Nineteenth-century Usk.

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By
Elizabeth Jane Fayrer Jones.

School of History, Politics and International Relations,

University of Leicester.

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Abstract

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The growth and evolution of towns during the nineteenth century has been thoroughly explored by urban historians. With their ballooning populations, rapid physical growth and complex internal relationships, it is understandable why towns and cities such as Manchester, Birmingham and London have captured the interest and imagination of scholars looking to understand the process that saw Britain transform from a rural society to the world's first urbanised nation. However, there has been considerably less research carried out on smaller settlements while the Welsh urban landscape remains almost entirely overlooked.

This thesis will employ Usk, a small town in Monmouthshire, south-east Wales to explore the experience of such towns during the nineteenth century. Using a variety of different sources including corporation, parish and local board records, newspaper articles and private correspondence, this thesis will explore the urban attributes of Usk to determine how they developed over the period in question and how its urban elite responded to the wider changes that transformed the urban landscape. It will explore the impact that centrally introduced reforms had on small towns to demonstrate that they were left without an effective form of local government and remained vulnerable to the influence of powerful aristocratic landlords and the growing authority of the county. The parallel processes of urban improvement and the development of urban based leisure, identified by Peter Borsay, will be examined to show that they were present in the smallest of towns but hindered by insufficient finances, limited space and reluctant ratepayers. Finally, internal relationships will be examined to show that in addition to the pressures touched upon above, the urban elites of small towns faced increasing competition from within the urban community as those from outside the traditional elite vied for their voices to be heard.

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Abbreviations

GA. - Gwent Archives, Ebbw Vale.

NLW. - National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth.

TNA. - The National Archives, Kew.

Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to explore the growth and development of Usk, a small town in Monmouthshire, south-east Wales, to determine how small towns adapted and responded to the changes that transformed British towns and cities during the nineteenth century. A review of the literature demonstrates that although there are several studies on the English small town in the eighteenth century and that European examples from the early modern period have received some analysis, Welsh equivalents have been overlooked. When working with the traditional definition of what constitutes a town, it is clear that this oversight is due to their size and perceived unimportance. Under this assumption, Usk can be easily marginalized, as its population in 1801 was only 734 inhabitants. In addition to this, Usk had no industry or obvious significance that would have previously warranted its study.

Initial research shows that although small, Usk was of considerable importance to its inhabitants and the communities that lived in the surrounding areas and when the fabric of the settlement is investigated more closely, characteristics associated with urban status emerge. Usk had a charter that dated back to the fourteenth century and borough status until its corporation was abolished in 1886. In addition to these official indicators, Usk had other urban features such as a market, civic buildings, amenities, a grammar school, banks and a newspaper; all of which are considered traits associated with urbanity and urban status. This study will explore the urban attributes of Usk to determine how they developed over the period in question and how its urban elite responded to the wider changes that transformed the urban landscape. In doing so the thesis will demonstrate that small towns and their elites were not passive observers who simply accepted their fates. Instead, they fought to re-establish their right to self-govern, to remain independent of the county and to reinforce their urban credentials. By looking at Usk, this project will contribute to the ongoing discussion as to what constitutes the dividing line between rural and urban and suggest that the definition of urban may need to be adapted when looking at Wales.

This thesis also aims to shine a light on the experience of Welsh towns which remain grouped together with and overshadowed by their Anglican cousins. Due to the geographical proximity and the political unification of the two nations it is assumed that

Welsh towns followed the same process of urbanisation. This thesis, however, will highlight the need for further research into the evolution of Welsh towns in order to fully understand the nature of urbanity within Britain.

Literature Review.

The intention of this literature review is to demonstrate that a study of the urban growth and development of Usk will fill significant gaps in the existing historiography and is therefore a justifiable case study for an in-depth investigation into the nature of nineteenth-century urbanity. Welsh urban history remains an under-developed area of research and is dominated by the study of large towns that benefited from the industrialisation of South Wales during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Traditionally it has been the cities and large towns that have been pinpointed as examples of nineteenth-century urbanity, however, they do not represent the only form that urbanity took during this period. With their rapidly growing populations, flourishing economies and their domination of the area that surrounded them there can be no doubt that they were obvious manifestations of what it meant to be urban. However, in more recent years, there has been a tendency to look at the process of urbanisation in smaller settlements, the development of which has received growing attention by those trying to understand the development of urban Britain. This study intends to work with the grain of this research to investigate the process and nature of urbanisation in Usk. By addressing the scope and limits of small, Welsh town urbanity during the eighteenth and nineteenth century this thesis aims to fill the obvious gap in the urban narrative of England and Wales and will also identify whether the pattern of growth and development of such a town mirrors the English model or whether the experience differs completely.

British urban history emerged as an independent field of study during the third quarter of the twentieth century when historians started researching the nature of urbanity and the causes of urban growth by primarily focusing on the cities and large towns that dominated the landscape.[1] Alan Everitt started to challenge this approach by addressing

[1] For example, H. J. Dyos, *The Victorian suburb: a study of the growth of Camberwell* (Leicester, 1961); A Briggs, *Victorian cities* (London, 1963).

the significance of smaller towns and the process of urbanisation that occurred within them.[2] Historians such as John Marshall, Penelope Corfield and Peter Clark have further developed this trend by specifically focusing on small towns.[3] Following a quiet period during the late 1980s, urban history re-emerged in the 1990s with a markedly different approach. Rather than focusing simply on the demographic and economic developments of English towns, historians such as Peter Borsay and Rosemary Sweet have addressed the political, social and cultural changes that also played an essential part in the urbanisation process.[4]

Although there have been in-depth studies on the fortunes of individual Welsh towns, Welsh urban history is yet to enjoy the same level of popularity. Clark describes the number of major Welsh urban studies as disappointingly few while Peter Borsay, Louise Miskell and Owen Roberts go so far as to call Wales the 'most under researched area of urban Britain'.[5] That is not to say that Welsh urban studies do not exist, as demonstrated by Neil Evans.[6] Evans, concentrating on the work of professional academics, argues that when an interdisciplinary approach is taken it is clear that 'there is more work about Wales than is first apparent'. He points to a number of studies from five different strands of 'Welsh urban thinking' that have addressed the role and urbanisation of Welsh towns. The lack of reference to the urbanisation of non-industrial towns, however, highlights their omission from the existing historiography as studies of Welsh towns have tended to focus on the larger urban centres of Merthyr Tydfil, Swansea and Cardiff. Although Evans points that there is a growing trend to look at smaller communities, it is still apparent that the growth and fortunes of small Welsh towns remain somewhat overlooked. Julie Light has investigated the smaller towns of Pontypool, Bridgend and Penarth and although her research is of relevance to this study, these three towns experienced urban growth as a consequence of industrialisation

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[2] A. Everitt, 'The market town', in J. Thirsk (ed.), *Agrarian history of England and Wales* (Cambridge, 1967).
[3] J. D. Marshall, 'The rise and fall of the Cumbrian market town, 1660-1900', *Northern History*, 19 (1983), 128-209; P. J. Corfield, 'Small towns, large implications. Social and cultural roles of small towns in eighteenth-century England and Wales', *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 10 (1987), 125-38; P. Clark (ed.), *Small towns in early modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1995).
[4] P. Borsay (ed.), *The eighteenth-century town 1688-1820* (London, 1990); R. Sweet, *The English town. 1680-1840 Government, society and culture* (Harlow, 1999).
[5] P. Clark, 'Introduction', in P. Clark (ed.), *The Cambridge urban history of Britain. Vol. II, 1540-1840* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 20; P. Borsay, L. Miskell, and O. Roberts, 'Introduction: Wales, a new agenda for urban history', *Urban History*, 32, no. 1 (2005), p. 5.
[6] N. Evans, 'Rethinking urban Wales', *Urban History*, 32, no. 1 (2005), p. 120.

