Thus, Wolverhampton in the 1870s was a polarised society divided between classes, and the middle class, who were the principal controllers of the process of governance, saw themselves as separate, respectable and more refined.

8.4 Associations and societies

In order to demonstrate and to defend their culture the various strands of the middle class maintained complex networks of societies and associations which showed what R. J. Morris described as their 'slender fragments of power'.¹¹¹ In Wolverhampton, as in most Victorian towns, the range of activity was extensive, covering every possibility from chess clubs to choral societies but the predominant characteristic was that those societies which had any cultural pretensions were almost exclusively middle class both in membership and in choice of officials. For the more prestigious societies, the honorary officers such as presidents were usually drawn from the local gentry: for example, Lord Wrottesley was president of the Festival Choral Society established in 1868. For all societies, committees were generally composed of the middle classes with professionals and Church of England ministers featuring prominently. Committees of cultural societies, such as the Literary and Scientific Society, seldom included council members. The impression created is that whilst the governance of Wolverhampton was primarily in the hands of manufacturers, cultural activity was regarded as a separate phenomenon, the province of the educated which would include professionals and clergy.¹¹²

From the late 1860s onwards there was a very rapid growth of societies and associations for cultural and recreational activity. This rising enthusiasm, particularly in the area of education, is exemplified by the Literary and Scientific Society established in 1881 which by 1887 had over 500 members

¹¹⁰ Letter from G. Eastlake Thoms, Borough Engineer, to S. Dickinson, Chairman of Parks and Baths Committee recorded in their minutes, 15 February 1878.

¹¹¹ R. J. Morris, 'Clubs, societies and associations' in F.M.L. Thompson (ed.), *The Cambridge Social History of Britain*, 3, *Social Agencies and Institutions* (Cambridge, 1990) 395.

¹¹² The educated and wealthy people of Wolverhampton had an active and enlightened associational culture in the eighteenth century. There was a flourishing debating society which allowed women 'of rank and distinction' to become members. See P. Clark, *British Clubs and Societies, 1580-1800: The Origins of an Associational World* (Oxford, 2000), 120-199.

whose subscriptions admitted 1,250 people to the regular lectures.¹¹³ Even so, there were occasional outbursts of protest that the people of Wolverhampton were not giving adequate support to some cultural activities, especially those concerned with music.¹¹⁴

As might be expected in a town having unusually high religious attendance, there were many organisations of a religious character, either directly or indirectly. Town directories listed Tract societies, Scripture Readers' societies, societies for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, Church Missionary societies, Bible societies and even a branch of the London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews. There were a Young Men's Christian Institute and a Church of England Young Men's Association with library, news room and lectures. A Temperance society flourished and here there were several council members involved as senior officials including the president S. T. Mander: their common feature was that they were members of the Liberal Nonconformist faction.¹¹⁵

There was a complex and widespread gradation of what might be termed friendly societies. In 1892 this network included seven lodges of freemasons, ten lodges of free gardeners, fifteen courts of foresters, and ten lodges of oddfellows. The latter three societies were commonly among those which, in their established order of precedence, participated regularly in civic ritual and procession.¹¹⁶

There was also a very wide spectrum of political societies. The Conservative cause was represented by an Association with twenty-six branches, two central clubs and a group of constituent clubs spread around the town. These latter included The Working Men's Central Conservative Club and its five associated clubs in outlying districts. The Liberals likewise maintained an Association which had twenty-two branches in the parliamentary borough, a central club and also two substantial offshoots - the Villiers Reform Club and the Fowler Reform Club.¹¹⁷

In the main, these associational networks represented a demonstration of middle class culture which occasionally admitted members of the skilled working class to its lowest ranks but which in general remained exclusive. There was virtually no close contact between the middle classes and the working classes who maintained their own different networks. This distancing generated a lack of understanding on the part of the controlling middle class of what was required to bring the working classes (if they were willing, of course) into an acceptance and practice of middle class morality and culture. There was very little comprehension that what the working classes needed was not the

¹¹³ *Barker's Directory* (1887), 52.

¹¹⁴ In 1869, a concert by the Choral Society given under the auspices of hospital charities attracted an audience of only 30. A correspondent to *WC*, 20 January 1869, observed that this poor attendance did 'not say much for the musical taste of Wolverhampton'.

¹¹⁵ *The Wolverhampton & South Staffordshire Almanack and Municipal Directory for 1861*, 47.

¹¹⁶ *The Wolverhampton Red Book & Directory* (1892).

provision of literary and scientific lectures, for which they were usually educationally unfitted, but rather the facilities for obtaining a basic education which very few of them had received. Furthermore, many employers were either indifferent or hostile to efforts directed towards adult education. It was often regarded as unnecessary and many employers took the view that no support should be provided. The argument in the town, wrote the journalist A. C. Pratt in 1873, was that the working men had become so well off that they should be required to pay for their education.¹¹⁸

There was a further complication in that the whole purpose of education was under debate. The predominantly middle class groups who held the power in adult education frequently saw it as their priority to educate the working classes out of what many regarded as a naturally slothful drunken existence enlivened only by gambling, rough sport and general violence. A. C. Pratt saw this moralising preaching stance of the middle classes as patronising and distasteful. It was symptomatic of the failure to understand working class needs and priorities which had led for example to the collapse of the original Athenaeum and Mechanics' Library in 1869.¹¹⁹ All of these communication failures and excessive moralising were displayed in the question of the Wolverhampton Fair which was debated and eventually resolved in 1876.

8.5 The Wolverhampton Fair

There had been a fair held in Wolverhampton since 1258. By the early nineteenth century the Fair, which was held annually in July in the market place, was a well-established and popular institution, 'a round of pleasure for the inhabitants and the people of the countryside'.¹²⁰ However, by the 1870s it was claimed by some that the Fair had degenerated, the quality of the entertainment was low and there was much associated drunkenness and disorder. Shopkeepers in the market place and adjoining streets complained that they lost business during the Fair. By 1870 the market place had been re-named Queen Square and contained the railed-off statue of the late Prince Consort, as described in Chapter 6. The square was seen by many councillors, particularly Nonconformists, as a critical site where respectable behaviour was of paramount importance. Furthermore, there were many instances of British towns which had sought to abolish traditional fairs on grounds of public order.¹²¹ In 1874 the mayor was presented with a petition signed by the inhabitants requesting abolition of the Fair.

¹¹⁷ *Mansell's South Staffordshire Family Almanack for 1885.*

¹¹⁸ *WC*, 1 October 1873.

¹¹⁹ See M. Fogarty, 'An analysis of the reasons behind the decline and ultimate collapse of the Wolverhampton Athenaeum and Mechanics' Library (1847-1869)', *West Midlands Studies*, 12 (1979), 32-9 for an account and further discussion of these events.

¹²⁰ W. H. Jones, *Story of the Municipal Life*, 204.

¹²¹ The attempts by urban authorities to discontinue fairs, 'these innocent amusements of the poorer classes', are discussed in F.M.L. Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society: A Social History of Victorian Britain, 1830-1900* (Hammersmith, 1988), 283-7.

The town council discussed the issue in 1876 and eventually passed a motion in favour of abolition by a majority of 23 against 14.¹²² The mayor explained that the Fair had been abolished on grounds of decadence. The decision was received very badly by the people of the town. It was seen as a gross infringement of the working man's right to pleasure. Moreover, the Fair was regarded across all classes as a tradition which should continue to be a source of pleasure and recreation. Even W. H. Jones, who had voted for abolition, conceded that the council 'had been taking a step in advance of the opinion of the inhabitants generally'.¹²³ There were many public meetings to protest against the decision:¹²⁴ placards in red announced 'working men's meeting'.¹²⁵

When the council reaffirmed their decision to abolish, the normally supportive *Wolverhampton Chronicle* published an editorial opposing abolition under the title 'The Fair Question'.¹²⁶ The writer criticised the moralising posture of the abolitionists who had attempted to draw an elaborate distinction between 'mere vulgar amusement and its much more distinguished and aristocratic kinsman "recreation"'. The abolitionists were accused of despising traditional fun as 'totally irreconcilable with the refinements of Free Libraries and Mechanics' Institutes'. The Fair was seen as a family entertainment where drunkenness would be less, not more. The traditional fun of the Fair was regarded as healthy and invigorating and included 'pageantry of the kind in which Oddfellows and Foresters so much delight'. Abandoning the Fair would lose trade for Wolverhampton and 'exile Wolverhamptonians to Dudley Castle at Whitsuntide'. Wolverhampton was established as 'the centre of a vast number of tributary towns who look to it to supply them at holiday seasons with some variety of interesting excitement'. It was necessary to 'hold our own with Birmingham and not loose our grasp on the interest of neighbouring towns'. With a concluding reference to 'the inexpediency of treating a resolution of working men with contempt', the editorial demanded a re-consideration of the question.

The opposition to the Fair was principally an alliance of the inhabitants of Queen Square and its surrounding streets with various religious bodies. In the first place the alternative site of St James

¹²² *Minutes of Wolverhampton Borough Council*, 7 (1876) 55 and *WC*, 12 January 1876.

¹²³ W. H. Jones, *Story of the Municipal Life*, 207.

¹²⁴ One public meeting protesting at abolition of the Fair without 'checking the feelings of the town' attracted over 2,000 of 'artisan class'. See *WC*, 9 February 1876. In the early stages of the campaign for a people's park, a correspondent calling himself 'a working man' wrote 'that the people needed space for leisure and recreation'. It was 'all very well for upper classes to talk about abolishing the Fair and the Races'. See *WC*, 19 August 1874.

The move to abolish the races is an interesting example of the dilemma faced by religious elites, especially Nonconformists, in promoting culture and recreation whilst attempting to apply social control. For example, the Methodist A. C. Pratt, the major figure in establishing a free library, described Wolverhampton racecourse as 'that stronghold of satan ... a moral plague spot which all decent peace and order-loving inhabitants would fain have wiped from the town.' See A. C. Pratt, *Black Country Methodism* (London, 1891) 103-4.

¹²⁵ *WC*, 16 February 1876.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

Square was proposed and rejected as too confined. Meanwhile local polls showed overwhelming support for restoration of the Fair although a petition in favour of confirming abolition was signed by 1,368 inhabitants plus 36 church ministers and 568 Sunday School teachers.¹²⁷

The final and decisive vote took place in May 1876 when the Fair was re-established by a majority of 22 against 19.¹²⁸ The duration of the Fair was reduced from eight to three days, but its future was assured and the decision was greeted with warm approval in the town. The whole episode was summarised perceptively in the local directory published in 1877: 'The Fair over which there has been a vast deal of fighting and bickering was abolished January 10 1876 but as some of those who voted against it saw their seats in the council chamber at stake, the agitators succeeded in re-establishing it.'¹²⁹ There had undoubtedly been a serious misjudgement of public opinion by some council members who supported the moralising ultra-religious viewpoint, and were seen as kill-joys. Analysis of the votes taken in 1876 shows that the powerful aldermanic support for abolition was provided principally by the Liberal Nonconformist group in its entirety.¹³⁰

It is paradoxical that the Liberal Nonconformists, principally Old Dissent Congregationalists, who had done so much to promote such worthy causes as public health, adult education and the parks should become so unpopular over their desire to create a polite and respectable civic society. In their ill-judged attempt to abolish the Fair and in the controls which they placed upon the use of the new amenities,¹³¹ the Liberal Nonconformists gave the impression that their primary objective was 'the elevation of the working classes'¹³² rather than simply providing facilities for healthy recreation. These restrictive policies ensured that the Liberal vote, which had once seemed likely to dominate the proceedings of the council, would become vulnerable in the more fluid popular politics which developed in Wolverhampton from the late 1870s onwards.¹³³

From that time it becomes possible to identify a number of significant changes in the governance of Wolverhampton. There was an increasing sense of civic responsibility for all among the elites and senior council members. Concern was more often expressed for the less fortunate citizens of the town, particularly those living in the unhealthy eastern districts. Furthermore, the independent authority of

¹²⁷ *Minutes of Wolverhampton Borough Council*, 7 (1876) 132.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹²⁹ *The Wolverhampton District Year Book Commercial and Trade Directory* (1877) 68.

¹³⁰ The aldermen who supported abolition included the Liberal Nonconformists Thomas Bantock, Samuel Dickinson, William Edwards, Isaac Jenks and John Jones.

¹³¹ See, for example, the arguments about whether to allow boating on the West Park lake to take place on Sundays. *WC*, 15 September 1880.

¹³² *Public Park: Report of the Town Clerk to the General Purposes Committee*, 26 April 1875.

¹³³ The way in which the local Tories took advantage of this situation by depicting the Liberals as opponents of the pleasures of the people is described in J. Lawrence, *Speaking for the People: Party Language and Popular Politics in England, 1867-1914* (Cambridge, 1998), 73-160.

elected councillors was becoming diluted: councillors were increasingly obliged to take advice from paid officials whose specific expertise often rendered them indispensable and to some extent unaccountable. Another factor which threatened to undermine the old patterns of authority was the increasing desire of east end residents to engage in local political discourse and to seek placement on the council representing their own wards. There was a widening of participation in the process of governance and the new structures of control would be significantly different from those which had largely prevailed since incorporation in 1848. These changes are described and analysed in Chapter 9.

Chapter 9 - Structures of Control III - Civic Duty, the Rise of the Professional and the Common Weal

‘Elites ... in the Black Country increasingly emphasized their common interests with the population at large and thereby enhanced a sense of “civic unity” transcending class lines.’

R. H. Trainor¹

‘The power of municipal elites was ... limited by the complexity of municipal business and by the consequently rising influence of municipal servants.’

J. A. Garrard²

At the end of the third quarter of the nineteenth century, the elected council which had governed the town since incorporation in 1848 was becoming increasingly open to external influence. The council was obliged to take note of the attitudes of a range of local and national institutions before formulating the policies which would direct governance. As R. J. Morris has commented, ‘at the heart of governance are the sets of institutions and procedures through which a political system operates’ and these institutions were acquiring increasing influence.³ Goldsmith and Garrard defined governance as ‘the set of institutions, rules and procedures by which a political system is governed’.⁴ Local institutions, often unelected, unaccountable and covering such diverse areas as poor law relief, magistracy and the whole spectrum of religious, cultural and social networks, were proliferating in size and complexity during the second half of the nineteenth century and most, if not all of them, exerted their influence on governance. In fact, as Goldsmith and Garrard observed, ‘it is doubtful whether Britain has ever had a system of local government as opposed to local governance, if by the former we mean a single unit responsible for all local affairs’.⁵

The extent to which governance diverged from independently-applied local government widened during the late nineteenth century. Moreover, the factors influencing governance were changing, particularly in the field of civic duty where urban renewal came to the forefront during the 1870s. The concept of the common weal assumed increasing importance in that civic duty had to be extended to include responsibility for the welfare of all of the people of the town. It was argued by Harold Perkin that during the 1860s there was an attitudinal change among governing bodies from individualism to collectivism, marked and legitimated by more intervention in community concerns such as public health for example.⁶ There was certainly a much greater willingness on the part of town councils to take necessary remedial action, especially when prompted by external criticism. This growing sense

¹ R. H. Trainor, *Black Country Elites: The Exercise of Authority in an Industrialised Area 1830-1900* (Oxford, 1993), 378.

² J. A. Garrard, *Leadership and Power in Victorian Industrial Towns* (Manchester, 1983), 222.

³ R. J. Morris, ‘Governance: Two centuries of urban growth’ in R. J. Morris and R. H. Trainor (eds), *Urban Governance: Britain and Beyond since 1750* (Aldershot, 2000), 1.

⁴ M. Goldsmith and J. Garrard, ‘Urban Governance: Some Reflections’ in R. J. Morris and R. H. Trainor (eds), *Urban Governance*, 15.

⁵ *Ibid.* 17.

⁶ In *The Origins of Modern British Society 1780-1880* (London, 1974), 437, Perkin quoted A. V. Dicey, ‘the chief guide to legislative opinion in the nineteenth century’ in support of this view.

of collective responsibility modified the process of governance by introducing new priorities for action.

A further and very significant complication to the operation of local government lay in the advent of the paid council official who was often a professional man possessing considerable expertise which not only raised his perceived status but also compelled the council to take more account of external guidance. The town clerk, in particular, was potentially a very powerful figure in his capacity as the senior permanent official, legal adviser and head of the entire administrative structure of the corporation. The permanence of the position was important in that it conferred upon the town clerk, in common with other paid officials, a much greater stability than that of elected council members. Most officials could easily out-last the majority of Wolverhampton councillors who had to seek re-election every three years. This advantage of professional longevity was of particular importance in the case of the town clerk in whom was vested the collective memory of the corporation. If the town clerk chose to adopt a dominant role, he could rival or even over-shadow the mayor as first citizen of the town. Moreover, because town clerks frequently retained their previous positions as solicitors, their social networks and areas of influence were at least as elevated as those of the senior council members. Town clerks, more than any other officials, could seriously influence urban governance.

Other officials, particularly those possessing specific and technical expertise such as, for example, the manager of the gas works also inherited (albeit to a lesser extent than the town clerk) the advantage of permanence. In addition, they were able to profit from a situation in which the technical content of their work could easily render it incomprehensible to most council members.

Thus, from around the 1870s onwards, the structures of control contributing to urban governance became susceptible to change to a greater extent than at any time since incorporation in 1848. The principal processes which became agents of change are firstly examined under two headings: (i) civic duty - urban renewal and citizenship, and (ii) the rise of the paid official. The overall effect was to widen participation in, and influence over, urban governance. Finally, the socio-political situation in Wolverhampton in 1888 at the end of the period under study is reviewed under the heading of the common weal. This concept, which had gained acceptance as an onward evolution from civic duty, was in theory at least the guiding principle of council policy. There remained, however, an underlying dichotomy between on one hand, the necessity of continued civic improvement to include the people of the eastern districts, and on the other, the degree of social control which was increasingly evident in the design and operation of new facilities.

9.1 Civic Duty - urban renewal and citizenship

In analysing the relationship between urban renewal and citizenship and considering their overall effect on the quality of life in British cities from 1890 onwards, Helen Meller identified a notable change of perception in Victorian cities at the beginning of the 1880s. Before that time, councillors in the more progressive urban authorities such as Birmingham saw their duty as 'serving their city as volunteers in local government, imbued with the message of the "civic gospel" that they were displaying citizenship'.⁷ This was also the case in Wolverhampton where Rev Berry had begun his ministry at Queen Street Congregational chapel in 1883 and was urging the acceptance of civic responsibility as a Christian obligation upon 'a large and influential congregation, including large employers of labour and civic leaders'.⁸

Although this concept of civic duty remained as a principal motivation, Meller argued that from the 1880s onwards, it had to take account of two new ideas which threatened to undermine the certainties of municipal progress. 'The first was the continuing incidence of poverty in the midst of great wealth which was found in juxtaposition at the heart of all great cities. The second was a post-Darwinian evolutionary sense that it mattered how the poor lived.'⁹ These new ideas circulated within Wolverhampton and generated a climate of potential change. Although the existence of appalling slums and terrible living conditions mainly in the eastern and central districts had been well known long before incorporated government began in 1848, it was not until the 1870s following the Ballard Report of 1874 and clearance of the central unhealthy area in 1877 that there was any serious discussion of the inequality of life across the east-west divide. Significantly, one of the first public statements acknowledging the indignity of the situation had been made in 1874 by the Congregationalist S. T. Mander (mayor 1899) who became a deacon of Rev Berry's Queen Street chapel.¹⁰

The open admission of inequality was accompanied by a growing willingness to face up to the east-west divide and to discuss what could be done to improve matters and who should do it. For the first time since incorporation, electors in the eastern wards were reported in the local press to be expressing critical views regarding the choice of councillors to represent them. In late 1869 the burgesses of St

⁷ H. Meller, 'Urban Renewal and Citizenship: the Quality of Life in British Cities, 1890-1990', *Urban History*, 22, pt.1 (1995), 63.

⁸ J. S. Drummond, *Charles A. Berry DD* (London, 1899), 46.

⁹ H. Meller, 'Urban Renewal and Citizenship', 64.

¹⁰ This was the statement by Mander discussed in Chapter 8 and concluding with the admission that 'the possessors of the wealth have retired from the desolation'. Mander's statement and the support which he received from the vicar of the high Tory St George's Church (see Chapter 8, footnotes 72 and 73) have some resonance with the apologetic address given by Arnold Toynbee to London working men in 1883 and quoted by H. Perkin in *The Origins of Modern British Society*, 449: thus, 'We, the middle classes ... have neglected you; instead of justice we have offered you hard and unreal advice; but I think that we are changing ... You have to forgive us, for we have wronged you.'

James' ward rejected the re-nomination of a councillor with a poor attendance record and added their views on the qualities which fitted a man to be a Wolverhampton councillor. In addition to being honest and industrious he should be self-made, 'the architect of his own fortune ... the burgesses of St James' ward did not want men to represent them who were born with silver spoons in their mouths'.¹¹ Although they elected successful men they were anxious that they should be 'business-like' and that their self-made background would guarantee that they would take care of ratepayers' money as if it were their own.

The requirement for financial success in candidates coupled with the continued migration of the more prosperous inhabitants to the west must have reduced the chance of eastern electors finding suitable eastern residents to represent them. In fact the anomaly whereby most of the council members lived in the west actually widened at the end of the nineteenth century. As shown by the analysis in Table 9.1, by 1895 90 per cent of the councillors and all of the aldermen were resident in the western wards.¹²

Table 9.1 – Residence of Council Members (West and East)

	Seats		1848		1868		1888		1895	
	West	East	West	East	West	East	West	East	West	East
Councillors	18	18	28	8	24	12	26	10	32	4
Alderman	6	6	9	3	12	-	12	-	12	-
Total	24	24	37	11	36	12	38	10	44	4

Source: *Minutes of the Borough Council*

Thus, in the latter years of the nineteenth century, local government in Wolverhampton was a western-dominated activity which would have to contend with a growing public concern for conditions in the east. Most council members were locally-born and self-made. The calibre of the council was not very high and its proceedings excited little interest among most of the townspeople. Contested elections were rare. Many of the most capable men in the town firmly rejected any involvement in council activity. J. C. Major (mayor 1875) observed that 'there were many in the town who were well-cultivated and able to perform the duties in connection with the Corporation and other public offices, but who would not take upon themselves such duties'.¹³

Although there was a reluctance to serve upon the council, critical ratepayers pressed for admission to council meetings from as early as 1852: Councillor Henry Underhill (later town clerk) proposed that

¹¹ *WC*, 6 October 1869.

¹² The wards remained unchanged from 1848 to 1896 when the municipality was re-divided into twelve wards instead of the previous eight. The new wards (Blakenhall, Graiseley, Park, Merridale and Dunstall) were created by dividing up St John's, St Mark's and St Paul's, of which the last-named ceased to exist.