and therefore do not help further an understanding of the experience of small, non-industrial towns like Usk whose urban status predated the nineteenth century.[7]

Harold Carter's seminal work, *The Towns of Wales* took a comprehensive look at Welsh urbanity over the last thousand years and is the most thorough examination of the development of Welsh towns.[8] However his observations and conclusions were drawn from a geographical perspective and his work focuses on the physical appearance and transformation of Welsh towns rather than providing a historical insight into the political, economic, social and cultural processes that were occurring within them. It is also worth noting that Carter is primarily concerned with the classification of Welsh towns rather than an analysis of their urbanity. In addition to this, Carter's work on the towns of Wales was published over 50 years ago and as Evans argues, a re-evaluation of Welsh urban history is much needed.[9] The history of small Welsh towns during the eighteenth and nineteenth century is almost non-existent within the field of Welsh urban history as it stands today. Although some towns such as Crickhowell and Denbigh have received attention from local historians, for a more in-depth investigation of small towns during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, one must take advice from the infamous *Encyclopaedia Britannica* entry of 1888, 'For Wales see England'.[10]

It is therefore important to look at research that focuses on English small towns during this period. Corfield's article on the implications of small towns explores the roles and functions of small urban settlements within increasingly complex urban networks.[11] She points out that for many people small settlements were the first and most regular point of contact with the urban world.[12] Peter Clark agrees and places small towns at the heart of economic, social and cultural life in early modern Europe.[13] It is difficult to disagree with these conclusions. During the eighteenth century the number of people who lived

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[7] J. Light, 'The middle classes as urban elites in nineteenth-century south Wales', *Welsh History Review*, 24 (2009), pp. 29-30.
[8] H. Carter, *The towns of Wales* (Cardiff, 1965).
[9] Evans, 'Rethinking urban Wales', p. 120.
[10] R. Gant, *Crickhowell through the eyes of the tourist 1780-1870* (Crickhowell, 2009); J. W. Pritchard 'Fit and proper persons. Councillors of Denbigh, their status and position, 1835-94', *Welsh History Review*, 17 (1994), pp. 186-204; A. Black and C. Black, *Encyclopaedia Britannica. A dictionary of arts, sciences and general literature, 9th ed., Vol. 24* (Edinburgh, 1888), p. 325.
[11] Corfield, 'Small towns, large implications', p. 125.
[12] *Ibid.*, p. 133.
[13] Clark, *Small towns*, p. 2.

in towns with a population of more than 2500 people rose from one in five to approximately one in three.[14] With such a huge proportion of the population living in small towns they would have clearly been an essential component in the urban system bridging the gap between the urban and rural worlds.

Important though these observations are, they fail to expand fully on the national variations between England and Wales. Clark and Corfield may discuss England and Wales, yet reference to the latter is rare and when it does occur, brief. Clark states that there were marked differences in the pattern and structures of small communities between England, Scotland and Ireland, omitting Wales completely.[15] Wales deserves to be included in the narrative. If it is of such great importance to understand the significance of small towns in England and Wales, then surely the situation in Wales should be addressed independently. It is widely accepted that 1851 was the point when England and Wales became predominantly urban. However, John Williams points out that although, 50% of people in 'England *and* Wales' lived in a town of over 5000 people, when considering Wales on its own, this number falls to fewer than one in five.[16] This clearly demonstrates that Welsh urbanisation was a much slower process and that the study of nineteenth-century urbanisation will not be complete until Welsh towns have been considered.

In recent years, there has been a growing tendency to move away from the Anglocentric view of British urban history in favour of adopting a four-nation approach with the growth of Scottish and Irish urban history. Like Wales, the experience of Scottish and Irish towns has received minimal attention when compared to their English counterparts. Writing in 2014, Charles McKean and Bob Harris observed that Scotland 'barely featured' in the accounts of European and British urbanisation during the early modern period and that which did exist tended to focus on what they termed as the 'big four', Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen, and Dundee.[17] David Dickson made a similar

[14] P. Corfield, *The impact of English towns 1700-1800* (Oxford, 1982), p. 9.
[15] Clark, *Small towns*, p. 2.
[16] J. Williams, *Was Wales industrialized?* (Cardiff, 1995), p. 17.
[17] B. Harris and C. McKean, *The Scottish town in the age of the enlightenment 1740-1820* (Edinburgh, 2014), p. 2.

observation when addressing Irish urban history stating that the 'published output in the field has been modest'.[18]

Efforts to address the process of urbanisation within Scotland and Ireland have seen the publication of a number of studies. In the case of Scotland, George Gordon and Brian Dicks' *Scottish Urban History* brought together nine essays to provide 'discursive commentary on some of the major issues of Scottish urbanism'.[19] They acknowledged that the essays did not constitute 'a totally representative sample … topically or chronologically', but that they hoped that they had successfully covered 'those periods considered as being crucial in the development of the country's urban traditions.[20] Subsequent studies have tended to focus on urban growth in terms of population size rather than the nature of urban change. In his chapter on urbanisation, Ian Whyte gave considerable attention to the increasing size of Scottish towns to demonstrate the rate of growth and to provide some explanation for why it occurred. He, however, concluded that there remain 'many major unanswered questions' as the process was more complex and interactive than simply being a consequence of industrialisation.[21]

What these early studies have done is begin to highlight the ways in which Scottish towns differed from English ones. Gordon and Dick argue that the 'problems, complexities and enigmas of Scotland's urban narrative' meant that it differed significantly.[22] Whyte argues that although urban expansion began later in Scotland 'it occurred at a much more rapid rate than south of the border', which, according to Tom Devine, 'was more likely to inflict…greater strain on urban relationships, amenities and sanitation'.[23] That Scottish towns differed from their English counterparts is an argument furthered by Charles McKean. He has suggested that 'useful parallels and patterns exist' between Scottish and English towns, which although 'illuminating', 'more often than not' distort the perception of Scottish towns which consequently are considered less cultured and slower to follow England's lead.[24] To counteract this view,

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[18] D. Dickson, 'What happened to modern Irish urban history?', *Urban History*, 46, no. 1 (2019), p. 10.
[19] G. Gordon and B. Dicks (eds.), *Scottish urban history* (Aberdeen, 1983), p. 2.
[20] *Ibid*.
[21] I. Whyte, 'Urbanisation in eighteenth-century Scotland', in T. M. Devine and J. R. Young (eds.), *Eighteenth-century Scotland: new perspectives* (East Linton, 1999), pp. 192-93.
[22] Gordon and Dicks, *Scottish urban history*, p. 1.
[23] Whyte, 'Urbanisation', p. 179; T. M. Devine, *The Scottish Nation. 1700-2000* (London, 1999), p. 154.
[24] C. McKean, 'Reconsidering the Scottish town', *Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland*, 9, no. 1 (2008), p. 98.