¹³ *Express & Star* (hereafter *E&S*), 9 November 1889.

there should be some controlled admission in order to counter the threat posed by the recently-formed Ratepayers' Protection Society.¹⁴ Despite suggestions that Birmingham had a more generous policy for public admission, the proposal was heavily defeated in 1852 and again much later in 1875.¹⁵

The eventual relaxation of restrictions upon attendance at council meetings by both press and ratepayers saw a gradual transition from a relatively respectful and formal tone of reporting to the satirical treatment of 1882. Under the heading, 'An Afternoon in the Town Council Chamber', the correspondent described his bewilderment at the way in which decisions were made and almost immediately reversed: 'nobody offered any explanation, most likely because nobody could have given one'. Members were accused variously of 'a conspiracy of silence', 'talking glibly' and 'slipping off at a tangent'.¹⁶ They were described as being 'somewhat insincere, not to say hypocritical'. They talked 'twaddle' and 'bosh' and their discussion was 'a sheer waste of time'. More seriously, one councillor was accused of alluding sneeringly to 'the masses' and of setting against their opinion 'the feeling of his friends and acquaintances among the respectable middle class'. It was suggested that 'he might speak differently of "the masses" when election time comes around'.¹⁷ In 1887 the *Express & Star* described the council as 'a haughty, plutocratic, oppressive, supercilious, obnoxious body with horse-head proclivities'.¹⁸

In adopting this extreme viewpoint the *Express & Star* was reacting against a council which was regarded by many as an inadequate body to cope with the problems of Wolverhampton particularly those involved in redressing the balance between east and west. There were not many articulate and capable councillors and it had been shown in the past that the council could be very strongly influenced if not almost overwhelmed by such resourceful and persuasive individuals as Robert Sidney on questions of gas and water in the 1860s and A. C. Pratt on the Free Library question in 1868. The editor of the *Express & Star*, Thomas Graham, recognised this potential for disproportionate influence. Graham, who was a prominent Liberal and a JP, had been a town councillor from 1872 to 1878. His son later wrote of Graham 'the important people of Wolverhampton appeared pygmies to him and he felt he could cope with any of them while still in his 20s'.¹⁹ Graham was a strict Congregationalist and a member of the Queen Street chapel: in 1876,

¹⁴ *WC*, 11 February 1852.

¹⁵ *Minutes of the Borough Council*, Book 6, 14 June 1875.

¹⁶ *E&S*, 6 May 1882.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *E&S*, 1 November 1887.

¹⁹ P. Rhodes, *The Loaded Hour, a History of the 'Express & Star'* (Wolverhampton, 1991), 21. Thomas Graham was appointed by the proprietor Andrew Carnegie, with instructions to edit a radical Liberal newspaper. J. F. Wall, in *Andrew Carnegie* (Oxford, 1970), 432-3, stated that 'the Evening *Express & Star* ... had been the voice of Tory reaction in the Black Country until Thomas Graham took it over in 1882. The incredulity and anger expressed in letters to the editor by the old subscribers were a delight to Carnegie and Graham.'

when he was a councillor, he had proposed the motion to abolish the Fair. In this contrast between reform and control, Graham personified the dilemma of the Liberal Nonconformist group.

9.2 The Rise of the Professional

Although the influence of eloquent individuals such as Graham could be considerable, a more serious and ever-present threat to the authority of the Council was presented by the rise of the paid official. Not only did these men have access to much council information; they also frequently had unique expertise in such areas as gas and water engineering, policing, public health, accountancy and legal matters, etc. These particular skills gave the officials much additional influence in a local government which found them to be indispensable in dealing with the rapidly increasing complexity of urban society. In Wolverhampton the first paid officials were appointed in the early years of incorporation from 1848 onwards and by 1854 there was a total of twelve employees. By 1887 the number of corporation officials had risen to 50. This progressive recruitment is detailed in Table 9.2.

The most powerful of these officials was the town clerk who was the senior permanent official and although strictly speaking he was an employee of the corporation, the town clerk surveyed all of its work as a whole and therefore acquired considerable power and authority. In the case of Horatio Brevitt, town clerk of Wolverhampton from 1882 to 1919, this authority was exercised to such effect that he 'regarded himself and expected others to regard him as the "Town Governor" and the "leading man in the town"'.²⁰ Brevitt was the first full-time town clerk, his predecessors having combined their work for the council with continuing private practice as solicitors. Brevitt had trained as a solicitor while articled to his predecessor as town clerk, Henry Underhill, and his professional status gave him easy entry to all of the social networks of the town. He was autocratic, dictatorial and overbearing, but he was very capable and his achievements were considerable.²¹ In particular he claimed with much justification to have been personally responsible for the inclusion of Wolverhampton among the new county boroughs created in 1888.²² He was knighted in 1917 and retired in 1919.²³

²⁰ For a concise account of Brevitt's municipal career, see G. W. Jones, *Borough Politics*, 269-72.

²¹ When Brevitt retired, the mayor spoke of him as being 'Napoleonic in manner and method' but added that 'he had such a happy knack of being right: of suggesting the finest remedy, of clearly handling each knotty problem that the town and his colleagues had suffered him gladly.' *E&S*, 14 July 1919.

²² Brevitt was the prime mover of three parliamentary acts which permitted the reconstruction of Wolverhampton: the Corporation Act of 1887, the Improvement Act of 1891, and the Tramways Act of 1899.

²³ In his later years, Brevitt tended to be obstructive and the more progressive committee chairmen hoped that Brevitt would retire, but he did not. Eventually his position was undermined by scandal. Jesse Varley, accountant clerk to the Education Committee, embezzled over £84,000 from the Corporation between 1905 and 1917. Brevitt was organisationally responsible for the work of this committee and was censured for negligence. These events were described and discussed in J. B. Smith, "Ingenious and Daring" The Wolverhampton Council Fraud 1905-17', a paper given at the European Association of Urban Historians, Fifth International Conference, Berlin, 30 August-2 September 2000.

Table 9.2 – Corporation Officers 1854 and 1887

1854	1887
Town Clerk	Town Clerk
Borough Treasurer	Assistant Town Clerk
Borough Surveyor	Clerk
Clerk	Borough Treasurer
Assistant Surveyor	Borough Accountant
Rate Collector	Assistant Accountant
Assistant	Borough Surveyor
Chief Constable	Assistant Surveyor
Market Superintendent	Manager, Sewage Farm
Inspector of Market	Manager, Baths
Inspector of Nuisances	Park Keeper
Inspector of Lodging Houses	Clerk
	Waterworks Engineers
	Waterworks Collectors (3)
	Waterworks Clerks (6)
	Rate Collector
	Librarian
	Assistant Librarians (2)
	Library Hall Keeper
	Art Gallery Curator
	Art Gallery Hall Keeper
	School of Art, Head Master
	School of Art, Assistant Master
	Medical Officer
	Analyst
	Inspectors of Nuisances (3)
	Clerks (2)
	Caretakers, Borough Hospital (2)
	Team, Manager
	Team, Night Foreman
	Team, Clerk
	Superintendent of Markets
	Recorder
	Coroner
	Magistrates' Clerk
	Chief Constable
	Superintendent
	Town Hall, Hall Keeper
12	50

Source: *Minutes of the Borough Council 1854* and *Barker's Wolverhampton Trade Directory and Guide 1887*.

Brevitt's career and also that of his predecessor Henry Underhill illustrate the ease with which the senior professional could gain access to the most influential social networks of the town and could move freely between private work and employment by the council and also council membership

which was held by Underhill for 18 years until his appointment as town clerk in 1869.²⁴ Although the general status of professionals was rising at this time, the degree of mobility also emphasises the permeability of Wolverhampton council to the articulate individual who was prepared to serve. For those professionals who aspired to council membership, the route to advancement was often short and undemanding. For example, in 1860 the solicitor John Hawksford joined the council and rose to alderman and then mayor within three years.

An even faster rate of promotion for a professional was achieved by John Annan who became mayor in 1884 within twelve months of election to council 'when a difficulty was experienced in filling the vacancy'.²⁵ Annan, a native of Perth in Scotland, had come to Wolverhampton as a gas engineer and had been appointed chief engineer and manager of the gas works in 1864. In that position he had been very successful, expanding production and reducing the price of gas 'to put Wolverhampton in the position of being one of the lowest gas-rated towns in the kingdom'.²⁶ Annan's humble origins as a working man combined with his ability and economic achievement would have endeared him specifically to the ratepayers and council of Wolverhampton. After his mayoralty he was elected alderman and appointed a borough magistrate. He was 'part and parcel of the same social and political elite' as his employers.²⁷

Even allowing for the obvious ability of such men as Annan, Brevitt, Graham and Underhill, the town council was clearly a permeable body with a measure of vulnerability arising from the relatively limited quality of most of its members. They were by no means the most capable men in the town: these latter seldom sought any involvement with a council which was described by the *Express & Star* in such disapproving terms. Overall there was a latent instability about Wolverhampton council.

9.3 The Common Weal

From the 1880s onwards, this much-criticised council was faced with growing problems, especially those concerned with the disparity between living conditions in the east and the west of the town.

²⁴ T. R. Gourvish commented that 'by the middle of the nineteenth century certain occupations had acquired a fairly high social status by mastering a core of esoteric knowledge and offering it to society for financial reward'. See T. R. Gourvish, 'The rise of the professions' in T. R. Gourvish and A. O'Day (eds), *Later Victorian Britain 1867-1900* (Basingstoke, 1988), 16.

²⁵ J. Jones, *The Mayors of Wolverhampton, II, 1881-1909*.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ J. Garrard, *The Great Salford Gas Scandal of 1887* (Salford, 1987), 27. In this paper Garrard gives much further discussion on the position of professionals in general and of gas engineers in particular. Gourvish noted that professionals such as gas engineers formed networks of contact through their membership of national bodies and would thus use 'an aspiration to gentlemanly status to raise their social esteem, part of an attempt to differentiate themselves from the "trade" aspects of their work.' See 'The rise of the professions', 30. These senior professionals constituted what Perkin described in 1967 as 'the forgotten middle class' formerly neglected in historiography but exerting an influence out of all proportion to their numbers. See H. Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society 1780-1880* (London, 1967), 252-70.

Increasingly, the council was accused of being composed chiefly of 'West-End swells' who would always favour their own wards.²⁸ The West Park could be cited as an obvious example and there were others to come: the new tram service was to run from the centre westwards through the wealthiest area of the town. Increasingly all kinds of social improvements were sought by the people living in the east end wards, 'the worst-lighted and worst-cared-for area in the town'.²⁹ Undoubtedly there had been major civic improvements but the extent to which they contributed to the 'common weal' of the people, east and west alike, was very questionable.

There had been steady progress towards the acceptance of a municipal policy which extended beyond the basic provisions of law and order and of public health. Civic pride, immeasurably strengthened by the visit of Queen Victoria in 1866, led the mayor Sir John Morris to affirm on that occasion that 'the necessities of a vast industrial population demand incessant efforts to ameliorate their physical condition, to educate their minds and to teach them moral and religious truth'.³⁰ By 1880 the mayor, John Jones, felt able to claim that 'Wolverhampton ... can compare favourably with towns of even larger size in its efforts to carry into effect the principle of local self-government, and to raise and improve the moral, physical, social and educational welfare of its inhabitants'.³¹ However, in the 1880s the council remained dominated by western residents and the voice of the east was rarely heard.

At the end of the 1870s, however, there were definite signs of increasing competition for council seats. Although there had been only one or two contests each year since 1849, in 1878 there were four contested seats. Although the few seats which were contested at that time attracted voting attendance figures of 70-80 per cent, it should not be forgotten that only a small proportion of the population were entitled to vote (15 per cent in 1897). However, the political climate of Wolverhampton was clearly changing and there were indications of the directions in which that change was leading. The campaign issues of local elections were particularly informative in that respect.

Although candidates for municipal office in late nineteenth-century Wolverhampton sought election on the predictable grounds of personal qualities, local connections and business experience, they also usually took up a position on some major issue concerning the development of the town, for example sewage disposal or the new tramway system. There were no stated party affiliations which might have enabled voting behaviour to be categorised. As late as 1900, of the 48 council members, four declared for the Labour party but the remaining 44 were nominally independent: G. W. Jones has suggested that although the individual political sympathies of these 'independents' could be determined fairly

²⁸ G. W. Jones, *Borough Politics*, 33; *E&S*, 27 October 1893.

²⁹ G. W. Jones, *Borough Politics*, 33; *E&S*, 31 October 1890.

³⁰ *The Royal Visit to Wolverhampton* (Wolverhampton, 1867), 51.

³¹ J. Jones, *Annual Report of the Borough Council*, November 1880.

readily, they nevertheless did vote independently on major issues,³² thus continuing a tradition which had been observed in theory since incorporation in 1848. Moreover, as G. W. Jones commented, 'neither the Liberal nor the Conservative Party possessed a distinct and coherent municipal policy which it wished to implement through the council'.³³ In 1880s Wolverhampton, only one small group of council members appeared to have any collective policy; these were the radical Liberals, strict Nonconformists centred upon Queen Street Congregational Chapel and having Thomas Bantock (mayor 1869) as their leading figure. The campaigns which they undertook had strong foundations in their religious beliefs. They continued the fight for control of education which had been so bitterly contested in the School Board elections of 1870, and they sought unsuccessfully to establish what they regarded as non-sectarian education by removing the controlling influence held by the Church of England. They voted for temperance whenever possible by attempting to reduce the number of licensed houses and argued that drink was the cause of much of the social degradation in the east end of the town. These policies, increasingly regarded as puritan and out-dated, were similar to those which Bantock and his followers had demonstrated in the abolition of the Fair in 1876, a decision which met with massive public disapproval and had to be reversed. The actions of the radicals divided the Liberal party in Wolverhampton: the more tolerant members of the party who were not teetotal and included prominent manufacturers went their own way and some drifted towards the Conservatives. The radical Liberals encountered powerful opposition from Tory councillors including supporters of the drink trade who portrayed the radicals as kill-joys and enemies of the working men's pleasure.³⁴ Thus began the long decline of the Liberal party in Wolverhampton. As G. W. Jones wrote, 'during the course of the 1890s the Conservatives gained two seats, the Liberals lost six and Labour made its first appearance'.³⁵

At the end of 1888 Wolverhampton council was a body of limited quality which was subject to increasing external influence and had to take account of many diverse views in formulating governance. The reputation of the council, 'an -easy-going alliance of Conservatives and

³² G. W. Jones, *Borough Politics*, 36.

³³ *Ibid.*, 35. A similar situation applied in Bolton, Rochdale and Salford: J. Garrard, in *Leadership and Power in Victorian Industrial Towns* (Manchester, 1983), 82, commented that 'councillors rarely arrived with a mandate; practically never with a collective one.'

³⁴ John Lawrence has argued cogently that the Tories in alliance with representatives of the drink trade made a popular appeal in the 1880s and 1890s which revitalised plebeian Toryism and accelerated the decline of Liberalism, particularly that of the radical faction. See J. Lawrence, *Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England, 1867-1914* (Cambridge, 1998), 99-128. The Tory alliance defended 'the pleasures of the people', particularly those of the public house, the race track and the football terrace where the alliance benefited from association with the newly-formed and very popular Wolverhampton Wanderers Football Club. See P. F. Young, *Centenary Wolves* (Wolverhampton, 1976), 14-5. The drink trade, of which the representatives were predominantly Conservative, found in the alliance and its popular Toryism a convenient way of countering criticism for their part in causing drunkenness. They had always sought a more respectable position in Wolverhampton society: see, for example, *WC*, 4 February 1880 where it was claimed that 'the social position of members of the trade never stood higher than at the present time'.

conservative-Liberals',³⁶ was not high and many gifted and able citizens were unwilling to become involved in its activities, even at mayoral level. Nevertheless there was a well-established civic identity with much associated pride: the corollary of this civic pride was that the council was more susceptible to external criticism particularly when Wolverhampton was compared adversely with neighbouring towns especially the paradigm of Birmingham. However, external criticism had been a valuable catalyst in accelerating schemes for municipal improvement, which had also been driven by a rising consciousness of the need to provide better cultural, educational and recreational facilities for all the people of Wolverhampton. Although the prosperous west continued to be favoured, there was undeniable concern for the less fortunate inhabitants of the east end who were beginning to find their own advocates and to advance, however, slowly, towards participation in governance.

The civic progress which had been made by the end of the nineteenth century may be judged in the context of Rev Berry's notable sermon of 1896 on 'Municipal Patriotism' delivered at Queen Street chapel in the presence of the mayor, aldermen, councillors and officials of the borough.³⁷ Berry emphasised that although civic pride was both natural and laudable, it should 'manifest itself in the promotion of the higher interests of life'. It was not many years since even the 'foremost municipalities limited their ideas of duty to the mere outward, external conditions of health and order; to the supply of police for the protection of life and property; to the provision of sewerage works; and to the procuring of an adequate supply of pure water'. Above and beyond these basic provisions, corporations had 'a responsible duty in respect of the moral welfare, the intellectual enlightenment, and the social uplifting of the people'. This elevated mission was being carried out in Wolverhampton and it would bring its own rewards. The provision of parks for the people was 'as moral a provision as the distribution of tracts'. Education and a wide range of cultural activities were receiving support and it was to be hoped that music would not be neglected. With the familiar quotation from John Wesley that 'cleanliness is next to godliness', Berry praised the establishment of public baths and wash houses but asked for extensions and improvements. It was the duty of all 'to assist in elevating and broadening civic ideas and civic life' and furthermore 'a corporation ought to be a civic church, catching its inspiration from the spiritual churches, and translating the same into laws and provisions which make for the common weal'.

When Berry spoke in 1896 urging his congregation to build Jerusalem in Wolverhampton,³⁸ there was much evidence of civic development to be seen including the public baths (1875), the west park

³⁵ G. W. Jones, *Borough Politics*, 30.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 38.

³⁷ C. A. Berry, 'Municipal Patriotism', a sermon preached in Queen Street Congregational Church on Sunday, 22 November 1896 before the Mayor, Aldermen, Councillors and Officials of the Borough.

³⁸ In his sermon, Rev Berry told his congregation that 'If you believe that the welfare of the community resides in the well-being of its people, make no stint in your arrangements for their mental, moral and

(1881), the Art Gallery and School of Art (1885) and the free library originally opened in 1870 was about to be much improved and re-opened on a new site. All of these amenities, however, were in the west: the poorer side of the town had only the east park opened in 1896 in a basic design and destined to deteriorate rapidly. All of the developments had been largely initiated and progressed by Liberal Nonconformists and therefore carried elements of both instruction and control.

At the end of the nineteenth century the local political situation was changing as the Liberals lost support but Wolverhampton was then, as it remains today, energetic and adaptable and civic improvement continued under new political alignments. There would be greater attention paid to the common weal of all the townspeople. As G. W. Jones wrote, 'The 1890s were the last years of a traditional style of politics on the Council, which reached back to its foundation in 1848, but they also saw the beginnings of new developments, particularly the growth of the Labour Party, bringing with it onto the Council new techniques, new aims and a new style.'³⁹

religious culture ... make our city "set upon a hill", a shining light and example to the communities of the land.' Berry was presumably making an analogy between Wolverhampton and Jerusalem both 'set upon a hill': he had visited Jerusalem in 1886 as described in J. S. Drummond, *Charles A. Berry DD*, 49-50.

³⁹ G. W. Jones, *Borough Politics*, 12.

Chapter 10 – Conclusions

‘Each town had its own unique story to tell and ... there were as many variations on the municipal theme as there were towns. However ... there were components in the municipal revolution which we can identify as pretty well universal.’

D. Fraser¹

Fraser observed that ‘by 1885, English urban authorities had become institutions with wide social purposes and they really did conduce to the general welfare of the local community’.² Although this transformation was general, the ways in which particular towns accomplished it were essentially individual. Although they generally arrived at the same end point in the late nineteenth century, towns approached it at different rates and with significant differences in the controlling variables and in the priorities for action.

The main problems facing newly-incorporated authorities were considered by R. J. Morris to be the results of market failure; ‘pollution, public health, poverty, education and public order were all issues which when left to market forces generated increasing negative externalities’.³ From the 1840s onwards these problems could be addressed by taking advantage of permissive Acts of Parliament, but the impetus to take action had to be generated locally. From the 1870s, councils were given ‘compulsory duties in the sanitary field with the appropriate powers’.⁴ However, local support was fundamental and a private local bill had to be submitted. Because the responsibility for municipal reform was therefore devolved upon local authorities, there were wide differences in the priorities, rates and scales at which improvement took place.⁵

The urban transformation which took place between the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 and the County Councils Act of 1888 has been described by Helen Meller as a two stage process in which the first stage was concerned with public health and the second stage was concerned with the wider provision of cultural and recreational facilities such as for example free libraries and public parks.⁶ The two phases may be summarised as: sanitation first and civilisation second. Although Fraser has suggested that the transformation was more gradual in its movement towards adoption of social purpose, the two stage model is conceptually helpful. Fraser accepts that ‘from the 1870s these wider

¹ D. Fraser, *Power and Authority in the Victorian City* (Oxford, 1979), 157.

² *Ibid.*, 156-7.

³ R. J. Morris, ‘Governance: Two centuries of urban growth’ in R. J. Morris and R. H. Trainor (eds), *Urban Governance: Britain and Beyond since 1750* (Aldershot, 2000), 4.

⁴ D. Fraser, *Power and Authority in the Victorian City*, 164.

⁵ The question of legislation and municipal reform is discussed in W. Ashworth, *The Genesis of Modern British Town Planning: A Study in the Economic and Social History of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London, 1954), 477-77.

⁶ H. E. Meller, *Leisure and the Changing City, 1870-1914* (London, 1976), 237.

social purposes were increasingly evident, and by the 1890s the change through practical commitment was clear to all'.⁷

In this final chapter the two stage model will be used as the basis around which to identify and analyse the factors which determined the governance of Wolverhampton. It is a particularly appropriate model for Wolverhampton where the period under study is approximately bisected by the very significant visit of Queen Victoria in 1866. For both stages, the variables affecting governance will be detailed and analysed in terms of their influence both singly and severally. The second stage discussion will examine not only the advent of cultural provision but will also consider how the concept of civic duty became extended to embrace the idea of the common weal, the benefit of all the inhabitants and not only those living in the more favoured western district.

The record and achievements of the Wolverhampton council will be judged in a general national context and will then be compared in greater detail with the paradigm of Birmingham. Wolverhampton councillors constantly looked to Birmingham not only as a model in many ways but also as a competitive neighbour. Both then and now, Birmingham represents the most appropriate standard against which to measure the performance of Wolverhampton council, beleaguered by criticism but always retaining civic pride.