McKean used the towns of Tain and Whithorn to demonstrate that Scottish burghs had characteristics and an evolutionary timeline that was distinct from England. The argument for a different Scottish model of urbanisation was further developed by McKean, with Bob Harris, in their comprehensive exploration of Scottish towns between 1740 and 1820 which argued that in order to understand the Scottish process of urban improvement, Scottish burghs need to be considered within the Scottish context.[25]

Irish towns, although under-researched, have arguably received more attention than their Scottish and Welsh counterparts. Following a number of early studies published in the 1950s, it was not until the late 1970s and 1980s that Irish urban history began to emerge as a field of study with the publication of Robyn Butlin's *The development of the Irish town* (1977) and David Harkness and Mary O'Dowd's *The town in Ireland* (1981).[26] Since then there have been a number of studies that have delved into the nature of Irish urbanism. 2002 saw the publication of the proceedings of a British Academy symposium that brought together research on aspects of English and Irish urban history regarding the early modern period and the nineteenth century. This allowed comparisons to be drawn between the two nations which highlighted that there were many ways in which the two differed. In their introduction to the volume, Peter Borsay and Lindsay Proudfoot acknowledge that the two shared similarities. Both had a capital city that outstripped its nearest rival, a middling tier of religious and secular administrative centres and port cities and a mass of small towns that made up the bulk of their urban systems. Nonetheless, they argue that Ireland did 'not just track the Anglo-Scottish' experience and conclude that the 'patterns of town creation and expansion were markedly different' and that their 'contrasting responses to industrialisation' ensured that 'in the long run the two countries … experienced very dissimilar patterns of urbanisation.[27] More recently, David Dickson has argued that Irish towns enjoyed a 'cycle of unusually strong Irish urban growth' between the 1660s

[25] Harris and McKean, *The Scottish town,* p. 2, 489 and 81.
[26] R. A. Butlin, *The development of the Irish town in 1977* (London, 1977); D. Harkness and M. O'Dowd, *The town in Ireland* (Belfast, 1881).
[27] P. Borsay and L. Proudfoot, 'The English and Irish urban experience 1500-1800: change, convergence and divergence', in P. Borsay and L. Proudfoot (eds.), *Provincial towns in early modern England and Ireland: change, convergence and divergence* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 21 and 27.

and the 1820s.[28] This he attributes to 'demand from Britain and its colonies' and argues that without the 'continuing strength of the imperial economy or the technological innovations that drove it to new heights' the 'Irish urban cycle would have been a far more modest phenomenon'.[29]

These studies are of interest as there are a number of similarities between Scottish, Irish and Welsh towns. Harris argues that because Scottish burghs were smaller the process was piecemeal and often limited by cost, a characteristic reflected across Wales. The evolution of Scotland's urban landscape, however, was different from its Celtic cousin. Whereas Scottish towns were established and developed organically with a capital city in the form of Edinburgh topping the hierarchy, most Welsh towns were plantations established by the Anglo-Normans as a weapon of conquest and consolidation. In this respect there are similarities with Ireland where there had been a period of town plantation during the seventeenth century. Toby Barnard has argued that many Irish towns were left without any strong commercial function once Ireland had been unified with England and as a consequence 'dwindle[d] into insignificance'.[30] This echoes the destiny of many towns in south Wales which, having been established as military strongholds, 'carried the seeds of its own decay'.[31] Welsh and Irish towns differ, however, as the period of growth identified by Dickson occurred while Ireland was still independent with a parliament that funded a number of improvement schemes in towns such as Dublin, Belfast, Waterford and Cork.[32] Ireland, like Scotland, also had a capital city, Dublin, which 'dazzled' provincial cities and whose 'innovations' shaped the urban ambitions of its smaller towns.[33]

The examples of research on Scotland and Ireland demonstrate why it is important that the urban fortunes of the separate nations of Britain are fully considered in their own context. Failure to do so misrepresents the true nature of British urbanisation. The work done by McKean, Harris, Barnard and Dickson has demonstrated that there are many

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[28] D. Dickson, *First Irish cities: an eighteenth-century transformation* (New Haven and London, 2021), p. 1.
[29] *Ibid.*, p. 263.
[30] T. Barnard, 'An Irish urban renaissance?', in J. Hinks and C. Armstrong (eds.), *The English urban renaissance revisited* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2018), p. 167.
[31] H. Carter, *Towns of Wales*, p. 29.
[32] D. Dickson, *First Irish cities*, pp. 149-83.
[33] *Ibid.*, p. 176.

ways in which the process differed from that which reshaped English towns. This demonstrates that the traditional Anglocentric model of urbanisation does not necessarily further our understanding of the process when considering Britain as a whole and adds weight to the argument that Welsh urbanisation deserves analysis before it can be concluded that it simply followed England.

Definitions of urban.

In order to have a purposeful discussion on the nature of urbanity and the process of urbanisation, it is important that the definition of these terms is explored. Max Weber, using the city to represent urbanity, stated that in order to be considered a full urban community a settlement must display a number of features including 'a fortification, a market, a court of its own with some degree of autonomous law, a related form of association and at least partial autonomy and autocephaly'.[34] Weber placed economics at the heart of his definition stating that a city was a settlement where the 'inhabitants primarily live off trade and commerce rather than agriculture'.[35] Scholars such as Chris Law and Edward A. Wrigley have also favoured economic definitions of urbanity claiming that economics and demographics caused the widespread and rapid urban growth of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[36] Law pinpoints three features that determine whether a settlement is urban or not: population, population density and having more than 50% of said population employed in non-agricultural pursuits.[37]

Many urban historians employ a population benchmark when discussing the difference between urban and rural, town and village. There is, however, little consensus. Wrigley uses a population of 5,000 people as the benchmark as he believes that this number would have meant that less than 50% of the population would have been employed in agricultural or rural pursuits. Wrigley himself acknowledges that drawing a line between urban and non-urban at a population of 5,000 people is completely arbitrary

[34] M. Weber, *The city* (New York 1958), p. 81.
[35] *Ibid.,* p. 66.
[36] C. M. Law, 'The growth of urban population in England and Wales, 1801-1901', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers,* 41 (1967); E. A. Wrigley, 'Urban growth and agricultural change: England and the continent in the early modern period', in E. A. Wrigley (ed.), *People, cities and wealth* (Cambridge, 1987). pp. 157-93.
[37] Law, 'Urban population', p. 125.

and that a plausible case can be made for lowering it.[38] Early modern historians such as Corfield and Clark agree and argue that the benchmark should be dropped to 2,500 people as that would have been large enough for a town to survive because the demands of its own population would generate enough business to support its own workforce.[39] This view has come to influence other more generalist studies: thus Simon Gunn adopted the same benchmark of 2,500 people as the minimum population needed to qualify as a town in a general survey of nineteenth-century urbanisation.[40]

Population size, however, is only ever a proxy for urbanity and historians and sociologists have always recognised that other factors should be considered. In 1938 Louis Wirth dissented from the use of size as a defining characteristic arguing that 'no definition of urbanism can hope to be satisfying as long as numbers are regarded as the sole criterion'.[41] He argues that in sociological terms, a city can be defined as a 'relatively large, dense and permanent settlement of socially heterogeneous individuals' and rather than looking for the existence of certain 'urban' characteristics such as population, population density, the occupation of inhabitants, the presence of certain physical facilities, institutions and political organisations, one should consider how potent these attributes were in 'moulding the character of social life into its specifically urban form'.[42]

Basing the definition of urban on population size results in the omission of the smallest settlements and, as Marshall has stated, there cannot be a valid conversation on the nature of urbanisation without looking at the process in its embryonic form.[43] This is a debate that applies to all periods of history but is particularly relevant to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries given the unprecedented and unequal extent of urban growth. Borsay, for example, argued that using demographics to define urbanity would result in the exclusion of 'the mass of petty settlements that masqueraded as towns' yet these 'towns' made up four-fifths of the English total. He points to the work of historians

[38] Wrigley, 'Urban growth', p. 158.
[39] Corfield, 'Small towns, large implications', p. 131.
[40] S. Gunn, 'Urbanisation', in C. Williams (ed.), *A companion to nineteenth-century Britain* (Oxford, 2004), p. 240.
[41] L. Wirth, 'Urbanism as a way of life', *The American Journal of Sociology*, 44, no. 1 (1938), pp. 4-5. See also Weber, *The City*, p. 66.
[42] Wirth, 'Urbanism', pp. 6 and 8.
[43] Marshall, 'The Cumbrian market town', p. 128.