10.1 Stage One: Sanitation

The fortunes of Wolverhampton during the first sixty years of the nineteenth century were founded upon the coal and iron deposits which lay close to the town on the eastern side. As a result of the intensive manufacturing activity which the minerals supported, the eastern district became ravaged and polluted and the health of its inhabitants was much inferior to that of the people who resided in the pleasant environment of the west. The problems of the east would have been familiar to the first council members elected in 1848: although most of them lived in the west or the centre, they frequently earned their living through manufacturing in the east.

The councillors always included many prominent local manufacturers and their sympathies clearly lay with manufacturing. Even the large group of shop/trade council members, who usually filled the ranks of the economists opposed to civic expenditure chargeable to the town rates, were broadly sympathetic to manufacturing because it was Wolverhampton's lifeblood. The toasts at municipal functions always included 'the town and trade'.⁸ Although it was obvious that public health was far worse in the east and in certain central slum areas, little of any significance was done to alleviate the problem during the first twenty years of the council. The Rawlinson Report of 1849 was very critical of

⁷ D. Fraser, *Power and Authority in the Victorian City*, 168-9.

Wolverhampton, and yet the reaction to it was defensive and its findings were denied. The councillors, mostly resident in the west, were unwilling to risk undue rate increases to improve conditions for the townspeople in the east. The attitude of manufacturers who were responsible for much of the ill health by a combination of poor working conditions and environmental pollution, was not only one of denial that the problem existed but also one of surprise that anyone should question the right of manufacturers to operate their processes without restraint.⁹ The ever-present clouds of smoke hanging over the town were surely a guarantee of prosperity.

Thus, even in the face of serious outbreaks of cholera and typhoid, the councillors maintained a deep-seated resistance to external criticism. They generally possessed a strong local pride, but it was an aggressive pride in their Black Country surroundings, the scarred landscape through which they had generated so much prosperity.¹⁰ They were largely anti-intellectual and certainly resented external interference with what they would have regarded as a hard but commendable way of life which would always involve less pleasant urban areas in which someone had to live. When the mayor Henry Underhill was faced with criticism from *The Times* in 1862,¹¹ he responded confidently that 'Wolverhampton is as clean a town as any manufacturing town in the kingdom'.¹² Underhill was expressing a typical local view of the time; complacent, defensive and denying the need for costly reform.

The quality of the council was limited: press reports described meetings which were often protracted and unproductive.¹³ Many of the more capable townsmen could not be persuaded to serve on the council; they could achieve a higher level of social prestige by appointment to the magistracy. The council frequently had recourse to public meetings when difficult issues arose and under these circumstances an eloquent speaker could sway the attenders and overwhelm the diffident councillors. For example, until his death in 1868, Robert Sidney led the economist faction in their campaigns to resist expenditure on social improvements.

⁸ See, for example, W. H. Jones, *Story of the Municipal Life of Wolverhampton* (London, 1903), 136.

⁹ The company history records that when Manders were considering designs for a new chimney for their John Street Works in the early 1860s (see figure 6.1), it was written that 'something was needed (as science in those days did not interfere with factories) for there existed people of an unreasonable temper who cried out that varnish fumes besides being a nuisance to the senses were positively hurtful to the body.' G. Le M. Mander, *The History of Mander Brothers* (Wolverhampton, 1955), 14.

¹⁰ W. H. Auden, writing in 1936, recognised the attraction of the Black Country, 'the old historic battlefield' with its 'scars of struggle' which then remained in profusion. He concluded in *Letter to Lord Byron*,

'It's the most lovely country that I know;
Clearer than Scafell Pike, my heart has stamped on
The view from Birmingham to Wolverhampton.'

¹¹ *The Times*, editorial, 16 May 1862.

¹² *WC*, 11 June 1862.

¹³ See, for example, *WC*, 10 March 1852 and much later in similar vein *Express & Star*, 6 May 1882 and 1 November 1887.

The overall effect of the stalemate arrived at between economists and expenders was that until the 1860s the councillors operated in much the same way as the commissioners whom they had replaced. They dealt adequately with questions of public order and they regulated the streets and markets, but they were always inhibited in their approach to wider issues such as public health by the resistance of ratepayers. The interplay of 'the sets of institutions and procedures through which a political system operates', which lay 'at the heart of governance',¹⁴ determined that in the early years after incorporation the effective power of the council as the elected authority should be strictly limited.

From the mid-1850s onwards there were signs that individuals and groups were emerging who would urge sanitary reform as both a public necessity and as the mark of a progressive council and that gradually these views would gain general acceptance. Because party political affiliation was eschewed in relation to Wolverhampton council, these reformers have to be classified indirectly by considering their speaking and voting behaviour rather than by relying on stated loyalties. They certainly shared a civic pride and a wish to 'cast differences aside' for the sake of 'the good old town' as demonstrated by the mayor Edward Perry who made these comments in his successful attempts to save the Corporation from the bankruptcy brought on by the attempt to purchase the water company in 1855.¹⁵ The solicitor Henry Fowler who was so instrumental in gaining acceptance of the sewerage scheme in 1863, also had a strong commitment to the general welfare of the town and its people.¹⁶

Both Fowler and the barrister Rupert Kettle extended their civic patriotism into a series of initiatives designed to achieve a rapprochement and a commonality of interest between the middle and the working classes for the greater good of the town. Kettle had sought agreement with the Chartists in 1842 and later in 1871 he proposed 'an industrial partnership' to guarantee stability, reduce strikes and lock-outs and enable artisans to share wealth with the middle classes.¹⁷ Fowler regarded his own Liberal Nonconformist background as providing a bridge to the artisan classes; he advocated cooperation between capital and labour in order to 'develop in this country an amount of security to the capitalist and an amount of prosperity to working men never seen before'.¹⁸ Although artisans were not represented on any municipal body when Fowler made these comments in 1863, labour relations in Wolverhampton were relatively stable and conciliatory.

¹⁴ R. J. Morris, 'Governance' in Morris and Trainor (eds), *Urban Governance*, 2.

¹⁵ W. H. Jones, *Story of the Municipal Life*, 96-107.

¹⁶ Fowler's campaigns in support of the sewerage scheme and other local improvements are described in the biography written by his daughter. See E. H. Fowler, *The Life of Henry Hartley Fowler, First Viscount Wolverhampton*, GCSI (London, 1912), 41-78.

¹⁷ *WC*, 12 July 1871.

¹⁸ E. H. Fowler, *The Life of Henry Hartley Fowler*, 63.

This equilibrium was assisted by the paternal, even familial attitude of many major employers¹⁹ who enjoyed good relations with their employees and were often popular figures locally despite continuing in some cases to operate the unjust system of Tommy truck. The advantage of being a local man, born in Wolverhampton, giving annual treats to employees and generous donations to charity guaranteed popularity. As R. H. Trainor observed for the Black Country in general, in the relative absence of a local aristocracy, the wealthy manufacturers became the natural recipients of respect and deference.²⁰

Thus, at the beginning of the 1860s, Wolverhampton was a successful stable town in which a council balanced between expenders and economists remained cautious in committing rate-funded expenditure for sanitary or social purposes. This was the period of 'a contest between an economy-minded petty bourgeoisie and a more established, expansionist-minded group of large employers and professionals'.²¹ Fraser commented that at that time for a local council to be regarded as truly established, it had to achieve three kinds of authority: legal, social and civic.²² The legal authority had been conferred with incorporation in 1848; the social authority had been acquired by the involvement of major employers and professionals in council work. What had not been achieved to any marked extent by the 1860s was the civic authority, the requirement for the council to 'become a focus of citizenship ... to personify *civitas* for all its citizens'.²³ The civic authority of the council had been severely damaged by the bankruptcy threat arising from the waterworks purchase in 1855 when the council had been exposed to public ridicule. However, in 1866 came the landmark event of the Royal Visit by Queen Victoria which not only raised the civic authority of the council but also placed new responsibility upon the council to pursue enlightened policies in order to justify Wolverhampton's new and elevated national ranking.

The circumstances of the visit, the first made by the Queen since the death of Prince Albert five years previously and immediately following the Queen's rejection of similar invitations from Liverpool and Manchester, combined uniquely to raise the prestige of Wolverhampton and of its council. Even in the 1850s when the Queen visited several industrial cities, 'the presence of the symbol of the nation and of the aristocratic hereditary principle ... acted as the catalyst for the expression of provincial, bourgeois

¹⁹ S. Gunn in *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class, Ritual and Authority and the English Industrial City 1840-1914* (Manchester, 2000) commented that industrial towns such as Blackburn, Keighley and Wolverhampton were 'often dominated by a small number of employers and still subject in the later Victorian period to modes of paternalist influence based on a highly localised web of dependent personal relationships'. J. Garrard made a similar observation in relation to Rochdale in *Leadership and Power in Victorian Industrial Towns, 1830-80* (Manchester, 1983), 29.

²⁰ See R. H. Trainor, 'The Gentrification of Victorian and Edwardian Industrialists' in A. L. Beier et al. (eds), *The First Modern Society* (Cambridge, 1989), 167-97.

²¹ S. Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class*, 22.

²² D. Fraser, *Power and Authority in the Victorian City*, 157-8.

²³ *Ibid.*, 159.

civic pride'.²⁴ In the event the Wolverhampton visit with its associated pageantry was a great success culminating in the ennoblement of the mayor. The visit advanced civic pride incalculably and the critical, even envious, comments from the external press merely served to raise to an even higher level the new civic pride and self-confidence of Wolverhampton.

In the aftermath of the Royal visit, Wolverhampton retained a measure of the approbation which it had received together with a much enhanced level of civic pride. There was an increased sense of the need for municipal improvement in order to justify the town's new national recognition. There was a constant reminder of the new status of Wolverhampton in the statue of the late Prince Consort which had become the focal point of the town. Nevertheless, civic pride was not the only driving force of reform by any means.

There was also after the late 1860s a powerful religious commitment to civic duty and municipal reform, particularly associated with Nonconformity. Simultaneously the power structure of the council was changing; the new group of professionals was increasingly influential and by the 1880s they were rivalling manufacturing for the senior positions such as mayor with shop/trade having fallen behind somewhat. This change arguably conferred a higher level of education on the council which might therefore have been expected to take a more reasoned view of necessary but costly reform. Above all, after 1870, there was an increased awareness of civic duty and the emphasis of governance widened from sanitation to civilisation.²⁵

10.2 Civilisation

By 1870 the major issues of borough sanitation were being addressed. The waterworks acquired by the council in 1868 was operating successfully and the new sewerage scheme had been completed and brought into use. However, of the problems which originally faced the newly-incorporated borough in 1848 (listed by R. J. Morris as 'pollution, public health, poverty, education and public order'),²⁶ all except the last-named remained obstinately in place, albeit sometimes in new forms. Pollution, public health and poverty were of particular concern in the eastern districts in general and specifically in the so-called 'unhealthy area' immediately to the east of the town centre. By the 1870s, however, the climate of opinion had become much more receptive to municipal reform, even if the initial reaction to external criticism remained familiarly defensive.

²⁴ S. Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class*, 165.

²⁵ Fraser suggested that this transition should be regarded as resulting from 'a gradually widening definition of the social purposes of municipal reform ... In early Victorian England the wholesome environment was seen mainly in terms of sanitary regulation, while by the later Victorian years it had been perceived as supplying men's cultural and recreational needs as well'. See D. Fraser, *Power and Authority in the Victorian City*, 168-9. For further discussion of the transition, in which the 1860s has been seen 'as the turning point between individualism and collectivism', see H. Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society 1780-1880* (London, 1972), 437-54.

When the Ballard Report, published in 1874, was just as critical of the town's sanitation as the Rawlinson Report had been twenty-five years previously, the first reaction of the mayor was defensive and equivocal. Nevertheless, the mayor was obliged to concede that Ballard's criticisms were fundamentally correct and it was of course impossible to conceal the east-west difference. As a direct consequence of the Ballard Report a scheme was proposed for clearing the unhealthy area and voted upon by the council in 1875. Support for the new scheme was unanimous, a result which may be contrasted with the slender majority by which the sewerage scheme had been approved in 1863. There was a new sense of civic responsibility and municipal reform was increasingly regarded as inevitable. As Helen Meller has argued, citizenship had become 'a measure of the willingness of municipalities to incur debt in great redevelopment schemes' and these schemes were acquiring 'social objectives'.²⁷

Among the issues which displayed social objectives, the widening of school education became an extremely controversial subject. The new School Board of 1870, elected after a fierce contest between the representatives of the Church of England and those of Nonconformity, had to make major improvements in schooling whilst avoiding as far as possible the pitfalls of sectarian conflict. Although religious attendance figures in Wolverhampton had been shown in the 1851 Census to be unusually high for an industrial town, the underlying reason was in the high level of dissenting worship and these Nonconformists, especially the Congregationalists, were totally opposed to any form of education which might favour Anglicans as the established church. The sectarian disputes over the School Board elections of 1870 signalled the breakdown of the accommodation between the Church of England and Nonconformity which had been demonstrated in various forms of cooperation earlier in the nineteenth century.²⁸ The disputes also illustrated how the town council, increasingly influenced by senior Congregationalists, would attempt to exert measures of control over the attitudes and behaviour of the townspeople.

By the late 1860s the council had acquired a strong and influential contingent of Nonconformist members including several prominent Congregationalists. These latter frequently held senior office as chairmen of committees and as mayors; they included some of the most important manufacturers in Wolverhampton. Their vocation to serve upon the council had been confirmed and strengthened by the sermons of Rev R. W. Dale given in Birmingham and published from 1867 onwards. Dale set out to demonstrate 'the sacredness of secular business'²⁹ and exhorted all Congregationalists to seek civic

²⁶ R. J. Morris, 'Governance' in Morris and Trainor (eds), *Urban Governance*, 4.

²⁷ H. Meller, 'Urban Renewal and Citizenship: the quality of life in British cities 1890-1990', *Urban History*, 22, 1, 65.

²⁸ These collaborative projects between the Church of England and Nonconformity were usually concerned with general religious philanthropy and did not therefore provoke doctrinal conflict. See J. D. Walters, 'The Evangelical Embrace: Relations between Anglicans and Dissenters in the period 1830-1870', *West Midlands Studies*, 14 (1981), 32-8.

²⁹ R. W. Dale quoted by E. P. Hennock in *Fit and Proper Persons*, 161.

duty as a Christian obligation. This duty required them not only to 'give to the poor the enjoyment of pleasant parks and gardens and the intellectual refinement of public libraries and galleries of art', but also to pay attention to the ever-present problems of public 'decency and morality'.³⁰ Thus, the Nonconformist councillors of Wolverhampton, with Congregationalists in the forefront, not only initiated most of the projects for social and cultural improvement but they also attempted by various measures of control to elevate the behaviour of the townspeople in general, and of the working classes in particular.³¹

Although the large Irish community provided a convenient scapegoat for most civil disorder, the municipal authorities were concerned that the working classes in general should be converted to an attitude of compliant respectability. They should be induced to adopt the behaviour and attitudes of the middle classes although for them membership of that group, if available at all, would be at a low level, for example, occasional appointment as a poor law guardian.

The fact that nationally this 'social control' in the sense of the attempt by the middle classes to gain some form of hegemony over the working classes was generally a failure does not altogether invalidate the term 'social control' as a description of a policy: it did define the intention, if not the achievement.³² R. J. Morris has suggested that a more accurate descriptive term would be 'steering' to describe the processes by which 'urban elites of the industrial city system' tried to influence other social groups. 'The resulting relationship' was described by Morris as 'much more one of bargaining than control'.³³

In Wolverhampton this 'steering' was intricately bound up with the provision of cultural and recreational facilities for all classes. The vision was indeed 'of a civilisation based on morality and culture'³⁴ but in order to deliver morality, public behaviour had to be supervised. The West Park, for

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 162.

³¹ R. J. Morris has suggested that one of the tangible effects of the attempt by the middle classes to gain cultural domination over lower status groups was 'the destruction of an independent radical middle class'. Thus 'clerks, tradesmen and artisans ... were drawn into the Mechanics Institution culture of the 1840s ... they were moulded into an elite-led class identity'. See R. J. Morris, *Class, Sect and Party. The making of the British middle class, Leeds 1820-1850* (Manchester, 1990), 324. This interesting argument would probably apply to Wolverhampton where middle class Liberal Nonconformists were so closely involved in supporting mechanics' institutes. Moreover, the artisans of the Black Country were themselves strongly Liberal and Nonconformist. See E. Taylor, 'The Working Class Movement in the Black Country 1863-1914', (Keele University PhD thesis, 1974), 8.

³² 'Social control' is becoming a superseded term which does not adequately describe the situation to which it refers. R. J. Morris has commented that 'historians have abandoned any simple concept of "social control" as a useful way of understanding policy and social action in an industrial society. Such a concept implied a sense of coherent and coordinated action on the part of elites and a lack of autonomy and agency by subordinate groups which did not accord with the evidence.' See R. J. Morris, 'Governance' in Morris and Trainor (eds), *Urban Governance*, 10.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ H. E. Meller, *Leisure and the Changing City*, 237.

example, had many regulations to control the working classes. The public baths were equally regulated and had a measure of segregation into two separate classes. The Free Library was subject to much debate regarding which books would be acceptable. However, when the council voted to abolish the traditional Fair in 1876, 'steering' had become 'control' and public reaction to the denial of their traditional space for carnival forced the decision to be reversed. The controversy over the Fair in particular focused attention on the way in which the governance of Wolverhampton, 'the interaction of government and society',³⁵ was becoming more diffuse and having to take note of a wider range of public opinion.

In the fourth quarter of the nineteenth century, Wolverhampton was subject to considerable change, particularly demographically and geographically. From the 1870s onwards there was a progressive migration of the prosperous classes out of the congested centre towards the pleasant and spacious suburbs to the west of the town. The wealthiest people moved two miles west to Tettenhall, 'the suburb of the palatial-like residence of local merchant princes'.³⁶ Even artisans and clerks were able to make a more modest move westwards because the Whitmore Reans area had been made available for housing by 1855. The overall effect of this migration was that the educated and influential members of the community became almost exclusively based in the west. By 1888 only 20 per cent of the council members were resident in the east and the eastern wards were represented largely by councillors living in the west.

This sharp social polarisation of Wolverhampton was reinforced in other ways. The principal schools were in the west. The main cultural and recreational amenities were in the west; only the inferior East Park was on the other side. It became increasingly apparent that the governance of Wolverhampton was operating through a western-dominated council, the so-called 'West End swells',³⁷ which would favour its own side of town for municipal development. This view was reinforced in 1902 when the first electric tram line was opened leading through the west to Tettenhall.

There were many other less formal ways in which the town was socially polarised towards the west. The network of societies and associations which proliferated after 1860 and influenced urban attitudes was largely based in the west. In any organisation with a cultural content, the committee usually included a large share of ministers of religion and schoolmasters. The council members were by no means all involved in cultural activity: the image of the self-made businessman councillor, lacking formal education but honest and industrious, persisted.

³⁵ R. J. Morris, 'Governance' in Morris and Trainor (eds), *Urban Governance*, 1.

³⁶ A. C. Pratt, *Black Country Methodism* (London, 1891), 65.

³⁷ *Express & Star*, 27 October 1893.

The westward migration of the wealthy made it even more unlikely that successful businessmen could be induced to serve on a council which was so heavily criticised and was demonstrably of modest quality even though it included some very capable individuals. Furthermore, as R. H. Trainor observed 'the leaders of the Black Country's industrial dynasties gradually reduced week-by-week involvement in local affairs, assuming roles of generous figureheads'.³⁸ In the late nineteenth century, there was a shortage of talented individuals prepared to undertake municipal service. As a consequence, the council was increasingly permeable and open to persuasion by the eloquent and confident individual.

When the rising complexity of municipal administration necessitated the appointment of paid officials, the direct power of the council in formulating governance became even more diluted. The town clerk Horatio Brevitt, appointed in 1882, was a dominant figure in Wolverhampton and remained so for more than thirty years. The gas manager John Annan became mayor in 1884, only twelve months after election to the council. The editor of the local newspaper, *Express & Star*, Thomas Graham was confident of his ability to manipulate the small men who were the nominal leaders of the town.

At the end of the 1880s, the governance of Wolverhampton was susceptible to change. Nonconformity, which had been so influential in promoting the cultural and recreational development of the town, was beginning to lose some influence,³⁹ not only from the general decline of urban religious observance but also because the townspeople felt increasingly alienated from the moralising attitudes which the 'Chapel Influence' (as it was later known)⁴⁰ attempted to apply to municipal life. Moreover, there was growing public impatience at the continual doctrinal arguments between the Church of England and Nonconformity.

As the concept of the common weal became increasingly accepted, so the need to improve conditions in the east became an important issue and electoral contests became more frequent. In 1874 the prominent Liberal/Congregationalist and manufacturer S. T. Mander expressed his concern and even guilt about conditions in the east and the Church of England vicar of St George's took the same view. Religious conflict was becoming 'anachronistic in an age when social questions were coming to the fore'.⁴¹ G. W. Jones wrote that at the end of the nineteenth century, the *raison d'être* of the Liberal

³⁸ R. H. Trainor, *Black Country Elites: The exercise of authority in an industrialised area 1830-1900* (Oxford, 1993), 360.

³⁹ C. G. Brown commented that 'the early and mid-1890s were the peak for organized religion in Britain from which decline set in.' in 'Did urbanization secularize Britain?', *Urban History Yearbook* (1988), 12. S. Gunn referred to 'the rapid decline of Nonconformity after 1900' in *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class*, 193.

⁴⁰ G. W. Jones, *Borough Politics: A study of the Wolverhampton Borough Council, 1888-1964* (London, 1969), 39.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 44.

party in Wolverhampton was in effect the defence of Nonconformity and such a party 'would not remain for long as a significant force when the main battle was between capital and labour'.⁴²

10.3 Wolverhampton in Comparative Context

Despite all of the criticism which Wolverhampton council endured and notwithstanding the extreme polarisation of the town between east and west, it has to be accepted that great progress was made in the forty years between incorporation in 1848 and the acquisition of county borough status in 1888. R. H. Trainor considered that '[Wolverhampton's] elite in particular had significantly expanded the town's institutions while learning to cope with a relatively strong factory base and labour movement'.⁴³

In order to judge the performance of Wolverhampton council in a national context, the concept of 'Fiscal Effort' (FE) may be used.⁴⁴ This term describes the quotient of public expenditure and assessed valuation so that it indicates the level of financial commitment which a council has seen fit to undertake in relation to its resources derived from rating. Table 10.1 shows seven towns and cities compared for FE in 1885: the figure for financial commitment in the calculation of FE is taken to be the outstanding loan debt of each urban authority.