such as Christopher Chalkin and Philip Styles whose research has suggested that communities with a population of less than 1,000 people could exhibit distinctly urban features.[44] This argument is further developed by Sweet who pointed out that very small towns could qualify as urban because they served as a centre for exchange and distribution and their economies were not solely based on agriculture. Sweet argues that a town 'cannot be defined simply in terms of its population; one must also consider its function, role and structure'.[45]

Harris and McKean have also counteracted the argument regarding size and urban status. Having acknowledged that many Scottish burghs, 'were, in British terms, no larger than villages' they argued that that as long as a burgh had 'a council, the right to hold markets and to impose taxes', then 'its urban form and management differed entirely from those of villages'. They contended that at the bottom end of the Scottish urban hierarchy there existed settlements of less than 1,000 people that 'could sustain the diversity that became one of the hallmarks of urban status'.[46] This observation demonstrates that the threshold currently employed when assessing the urbanism of towns in England does not apply north of the border and therefore perhaps should be adjusted when considering other non-English examples. Its use to determine what constitutes a town in Wales has resulted in a perception of Welsh urbanity as being slow, uninspiring and lagging behind its larger cousin, a view that does not necessarily reflect what was happening on the ground. The argument that urban status was not solely dependent on population will underlie this whole study. Robert Dickinson asserted that the 'definition of an urban settlement is fundamentally a question of function, not of population' and it is this definition that this project will adopt when looking at Usk.[47] Rather than focusing on demographics, it will look beyond the population and focus on the functions and services the town provided its inhabitants and the surrounding hinterland.

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[44] Borsay, *The eighteenth-century town*, p. 5; See C. W. Chalkin, 'A seventeenth-century market town: Tonbridge', *Archaeologica Cantiana*, 76 (1961), pp. 152-62; P. Styles, 'Henley-in-Arden in the seventeenth century', in P. Styles, *Studies in seventeenth century west Midlands history* (Kineton, 1978), pp. 205-12.
[45] Sweet, *The English town*, p. 8.
[46] Harris & McKean, *The Scottish town*, pp. 489-90
[47] R. E. Dickinson, 'The distribution and functions of the smaller urban settlements of East Anglia', *Geography*, 17 (1932), p. 20.

Dickinson is not the only academic to favour this definition. The function of a town is fundamental to Steve Royle's argument that although nineteenth-century small town populations may have fallen below the 2,500 benchmark they should not be dismissed without consideration.[48] Royle's chapter will be of great use for this study as it focused on the fortunes of towns with similar sized populations during the same period of time. He also acknowledged and discussed the occurrence of country towns and/or market towns and how their roles differed from the industrial, rapidly growing and more obviously 'urban' examples favoured by urban historians. Royle dismissed the argument that the end of the eighteenth century saw small towns either grow or 'experience retardation'.[49] Instead he demonstrated that they continued to perform their traditional roles as agricultural service centres and central places as part of the traditional 'symbiosis between town and country'.[50]

Research into small rural towns that served the surrounding agricultural areas have been of considerable use to this study. Although the settlement at the heart of this study never achieved a population of 2,500 people, it had many of the traits and institutions that historians pinpoint as being indicative of an urban settlement. Its process of urbanisation, therefore, and more importantly, the factors behind it deserve further exploration. If the entire process of urbanisation that transformed British society, politically, economically, and socially during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is to be fully investigated and understood, it is vital that the experiences of all types of towns are included. Usk may have been small but that does not mean that it was not urban. Further still, if the arguments for basing urbanity on character and function are to be disregarded and classification is to rest on demographics, then it is paramount that these statistics are looked at in the context of the region in which the town is situated.

The Welsh urban experience.

In his chapter on national and regional population trends Clark discussed small town populations of England and the regional differences that occurred during the early

[48] S. A. Royle, 'The development of small towns in Britain', in M. Daunton (ed.), *The Cambridge urban history of Britain. Vol. III, 1840–1950* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 152.
[49] Clark, 'Introduction' in Clark (ed), *Cambridge urban history of Britain. Vol. II*, p. 742.
[50] Royle, 'Development of small towns', p. 153.

modern period.[51] By putting them in the context of early modern England, he accounted for their fortunes and the patterns that emerged when studying these settlements. These observations are of considerable interest to this study as they help explain the reasons and causes of small-town successes and failures and it is thought that these theories can be utilized when looking at small towns in Wales. However, it is important to consider the political and economic conditions experienced by Wales as they had direct implications for Welsh towns.

Wales's urban experience was historically very different from that of its more dominant neighbour. In 1912, Edward A. Lewis stated that towns of Welsh origin did not exist.[52] Although writing at a time when the Celtic nations were viewed as being backward in contrast to Anglo-Saxon superiority, this argument has continued to hold sway amongst historians. Writing in 1965, Harold Carter argued that it was the Normans who first introduced town life to Wales as it had not organically developed an economy that needed towns while Ralph Griffiths suggested that the growth of towns in Wales was a 'story of immigration, conquest and assimilation'.[53] Even as recently as 2012, Matthew Stevens acknowledged that there were only a few settlements in Wales with pre-Norman roots and that Wales was urbanised 'overwhelmingly' after 1070.[54] This date of town formation instantly differentiates Welsh towns from England where the more successful towns tended to be those that emerged in the Anglo-Saxon period.[55]

Contemporary descriptions of Wales during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries paint pretty desperate pictures with one visitor describing Wales as being 'the fag end of creation; the very rubbish of Noah's flood'.[56] Geraint H. Jenkins states that during the early Stuart period Wales experienced 'sluggish economic growth' and as a result the civil wars had a catastrophic impact on the country's economy 'bringing misery,

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[51] P. Clark, 'Small towns in England 1550-1850: national and regional population trends', in P. Clark (ed.), *Small towns of early modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 90-120.
[52] E. A. Lewis, *The medieval boroughs of Snowdonia* (London, 1912), p. 5.
[53] Carter, *Towns of Wales*, p. 13; R. A. Griffiths, 'The authors of urban records in medieval Wales', in W. Prevenier and T. de Hempinne (eds.), *La diplomatique urbaine en Europe au moyen âge: actes du congrès de la commission internationale de diplomatique, Grand 25-29 août 1998* (Louvain and Apeldoorn, 2000), p. 159.
[54] M. F. Stevens, 'Anglo Welsh towns of the early fourteenth century: A survey of urban origins, property-holding and ethnicity', in H. Fulton (ed.), *Urban culture in medieval Wales* (Cardiff, 2012), p. 187.
[55] Clark, 'Small towns in England', p. 3.
[56] N. Ward, *A trip to Wales* (London, 1701), p. 6.

hardship and a general sense of war weariness'.[57] Many of those towns hit the hardest were Wales's castle towns. The presence of a castle had a significant impact on the urban landscape of Wales as its rise and fall directly impacted the fortunes of the town that developed in its shadow. An excellent example of this is Raglan, a small rural village in Monmouthshire. The development of a substantial castle in the fifteenth century proved hugely beneficial to the village. The castle housed the large household of the Somerset family who, as the earls of Worcester, 'lived in great state'.[58] Maintenance of their household created employment which along with their need for supplies provided a stimulus to the growth of Raglan's economy. The castle, however, was a target for the parliamentarian forces in 1646 and following a siege that lasted several months the castle was surrendered, partially demolished and the Somerset family departed Raglan never to reside in the locality again. The impact of this was disastrous for the settlement as the loss of the castle community resulted in the collapse of Raglan's market, which was not revived until the nineteenth century.[59] The civil wars were the final time that many castle towns served their original purpose and the failure of these towns to adopt new functions resulted in them losing any distinguishing urban characteristics.