The results in Table 10.1 demonstrate that although Bradford, 'the model municipality of its size',⁴⁵ had an exceptionally high FE of 15.7, the other six authorities had results varying between 1.7 and 4.5. Wolverhampton at 2.8 had a creditable figure similar to that of Manchester at 2.9 and considerably higher than that of Liverpool at 1.7.⁴⁶

⁴² *Ibid.*, 44.

⁴³ R. H. Trainor, *Black Country Elites*, 374.

⁴⁴ The concept of Fiscal Effort (FE) was described by J. Kaufman in his paper 'Municipal Government and Civic Associational Activity in Late Nineteenth Century American Cities' given at the Urban History Group Conference, University of Sussex, 3 April 1997. I am indebted to Jason Kaufman for helpful discussion regarding FE. It is appreciated that FE calculated from loan debt as shown in Table 10.1 takes no account of rating income, but it does provide an approximate and useful comparison for urban centres.

The Fiscal Efforts of the seven towns relate directly to expenditure on public works of which the major component is usually the purchase of the waterworks which amounted on average to 39% of total debt. The corresponding Wolverhampton figure was 34%.

⁴⁵ F. Dolman, *Municipalities at Work: The municipal policy of six great towns and its influence on their social welfare* (London, 1895), 85.

⁴⁶ There is further comment on comparative borough debts in D. Fraser, *Power and Authority in the Victorian City*, 169.

Table 10.1 - Comparative Fiscal Effort of Urban Authorities, 1885

	Population at 1881 Census (‘000)	Assessable Value (AV) £000	Loan Outstanding (LO) £000	FE (LO/AV)
Birmingham	401	1,549	7,000	4.5
Bradford	183	255	4,004	15.7
Leeds	309	1,116	4,126	3.7
Leicester	122	400	1,515	3.8
Liverpool	352	3,381	5,794	1.7
Manchester	341	2,264	6,600	2.9
Wolverhampton	74	259	724	2.8

Source: *Parliamentary Papers*, 1884-5, LXVII, 7, 100-299.

In extending assessment into the detail of council performance, further comparison will be confined to Birmingham, which was not only the most frequent comparison made in Wolverhampton but also became the national paradigm. Frederick Dolman wrote in 1893 that ‘municipal reformers look to Birmingham as the eyes of the faithful are turned to Mecca’.⁴⁷ Table 10.2 sets out details of the main public facilities provided by Birmingham and by Wolverhampton between 1848 and 1888.

The details shown in Table 10.2 demonstrate that the record of Wolverhampton council between 1848 and 1888 compared favourably with that of Birmingham. Most of the facilities shown were available in Wolverhampton at about the same time as Birmingham and in the critical respect of waterworks purchase, Wolverhampton was over twenty years ahead of Birmingham. Admittedly, Wolverhampton did not purchase the gas works during this period, but it was after all ‘one of the lowest gas-rated towns in the kingdom’.⁴⁸

The problems of governance in Birmingham were not dissimilar to those in Wolverhampton. Before the mayoralty of Joseph Chamberlain began in 1873 and took Birmingham to the head of the municipal league, ‘the city was notoriously backward in its municipal administration ... well behind other towns’.⁴⁹ At that time, Birmingham also had the same defensive reaction to external criticism as did Wolverhampton and also concealed behind averages the widely differing death rates across the districts of the city.⁵⁰ From the 1870s onwards, both Birmingham and Wolverhampton entered upon a

⁴⁷ F. Dolman, *Municipalities at Work*, 1.

⁴⁸ J. Jones, *The Mayors of Wolverhampton, II, 1881-1909*. J. Annan (1884-5).

⁴⁹ Fraser commented further that Birmingham’s pre-eminent municipal reputation after 1880 as ‘the best-governed city in the world’ (described thus by J. Ralph in *Harper’s Monthly Magazine*, June 1890) was based largely upon the high rate of improvement which the city had to implement in the 1870s whilst ‘energetically seeking to catch up’ with other towns. See D. Fraser, *Power and Authority in the Victorian City*, 101.

⁵⁰ In 1870 the average death rate in Birmingham was about 25 per thousand but the city had black spot areas in which the death rate was 60-80 per thousand. A. Briggs, *History of Birmingham, Volume II, Borough and City 1865-1938* (London, 1952), 76-7.

Table 10.2 - Provision of Social and Cultural Facilities in Birmingham and Wolverhampton 1848-88

	BIRMINGHAM				WOLVERHAMPTON			
	Date	Cost	Source of finance	Comment	Date	Cost	Source of finance	Comment
Art Gallery	1885	£40,000	profit from gas company		1884	£8,000	private gift	
Free Library	1865	£16,000			1868		private/public	
Medical Officer of Health	1872				1873			
Public Parks	1857 onwards		gift/lease	10 parks acquired by 1882	1881	£16,000	public loan	
Purchase of gas works	1875	£450,000	public loan					gas works remained as private company
Purchase of water works	1876	£1,350,000	public loan		1855	£210,000	public loan	
Sewerage scheme	1876	£400,000	public loan		1861	£35,000	public loan	
Slum clearance scheme	1876	£550,000	public loan	43 acres cleared	1877	£228,000	public loan	12 acres cleared

Sources:

Birmingham - A. Briggs, *History of Birmingham*, Vol. II (Oxford, 1952); J. T. Bunce, *History of the Corporation of Birmingham*, Volume II (Birmingham, 1885); E. P. Hennock, *Fit and Proper Persons* (London, 1973).

Wolverhampton - W. H. Jones, *Story of the Municipal Life of Wolverhampton* (London, 1903); J. Jones, *Literary Institutions of Wolverhampton 1794-1897* (London, 1897); *Minutes of the Borough Council*.

new phase of municipal reform. Despite having less than a fifth of Birmingham's assessable value to draw upon, Wolverhampton did not fall behind after 1870 as evidenced by the massive clearance and improvement schemes which both authorities undertook in 1876-7.⁵¹

Thus the much-criticised Wolverhampton council provided the facilities for sanitation and civilisation at a comparable rate of progress to that achieved by Birmingham. It is also creditable that they accomplished so much social and cultural improvement whilst maintaining public harmony within a diverse industrially-dominated population. The frequent recourse to public meetings and the deep-seated attachment of the townspeople to what they regarded as their public space and rights of assembly ensured that the town was administered by interactive governance rather than by direct council government. All of the people who participated in this process of bargaining rather than control - councillors and townspeople alike - made their individual and collective contribution to governance. The history of the urban landscape 'cannot be depopulated'⁵² and a great debt must be acknowledged to these people. They were driven by various imperatives as described but their common factor was the affection and pride invested in 'the good old town' which, on 18 December 2000, finally became the City of Wolverhampton.

⁵¹ The Birmingham Improvement Scheme is described in A. Briggs, *ibid.*, 67-82.

⁵² P. Waller, 'The English Urban Landscape: Yesterday, today and tomorrow' in P. Waller (ed), *The English Urban Landscape* (Oxford, 2000), 11.

Further Study

In this thesis the urban biography of Wolverhampton was constructed on the premise that governance was generated by interaction between a number of determining variables: these were essentially those which Sidney Checkland categorised in 1966 as economic, ideological, political, social and spatial.¹ The influence of these variables is, however, much more complex than a simple summation of their individual effects. Not only did they interact with each other, but their effects were not constant; they varied with time.

Taking Wolverhampton as the exemplar of this approach to urban biography, it was argued in the thesis that manufacturing, as might be expected, was always a very powerful influence. Throughout the 40 year period, manufacturing with its associated trade was regarded as the ruling local priority, able to create pollution as it wished, a small price to pay for employment and prosperity. However, the leading manufacturers were often very religious men and included many Nonconformists who latterly became converted to the cause of municipal reform and expressed misgivings over the wretched conditions which manufacturing had caused in the eastern district.

Religion thus became from the late 1860s a very important determinant of Wolverhampton's governance. It was certainly one of the factors which swung the council away from control by economists towards the necessity of municipal improvement. Civic pride, often assertive and tinged with a measure of anti-intellectualism, was greatly enhanced by the Royal Visit of 1866 and thereafter became a major factor in governance: Wolverhampton had acquired an urban status but this had to be maintained by visible civic improvement. By the 1870s, therefore, the interaction of these variables and some others was moving Wolverhampton steadily towards an acceptance of civic duty which would be extended to favour the common weal of all the people.

There is of course nothing unique or unusual about these changes. The conversion of councils to sanitation and then civilisation occurred in virtually every town, but just as in Wolverhampton other towns had their own particular balance of determining variables. Although the nationally-observed changes occurred generally, individual towns showed significant differences in the motivation, timing and extent of reform.

In so far as towns exhibit similarities, they can be classified into urban genres such as industrial towns, port towns, county towns, market towns, etc. Within each of these classifications, there is a strong possibility that the determining variables of governance will be similar, even if their individual details have different nuances. For example, Nonconformism was a powerful influence in the manufacturing

towns of Birmingham, Leicester and Wolverhampton although the leading denomination was different in each case as Quakerism, Unitarianism and Congregationalism respectively.

In moving from one genre of town to another, there will usually be major changes in the significant variables. For example, whereas manufacturing was the largest occupational group on Wolverhampton council between 1848 and 1888 at 36 per cent, in the county town of Lincoln for the same period, the manufacturing group was only 6 per cent of the council, easily outnumbered by shop/trade at 50 per cent and by professionals at 30 per cent.² With such important differences occurring in the relative strengths of variables controlling governance it should be possible to derive causal relationships in urban biography and to compare not only individual towns, but also genres of towns.

H. J. Dyos defined urban biography as 'the historical study of a town as an entity and in all its phases', which is what the concept of governance enables the historian to attempt. When the determining variables of towns are identified and evaluated for their influence on local governance, then the comparative study of towns is taken into a wider and more generalised discourse.

David Reeder, writing in 1998, commented on the growth of urban biography and, in the course of reviewing several such works, identified inconsistencies arising from structures in which many individuals contribute papers to an edited volume. The result is rarely a coherent whole and Reeder expressed doubts 'whether the multi-authored volume is necessarily the best way forward in developing the city biography' and also noted that there was no attempt to apply urban biography to the discussion of cities as members of urban genres.³

There are clearly many pitfalls in attempting to study groups of towns which have been brought together under various categories. However, thematic urban biography was considered by Sidney Checkland writing in 1983 to hold the possibility of grouping towns into families with common characteristics. At that time, Checkland conceded that the development through generalised urban history of 'a fully integrated theory of city performance (even if confined to a "family" of cities)' was beyond the reach of contemporary urban historians.⁴

¹ S. G. Checkland, 'Toward a Definition of Urban History' in H. J. Dyos (ed.), *The Study of Urban History* (London, 1968), 351.

² I am indebted to Denise McHugh for details of her Lincoln database from which these figures were calculated.

³ D. Reeder, 'The Industrial City in Britain: Urban Biography in the Modern Style', *Urban History*, 25, 3 (1998), 378.

⁴ S. G. Checkland, 'An Urban History Horoscope' in D. Fraser and A. Sutcliffe (eds), *The Pursuit of Urban History* (London, 1983), 466.