It should be remembered that Jenkins was writing a more general history of Wales in which the fortunes of Welsh towns were an aspect rather than the focus. Nia Powell, in contrast, has carried out detailed research on Welsh towns in the early modern period. She concluded that as its economy started to mature, the role of Wales's towns changed as their primary function shifted from their original military and administrative ones to having a more commercial impetus with a role as a meeting place for the exchange of money, commodities and external ideas.[60] Although this research gives a more positive impression of early modern urban Wales than Jenkins, it is evident that Welsh towns took a long time to recover from the upheaval and decline of the early modern period. Clark states that the Compton Census in 1676 points to the start of an urban recovery which would continue throughout the eighteenth century.[61] However, these signs of

[57] G. H. Jenkins, *The foundations of modern Wales 1642-1780* (Oxford, 1993), p. 30.
[58] A. Tribe, *Raglan castle and the civil war* (Caerleon, 2002), p. 1.
[59] P. Courtney, 'Towns, markets and commerce', in M. Grey and P. Morgan (eds), *Gwent County History. Vol. 3. The making of Monmouthshire, 1536-1780* (Cardiff, 2008), p. 252.
[60] N. Powell, 'Do numbers count? Towns in early modern Wales', *Urban History*, 32, no. 1 (2005), p. 54.
[61] Clark, 'Small towns in England', p. 98.

recovery were not apparent in Wales until the middle of the eighteenth century. As a result, Philip Jenkins argues that to speak of urban history in Wales before the nineteenth century is to misuse the term and explains that even at the end of the eighteenth century; Wales's urban landscape was less than awe-inspiring.[62]

Eighteenth-century Welsh towns are described as small and unimportant.[63] Even at the start of the nineteenth century, visitors to Welsh towns were far from flattering about what they saw, many commenting on the impoverished and neglected appearance of the buildings and environment. Benjamin Malkin, visiting South Wales at the turn of the nineteenth century, described Builth as a town that 'exhibits that air of impoverished and dilapidated antiquity which so universally bespeaks the neglect and unambitious character of a thinly peopled country'.[64] The lack of population is identified by Carter as one of two significant factors that restricted urban growth during this period as low population and low population density resulted in a limited demand for urban services.[65] This coupled with poor transport and communication links meant that urban and economic growth before the nineteenth century was slow and sluggish.

The situation in Wales at the start of the nineteenth century was in some ways similar to that of early eighteenth-century England, therefore, rather than ignoring Welsh towns for not meeting the requirements that determine urbanity at a certain point in time, it seems necessary to adopt a more flexible definition of the term instead. Sweet argues that the definition of the term 'urban' needs to be reassessed when looking at settlements over time and argues that an urban settlement of a certain size might be considered small at one point in time despite the same population being considered substantial a hundred years earlier.[66] If the definition of 'urban' should change when moving through time then should it not be altered so towns are considered in context of their region? A town with a population of 5,000 might be considered small in nineteenth-century England; however, the same town would have been one of the largest urban centres in nineteenth-century Wales.

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[62] P. Jenkins, 'Wales', in Clark (ed.), *The Cambridge urban history of Britain. Vol. II, 1540-1840* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 134.
[63] H. Carter, 'The growth and decline of Welsh towns', in D. Moore (ed.), *Wales in the eighteenth century* (Swansea, 1976), p. 48.
[64] B. H. Malkin, *The scenery, antiquities and biography of south Wales* (London, 1807), p. 404.
[65] Carter, 'Growth and decline', p. 13.
[66] Sweet, *The English town*, p. 9.

Borsay, Miskell and Roberts support the importance of taking geographical context into consideration by arguing that towns and urban networks cannot be expected to be the same across Europe.[67] In Clark's *Small towns in early modern Europe* it is clear that the definition of a small-town changes when looking at examples outside the United Kingdom.[68] Why is this not the case when considering Welsh towns? Small as they were, Welsh towns played a significant role in the lives of those living in the surrounding countryside.[69] As Borsay, Miskell and Roberts have pointed out, in societies with low population densities 'even tiny settlements can operate very effectively individually as towns, and collectively as part of wider urban networks.[70]

In his chapter on small towns, Clark argued that descriptions of English small towns were written by Londoners or landowners who were used to the 'great metropolis' and as a result found small town urbanity wanting.[71] However Clark is guilty of the same thing when looking across the border at Welsh towns. Dismissing Welsh towns just because they do not conform to the English model is to fail to acknowledge the context of their formation and the circumstances that shaped their development. As Evans concludes, although comparisons with towns outside of Wales are helpful, it is paramount that Welsh towns are kept 'firmly in their regional context in order to understand the nature of their urbanity'.[72] This study will look at the urbanisation of Usk keeping it within its correct geographical context and in order to do this it is important to examine the urban backdrop in which Usk was situated.

The urban landscape of south Wales.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the urban landscape of South Wales changed dramatically and in a way that was impossible to have foreseen. Swansea was one of the first towns to benefit from the economic stimulus associated with industrialisation and its development has been the subject of studies by Louise Miskell

[67] Borsay, Miskell, and Roberts, 'Introduction', p. 11.
[68] Clark, *Small towns*, pp. 50-5 and p. 186.
[69] Carter, *Towns of Wales*, p. 49.
[70] Borsay, Miskell and Roberts, 'Introduction', p. 10.
[71] Clark, 'Small towns in England', p. 91.
[72] Evans, 'Rethinking urban Wales', p. 131.

and Robert Anthony.[73] Although Usk's urban growth and development is not the same as Swansea's, studies carried out on the town during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are excellent examples of detailed studies on Welsh towns and provide a useful framework for the study of Usk. Interestingly, Miskell points out that at the start of the nineteenth century Swansea possessed a wider range of urban amenities that might be expected of a town of its size.[74] Swansea was not Wales' biggest town and therefore it needed to distinguish its urban identity through the development and provision of urban institutions, and this is something that will also be addressed in the study of Usk.

Unlike Swansea, Merthyr Tydfil's urban status was solely based on its size.[75] Merthyr Tydfil's emergence as the largest town in Wales was solely due to the rapid population growth that occurred in response to the establishment of the ironworks. It was, however, slow to develop the characteristics and institutions associated with urbanity. Writing at the start of the nineteenth century, John George Wood stated that Merthyr Tydfil 'is but a village, although by courtesy it enjoys the title of a town' and that it was no more than a mass of shacks and cottages.[76] His observations have been supported by historians such as Chris Evans who, having taken a more considered and analytical approach, concluded that it was the 'sheer bulk of migration that allowed Merthyr Tydfil to lay claim to any urban credentials at all.[77] Evans goes on to explain that schemes for street lighting and repaving, new town halls and market buildings which became new standards of urban sophistication were not to arrive in Merthyr Tydfil until after 1850.[78] It could be argued that Usk was able to demonstrate these urban credentials earlier than Merthyr Tydfil despite the discrepancy in population size demonstrating that Welsh urbanity could take a variety of different forms.

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[73] R. Anthony, '"A very thriving place": the peopling of Swansea in the eighteenth century', *Urban History*, 32, no. 1 (2005); L. Miskell, 'The making of a new Welsh metropolis: science, leisure and industry in early nineteenth-century Swansea', *History*, 88, no. 1 (2003), pp. 32-52.
[74] *Ibid*., p. 33.
[75] For studies on Merthyr Tydfil see C. Evans, *The labyrinth of flames, work and social conflict in early industrial Merthyr Tydfil* (Cardiff, 1993); H. Carter and S. Wheatley, *Merthyr Tydfil in 1851: Study of spatial structure of a Welsh industrial town* (Cardiff, 1987).
[76] J. G. Wood, *The principal rivers of Wales illustrated, consisting of a series of views from the source of each river to its Mouth* (Bensley, 1813), p. 57.
[77] Evans, *labyrinth of flames*, p. 145.
[78] *Ibid.*, p. 146.

The failure of Merthyr Tydfil to adopt urban features is, in many ways, due to the speed with which it grew but was also a result of the powerful ironmasters who were 'reluctant, evasive civic leaders' and showed very little interest in the development of Merthyr's 'sense of urban self-esteem' and its 'civic dignity'.[79] However not all towns suffered from a lack of investment from wealthy individuals as some towns, such as Cardiff, owed their urban survival to the patronage of their wealthy landlord.[80] A number of studies of Cardiff have discussed its growth and development all of which agree that the nineteenth century was a period of 'frantic change'.[81] Cardiff suffered from a considerable period of stagnation during the early modern era and as a result started the nineteenth century with a mere 1,870 inhabitants.[82] The turning point in its fortunes came at the end of the 1830s when two very significant projects were undertaken, the creation of Cardiff's first dock and the building of the Taff Vale Railway. Both initiatives were in response to the demands of industrialists who needed improved methods of transport, both by land and sea.[83] The second Marquis of Bute personally financed the construction of the dock at an estimated cost of £350,000 for which he has been credited as the 'creator of modern Cardiff'.[84] Daunton and Rees both refer to the construction of the West Dock in 1839 and the coming of the railway in 1840 as 'revolutionary' with the latter arguing that they 'opened a new chapter in Cardiff's history' that resulted in a 'flood of consequential changes, revolutionary in their effect, not only for the town but for the industrial region of the interior'.[85]

The knock-on effects of these developments were widespread and resulted in the development of Cardiff's urban environment and a massive reordering of the region's urban hierarchy and the networks. Jenkins states that the towns that mattered most in Wales during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries 'were not on Welsh soil' with Bristol, 'the metropolis of the west', being the most influential urban centre in south Wales.[86] There can be no doubt that the emergence of Cardiff as the largest town in Wales created a new sphere of influence that rivalled Bristol's and eventually

[79] Evans, *labyrinth of flames*, p. 145; Anthony, '"A very thriving place"', p. 74.
[80] J. Davies, *Cardiff and the marquesses of Bute* (Cardiff, 1981), p. 246.
[81] M. J. Daunton, *Coal metropolis, Cardiff 1870-1914* (Leicester, 1977), p. 1. For another study of Cardiff see W. Rees, *Cardiff: A history of the city* (Cardiff, 1969).
[82] To put this figure in proportion, Usk had 734 inhabitants at the same time.
[83] Rees, *Cardiff*, p. 261.
[84] Davies, *Cardiff*, p. 247.
[85] Rees, *Cardiff*, p. 276.
[86] Jenkins, 'Wales', p. 133; Miskell, 'The making of a new Welsh metropolis', p. 33.

superseded it.[87] This resulted in a huge shift in the urban networks of southeast Wales as towns such as Usk started to look westwards into Wales rather than across the River Severn to Bristol.

Usk and its environs.

Urban settlements did not exist in isolation and their interaction with their rural surroundings, with one another and with larger towns and cities, such as Cardiff and Bristol, created networks that spread across regions, countries and the world. There are two key models of urban systems that are explored by Hohenberg and Lees in *The Making of Urban Europe 1000-1951*: central place theory and the network system.[88] Central place theory was developed by the geographer Walter Christaller who saw settlements as 'central places' that supplied their surroundings or hinterland with specialised economic, administrative and cultural services.[89] William Cronon demonstrated how low ranking goods and services were available in low ranking urban settlements that served a hinterland 'no more than a couple of miles beyond their own boundaries'.[90] However because people were willing to travel further for more specialised services, higher ranked goods and services were provided by larger urban settlements, as they needed a higher demand to make them viable. This created an urban hierarchy of low-ranking settlements providing general goods and services; middle sized towns in which more specialised items and facilities were available such as jewellery, books and basic legal services and finally the largest towns and cities that dominated entire regions delivering services and goods that needed substantial markets to sustain them.

Improved transport networks, however, meant that towns could bypass the markets of larger settlements and gain direct access to those at the top of the hierarchy. As a result the more flexible network system provided an 'ordering of functionally complementary cities and urban settlements' that looked at towns in terms of nodality rather than centrality.[91] Hohenberg and Lees observed that urban settlements also belonged to

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[87] Davies, *Cardiff*, p. 246.
[88] P. M. Hohenberg, and L. H. Lees, *The making of urban Europe 1000-1951* (London, 1985), pp. 4-5.
[89] *Ibid.*, p. 4 and p. 49.
[90] W. Cronon, *Nature's metropolis*: *Chicago and the great west* (New York, 1991), p. 280.
[91] Hohenberg and Lees, *Urban Europe*, p. 240.

networks of trade, information and influence that reached far beyond the borders of a country.[92] Not only were urban settlements linked with each other but they were also intrinsically linked to the rural countryside that surrounded them. The relationship between the 'city' and the countryside was explored by William Cronon who claimed that urban historians have tended to see city and country as separate places and as a result, failed to look outside the outskirts of cities to the hinterland beyond.[93] However to do so is in fact 'to miss much of what the city is' as country and city can only exist in each other's presence.[94]

This investigation is predominantly based on Usk's immediate locality and therefore it is vital that the urban history of Monmouthshire is taken into consideration. Fashioned from the lordships and manors that were left following the abolition of the Welsh Marcher lords, Monmouthshire has a unique and unusual urban history that has seen considerable disruption, transformation and growth. The towns that existed in Monmouthshire before the industrial revolution (Monmouth, Chepstow, Abergavenny, Caerleon and Usk) were founded by the Normans and were inhabited by Norman/English settlers attracted by the possibility of land, wealth and power.[95] Tony Hopkins described the Anglo-Welsh Marches as a 'tempestuous frontier zone' that witnessed a prolonged and bloody struggle that had significant implications for urban Monmouthshire.[96] Even after the subjugation of the Welsh, the involvement of the powerful Marcher lords in English politics meant that the political situation within the county remained volatile and its towns saw several outbreaks of violence throughout the medieval period. Such episodes would have had devastating and long-term repercussions and limited any potential urban growth.

The first Act of Union in 1536 saw the formation of Monmouthshire and brought the domination of the Marcher lords to an end. As a result the early modern period was a time of considerable change and uncertainty for the six existing towns of the new

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[92] *Ibid*., p. 5.
[93] Cronon, *Nature's metropolis,* p. xvi.
[94] *Ibid*., pp. 18-19.
[95] A. G. Mein, 'The development of the Norman Town', in J. K. Knight and A. Johnson (eds.), *Usk castle, priory and town* (Glasgow, 2008), p. 79.
[96] T. Hopkins, 'The towns', in R. A. Griffiths, T. Hopkins and R. Howell (eds.), *Gwent County History. Vol. 2. The age of the marcher lords, 1070-1536* (Cardiff, 2008), p. 116.

county and had significant repercussions for Monmouthshire's urban landscape.[97] The selection of Monmouth as the county town in 1536 was not an obvious choice as it was not centrally located nor the biggest; however, it had a long association with the English crown, forming part of the Duchy of Lancaster, and it was easily accessible for the justices of assize who regularly visited the towns of Hereford and Gloucester.[98] The adoption of new administrative and cultural functions resulted in notable urban growth so that by the dawn of the eighteenth century Monmouth was the largest town in the county.[99]

The emergence of Monmouth as the principal town of Monmouthshire clearly resulted in a reordering of the urban hierarchy. Paul Courtney suggests that Abergavenny had been Monmouthshire's biggest town at the start of the early modern period due to the growth of the Welsh wool trade; however, this was no longer the case by the eighteenth century.[100] Another town that struggled during this period was Chepstow, the former centre of the Marcher lordship of Striguil. Chepstow had been an important port during the medieval period and had been in the unique position of paying no duty to the English King.[101] However, following the dissolution of the marcher lordships, Chepstow struggled to maintain its former success and a charter dating from the early sixteenth century states that it was granted help to counter economic depression.[102] In addition to this, Chepstow and its castle suffered heavily during the civil wars and it was not until the eighteenth century that the town began to recover.