It is proposed that this prospect should be re-examined bearing in mind all of the theoretical changes which have arisen since Checkland's original paper. Obviously the reality of urban life and governance has been shown to be much more complex than might have been accepted 20 years ago: simple ideas, such as social control for example, have been superseded and a more nuanced approach has become general. Nevertheless, it is proposed that thematic urban biography does give promise of approaching, albeit cautiously, a general theory of urban governance. Much more comparative analysis is required on a range of towns and cities which represent as wide a diversity of urban categories as possible.⁵ Surely, however, we can agree with Checkland that the possibility of a general theory of urban history 'should be kept in sight as an aspiration'.⁶

⁵ See J. B. Smith, 'Urban Elites c.1830-1930 and Urban History', *Urban History*, 27, 2 (2000), 255-75.

⁶ S. G. Checkland, 'An Urban History Horoscope', 466.

Appendix 1 – Analysis of Wolverhampton Council members, 1848-1888

The details of all members of the council were collected and entered upon the form shown below which was completed as far as possible for each individual. There is no specific listing of this information which was obtained principally by reference to the Minute Books of the council and its committees and to the pages of the *Wolverhampton Chronicle*.

<u>Wolverhampton Council</u>
Name
D.O.B.
Place
Date elected Councillor
Address
Ward of Address
Occupation
Ward represented
Date elected Alderman
Address
Ward of Address
Occupation
Ward represented
Date elected Mayor
Address
Ward of Address
Occupation
Committees
Date of leaving office
Reason
Politics
Religion
Magistrate
Mason
Societies
Other membership
Relation
References
Notes

A full range of minute books is held in Wolverhampton Archives and Local Studies Collection and these books provide full details of the elections to council held in November of each year. The month of November is the operative date when new councillors assumed office so that a council member described in the main text as being mayor (1874, for example) would have been elected in November of 1874 and would have served until November 1875. The minute book entries were not always dated and therefore references in the thesis may sometimes be given in terms of the page number alone. It should be noted that the minute books for 1848-88 give a very limited account of council proceedings. There is very little description of any discussion. The motions proposed are recorded together with the results of the votes, but sometimes even the names and numbers of those voting are not listed. To

obtain any real indication of the flavour of the debates, it is absolutely necessary to refer to the *Wolverhampton Chronicle* which usually gives a verbatim account of proceedings accompanied by separate editorial comment on main issues.

Reports in the *Wolverhampton Chronicle* also provide an invaluable source of information regarding council members' political and religious affiliations and the social networks to which they belonged. The reports also give some guidance on the relative status of local councillors which enables the classification of their occupations to be assigned with greater reliability. There are several very general statements of occupation to be found in the electoral results such as 'manufacturer', 'agent', 'carrier' and 'factor' which give insufficient information to define the status of the subject. In this work, the general information derived from the *Chronicle* and elsewhere is used to define individual categories as accurately as possible.

In this thesis, the description 'manufacturing' is used exclusively as a description of the productive manufacturer and only that. Such categories as 'agent', 'carrier', 'factor' and 'merchant' are placed under the general heading of 'shop/trade'. The category of 'drink' includes all aspects of the licensed trade from publicans to maltsters and wine merchants. 'Professionals' refers to those qualified men who are generally self-employed such as architects, lawyers, medical officers, surgeons and surveyors. The category of 'administration' refers to those men who managed substantial enterprises on behalf of others or of a company; 'gentleman' denotes the retired.

It is relatively easy to establish the political and religious sympathies of senior council members at least and any appointments as magistrates or poor law guardians are clearly recorded. However, it is a great deal more difficult to determine whether councillors were members of societies or associations because very few records remain. On this question of general social networks local directories and the Red Books are an invaluable source. Membership of Freemasonry in this study was checked from the original records as acknowledged in Chapter 4.

Appendix 2 – Analysis of Leicester Council members, 1835-1889

The details for Leicester council members were collected as described for Wolverhampton using the same form to assemble the database. The task was much easier in the case of Leicester because the basic details are listed in J. Storey, *Historical Sketches of the Borough of Leicester* (Leicester, 1895) which is the source of all the following information. In the case of Leicester the category 'manufacturing' refers almost exclusively to the textile industry.

Table 1 – Occupational Composition of Leicester Council – Specific Councils
(Figures are percentages)

	1848-9	1968-9	1888-9
Manufacturing	55	35	28
Shop/trade	26	35	40
Drink	6	8	8
Professional	13	20	28
Administration	-	-	-
Gentleman	-	2	-

Table 2 – Occupational Composition of Leicester Alderman
(Figures are percentages)

	1835-44	1845-54	1855-64	1865-74	1875-83
Manufacturing	63	78	50	50	40
Shop/trade	3	11	50	30	40
Banking	3	-	-	-	-
Professional	7	11	14	13	20
Gentleman	24	-	-	7	-

Table 3 – Occupational Composition of Leicester Mayors
(Figures are percentages)

	1835-44	1845-54	1855-64	1865-74	1875-83
Manufacturing	80	60	80	60	30
Shop/trade	-	20	10	30	50
Banking	20	-	-	-	-
Professional	-	10	10	10	20
Gentleman	-	10	-	-	-

Table 4 – Average Years of Service of Leicester Council Members

	1835-45	1846-55	1856-65	1866-75
Whole Council	6.0	6.6	5.5	5.0

Table 5 – Length of Service of Leicester Council Members 1835-1875
(Figures are percentages)

	0-3 years	3-6 years	6-9 years	9-12 years	12-15 years	15 years +
Whole Council	40	21	8	13	6	12

Table 6 – Length of Service of Leicester Council Members 1835-1875 divided into decades for date of first election
(Figures are percentages)

Whole Council	0-3 years	3-6 years	6-9 years	9-12 years	12-15 years	15 years +
1835-45	43	20	11	11	1	14
1846-55	42	16	9	12	9	12
1856-65	31	28	5	18	10	8
1866-75	40	24	4	18	8	6

Appendix 3 – Relative Values of Money

In 1962 Mitchell and Deane opened their article on ‘Wages and the standard of living’ as follows: ‘In travelling backwards from the twentieth century to the nineteenth, the student of wages passes from a highway to a thorny path.’¹ This caution is very true and particularly apposite in attempting to make any comparison between current values of money and corresponding values in the nineteenth century. Obviously, the value of £1 in 1800 is a good deal higher than that of £1 today, but the multiplication factor is really impossible to define with any confidence. Wages are relevant only as far as they relate to living conditions at the time, to the cost of accommodation and to that of food.

Although it is virtually impossible to make an accurate comparison between values of money across the past two centuries, banking economists have attempted the exercise on an approximate basis by calculating the amount of money required in modern times to purchase the goods which could have been bought for £1 in past years. The calculation is rightly unacceptable to a strict theoretical economist, but it does provide a rough guide and shows relative fluctuations.² With these major reservations, the results are quoted below:

Year	Value of £1 in January 2001
1800	29.9
1810	28.4
1820	34.8
1830	41.5
1840	37.0
1850	48.7
1860	43.7
1870	42.7
1880	44.8
1890	53.3
1900	54.9

¹ B. R. Mitchell & P. Deane, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge, 1962) 338.

² I am grateful to Don Bennett, formerly of Midland Bank, for providing the data from which these results were obtained.

The results show that between 1850 and 1890, what we would now define as inflation and what the Victorians would have seen as a fall in the purchasing power of money amounted to a little over 9% equivalent to a depreciation rate of about 2% per decade.

Appendix 4 – Usage of Wolverhampton Free Library, 1879-80

Table 1 - Occupation Analysis of Readers' Tickets for Reference Library

Artists	45	Hatters	5
Agents, Collectors and Travellers	80	Labourers	67
Apprentices	17	Ladies	15
Assistants and Shopmen	74	Locksmiths	102
Blacksmiths	14	Managers and Foremen	18
Boot and Shoe Makers	72	Manufacturers and Merchants	12
Brassfounders	56	Mechanics	26
Bricklayers and Builders	17	Miscellaneous Trades	289
Chemists	24	Painters, Plumbers and Decorators	92
Carpenters	41	Photographers	5
Clerks and Bookkeepers	749	Printers	68
Coach Builders	9	Professional Gentlemen	240
Coopers	6	School Teachers	216
Draughtsmen	10	Scholars and Students	258
Electrotypers	13	Shopkeepers	16
Engineers and Fitters	155	Stampers	46
Errand Boys	32	Tailors	15
Grooms	2	Tin-plate Workers	221
Innkeepers	7	Warehousemen and Packers	61
Ironworkers	44	No occupation given	379
Japanners	164		

Source: *Annual Report of the Wolverhampton Free Library Committee, 25 October 1880.*

Table 2 - Age Groups of Borrowers
(figures are percentages)

14-16 years	29.8
17-20 years	19.0
21-25 years	16.0
26-30 years	10.2
31-35 years	7.7
36-40 years	7.7
41-45 years	3.7
46-50 years	3.2
over 50 years	2.6

Source: As for Table 1.

Table 3 - Subject Classification of Books issued by Lending Library
(figures are percentages)

Fiction	68.8
Magazines & Miscellaneous	13.4
Juvenile literature	5.0
History & Travels	4.7
Art, Science & Natural History	3.0
Theology & Philosophy	1.9
Biography	1.7
Poetry and Drama	1.2
Law, Politics & Commerce	0.2

Source: As for Table 1

Table 4 - Reference Library - Examples of Issues

	No. of times issued		
Art Journal volumes	192	Geikie's Life of Christ	10
Atfield's Chemistry	21	Gilray's Caricatures	39
Ballads, British, illustrated	3	History of England	14
Bible Dictionary, by Smith	10	Hogarth's Works	38
Boscabel Tracts	4	Illustrated London News	130
British Butterflies, by Morris	8	Italian School of Design	17
Cartoon Portraits of Men of the Day	25	Index Bible	8
Cassell's Popular Educator	105	Map of Wolverhampton	17
Chambers' Encyclopaedia	19	Many Thoughts of Many Minds	3
Chambers' Information for the People	9	Macaulay's Works	13
Chemistry of Common Life	8	McCarthy's History of our Time	11
Commentary on the Bible, by Clarke	25	Old England (Knight)	28
Commentary on the Bible, by Matthew Henry	28	Pictorial Gallery of Art	7
Dore Sketches	25	Peerage - Burke and Debret	41
Drawing and Design, Industrial	4	Pen and Pencil Pictures	12
Drawing from Nature, by Barnard	13	Phonetic Journal volumes	34
Dictionary of Mechanics	28	Poets, English	44
Encyclopaedia Britannica	150	Punch volumes	818
Encyclopaedia Popular	6	Ruskin's 7 Lamps of Architecture	29
English Mechanic volumes	73	Seymour's Humorous Sketches	139
English Hexapla	2	Shakespeare's Works	18
Engineer volumes	6	Staffordshire, Past and Present	3
Family Physician	10	Staffordshire, by Shaw	40
French Revolution, by Thiers	6	Times volumes	88
Gazeteer of the World	34	Ure's Dictionary of Science	10
Grammar of Ornament, by Owen Jones	23	Wolverhampton Chronicle vols	28

Source: As for Table 1

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Evening Star, 1882-4

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Hinde's Household Almanack (Wolverhampton, 1890)

3. LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Wolverhampton Town Commissioners Minute Books 1777-1848

Wolverhampton Borough Council Minute Books 1848-88

Dates of commencement of *Minute Books* of committees are as follows: 1848 – Finance, Gas, General Purposes, Markets, Public Works, Streets and Sewerage; 1850 – Health of Town/Sanitary; 1853 – Watch; 1862 – Sanitary, Streets; 1865 – Sewerage; 1869 – Free Library, Water; 1872 – Team; 1875 – Artisans' Dwellings and Streets; 1877 – Parks and Baths; 1886 – Art Gallery.

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