Considering the fortunes of Wales during the early modern period, it is not surprising to find that Monmouthshire's smaller towns struggled to survive. While the larger towns of Monmouth, Abergavenny and Chepstow benefited from English trade connections the smaller towns of Usk, Caerleon and Newport were more dependent on local custom

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[97] Courtney, 'Towns', p. 251.
[98] W.R.B. Robinson with M. Gray, 'The making of Monmouthshire', in M. Gray and P. Morgan, (eds.), *Gwent County History. Vol. 3. The making of Monmouthshire, 1536-1780* (Cardiff, 2008), p. 3.
[99] For studies of Monmouth see K. Kissack, *Victorian Monmouth* (Ledbury, 1984); K. Kissack, *Monmouth: the making of a county town* (London, 1975) and P. Borsay, 'New approaches to social history. Myth, memory and place: Monmouth and Bath, 1750-1900', in *Journal of Social History*, 39.3 (2006), pp. 867-89.
[100] P. Courtney, *Report on the excavations at Usk 1965-1976: Medieval and later Usk*, (Cardiff, 1994), p.129.
[101] I. Waters, *About Chepstow* (Newport, 1952), p.13.
[102] Courtney, 'Towns', p. 252.

and as a result suffered considerably with Usk experiencing stagnation and decline.[103] The suggestion that Usk relied on local custom indicates the importance of the rural parishes that surrounded the town. However, improvements in communications meant that Usk was exposed to a greater number and variety of networks which would have seen Usk's hinterland change. During the eighteenth century, Usk would have been in the hinterland of Monmouth, which in turn was in that of Bristol. However, by the end of the nineteenth century this changed as Usk came under the influence of Newport, which in turn was under the influence of Cardiff.

There is also an argument to be made that these hinterlands varied depending on function. Although Newport and Monmouth were both larger towns, both looked to Usk for judicial services, as it was the location of the Monmouthshire quarter sessions and the county gaol. The opening up of travel networks such as turnpike roads and rail meant that Usk was more accessible and therefore able to serve a larger hinterland. It also meant that Usk benefitted from the expansion of the leisure, travel and tourist industry that saw people visit the town and surrounding area. This is significant to this study as many of the visitors to Usk and to South Wales wrote accounts of the places they visited. Descriptions of Usk being 'dilapidated', 'disagreeable' and 'antiquated' indicate the appearance and condition of the town at the start of the nineteenth century.[104] The survival of these accounts enables the study to gauge the growth and development of the town during the period in question.

The amount of research done on the history of Usk is minimal. The medieval period has received the most attention with historians such as Geoffrey Mein and Jeremy Knight having looked at the development of the Norman town and its castle in considerable detail.[105] However Usk's fortunes during the early modern and subsequent periods has yet to be investigated fully. The *Gwent County History* series often makes reference to Usk but there is very little attention given to the town specifically. Local historian Jan Barrow carried out interesting research on the markets, trades and occupations of Usk

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[103] Courtney, 'Towns', p. 252.
[104] W. Coxe, *An historical tour in Monmouthshire* (London, 1801), p. 125; H. P. Wyndham, *A tour through Monmouthshire and Wales* (Salisbury, 1781), p. 6.
[105] See articles in J.K. Knight and A. Johnson (eds.), *Usk castle, priory and town* (Glasgow, 2008). Also J.K. Knight, 'Usk castle and its affinities', in M. W. Thompson and A. Saunders (eds.), *Ancient monuments and their interpretation: Essays presented to A.J. Taylor* (Chichester, 1977) and A.G. Mein, *Norman Usk: the birth of a town* (Usk, 1986).

much of which relates to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; however, her observations are limited in scope and fail to investigate what was happening in the town beyond its trades and markets.[106] There was reference to eighteenth-century Usk by Barrow in *Usk castle, priory and town* but this provided a description of the town rather than an analysis of what was happening within the town and why.[107] The nineteenth century is completely overlooked within this volume and at present the only work done on the town during this time frame is David Lewis' work on early Victorian Usk.[108] His work was based on the census enumerator's book of 1851 and although it included some interesting observations on religion, leisure and local government, Lewis only provided a snapshot of the town during a brief part of the century rather than explore the process of growth and development that shaped it during this period.

As the historical analysis of Usk during the nineteenth century is limited contemporary accounts will be of great use to this study. One source of material that will be of particular use is the work of James H. Clark, a printer who lived in the town from 1834. As well as being responsible for writing and publishing the town's newspaper, Clark also wrote several books on Usk. These offer a unique, contemporary insight into nineteenth-century Usk as he was actively involved in numerous societies, committees and councils that were instrumental in the governance of the town during the period. Obviously, it is important to treat these with caution as many of his facts are not referenced, many of his accounts are based on his own memories and it is likely that at times he was pushing his own agenda. However, his first-hand descriptions of Usk in the 1830s and of events that occurred within the town will be of great use when investigating the urban fabric of this settlement. It is clear that Clark viewed Usk as a town and represented it as such. His involvement in Usk's committees and councils suggests that he identified with the governance of the community and indicated the presence of an associational culture in Usk, an important element of civil society.[109]

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[106] J. Barrow, *From dawn till dusk: Usk: the story of its markets, trades and occupations* (Usk, 2004).
[107] J. Barrow, 'The eighteenth-century market town', in J. Knight and A Johnson (eds.), *Usk castle, priory and town* (Hereford, 2008), pp. 129-138.
[108] D. Lewis, *Early Victorian Usk* (Cardiff, 1982).
[109] R. Morris, 'Civil society and the nature of urbanism: Britain, 1750-1850', *Urban History*, 25, no. 3 (1998), p. 290.

To conclude this review, it been shown that the urbanisation of Welsh towns has received a limited amount of attention and although historians have recently started to explore the urban experiences of Scotland and Ireland, the perception of nineteenth-century urban Britain remains dominated by English examples. If the traditional method of defining what constitutes a town is employed the reasons for this oversight are obvious considering that the majority of Welsh towns fell below the 2,500 benchmark and as a result would not have been perceived as urban. However, the study of urban history has moved forward considerably over the last three decades and the study of urban settlements, whether large or small, has started to place considerable importance on the institutions and characteristics that also define urbanity. Although the towns of Wales have started to receive more scholarly attention; as this review of the existing literature demonstrates, there is a long way to go before there is an overall picture of Wales's urban landscape in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Although Usk is only one very small town in a country of small towns it is an excellent example of how a small town with a population less than 2,500 inhabitants can be considered urban. It is also representative of similar towns, such as Cowbridge, Tenby and Lampeter, that did not benefit directly from the process of industrialisation but continued to serve their inhabitants and surrounding communities. These contrast with other small Welsh boroughs that lost their urban identity. The Municipal corporations report of 1834 stated that the boroughs of Crickhowell, Hay and Talgarth no longer had any 'trace of municipal institutions' while New Radnor was 'in no respects distinguishable from the rest of the county'.[110] This thesis will show that Usk, rather than disappearing into the rural background, continued to evolve and remained a necessary component in the urban hierarchy of Wales and of Britain as a whole.

Topographical description of Usk.

The town of Usk is situated in the centre of Monmouthshire, approximately 13 miles west of Monmouth and 15 miles northeast of Newport. The original settlement is located on the banks of the River Usk and over looked by a hilly outcrop on which the

[110] *Appendix to the first report of the commissioners appointed to inquire into the municipal corporations in England and Wales. Part I. Midland, western and south-western circuits* (London, 1835), p. 226 and p. 361.

castle is built. Twentieth-century development has seen the construction of housing on the outskirts of the town, especially to the northeast of the town along the old road to Raglan and Monmouth. The Olway Brook flows to the south and is prone to flooding. The River also floods but flood prevention schemes have meant that it has not flooded the town since 1979. The river is crossed at Usk by a bridge designed by William Edwards that was built in 1746-7 and a railway bridge that was built in 1856. The town is surrounded by agricultural land and is linked to the other towns of Monmouthshire by road. The town is situated within the parish of Usk that also includes the hamlets of Gwehelog and Glascoed, the latter being separated from the town by Monkswood which enjoyed extra-parochial status having been linked with the Cistercian Monastery at Tintern.

The town is thought to have been founded between 1150 and 1170 by Richard 'Strongbow' de Clare who also founded a Benedictine priory in Usk at the same time.[111] The parish church, St Mary's, was also founded in the twelfth century although the oldest parts appear to predate the priory suggesting the presence of an earlier settlement.[112] The Norman town was laid out with a central marketplace, now known as Twyn Square, located between the castle and the church. Aspects of the current street plan reflect the medieval borough which was concentrated along Bridge Street and the areas to the east and south of Twyn Square. Property throughout the town was divided in to burgage plots that got wider as they moved away from Twyn Square and for which tenants had to pay an annual rent of 1 shilling.[113] Usk had been part of the Marcher lordship of Striguil (modern day Chepstow) which was divided up on the death of Anslem, the last son of William Marshall, in 1245. Usk was then made the *caput* or head town of a smaller lordship of the same name.

The medieval period was followed by a phase of considerable growth during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This saw the centre of the town shift westwards towards the river with the development of Old Market Street, New Market Street, Baron's Street and Walker Street. Paul Courtney has suggested that the initial impetus

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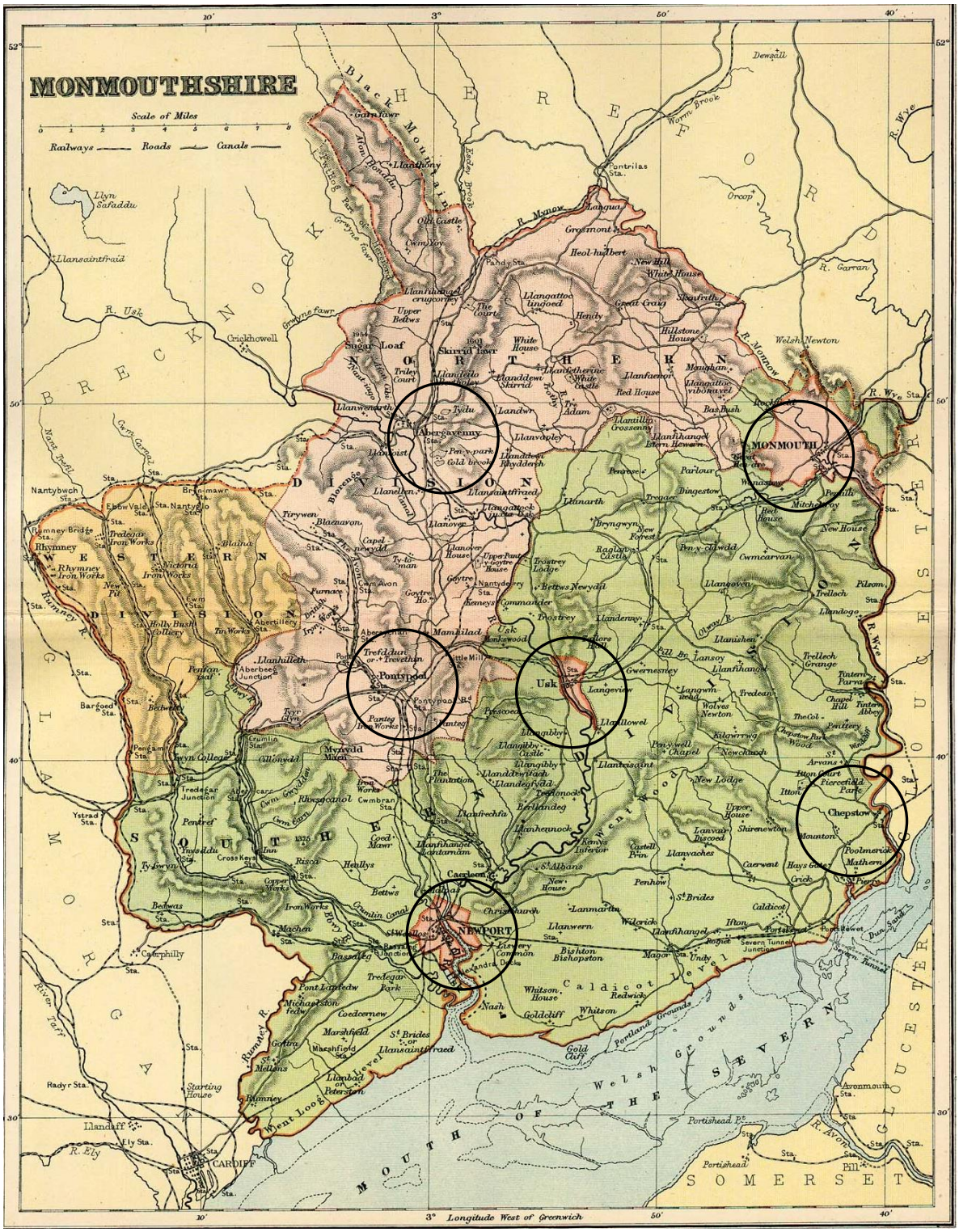
[111] For an in-depth discussion on the date of foundation see Mein, *Norman Usk*, pp. 34-43.
[112] M. Gray and S. Rees, 'The Medieval Priory and its community', in J. K. Knight and A. Johnson (eds.), *Usk castle, priory and town* (Hereford, 2008), p. 40.
[113] Mein, *Norman Usk*, p. 82.

Figure I.1. *Monmouthshire and its principal towns, 1895.*



Source: J. H. F. Brabner (ed.) *The Comprehensive gazetteer of England and Wales*, (London, 1985).

for this development was the sacking of the medieval town by Owain Glyndwr in 1402.[114] This shift saw the commercial centre of the town move from Twyn Square and

[114] Courtney, *Report on the excavations at Usk*, p. 107.

a deed for 1469 indicates that a new marketplace had been constructed at the end of New Market Street before the end of the fifteenth century.[115] This date supports Courtney's assertion as the town's economic recovery would have been dependant on it re-establishing its market. The relocation of the market resulted in the development of the surrounding area so that when Coxe visited, he found it to be 'more modern and in better repair' than the other parts of the town.[116]

At the same time, the older areas of the town went into decline. The castle had been abandoned by the end of the fifteenth century.[117] By 1564, a presentment to the Earl of Pembroke shows that the leasee of the castle, Roger Williams, had stripped much of the inner ward of stone which he used to build a new residence on Old Market Street known as Great House.[118] As indicated above, the abandonment of a castle could have serious economic consequences on a town and the loss of this customer base may have been another factor that contributed to the shift westwards. The early modern period also saw the disappearance of streets to the southeast of the town. Burgess rolls show that in 1569 there were 16 houses along a street known as Pook or Puck Lane that ran along the southern boundary of the Priory, however, by the time of Coxe's visit at the end of the eighteenth century these had vanished.[119] Similarly, Olway Street, situated to the east of the church, experienced a fall in burgages from 38 to 9 between 1630 and 1670.[120] This decline was likely caused by the shift west, the decline of Twyn Square as the economic centre of the town and the regular flooding of the Olway Brook. These changes, however, were 'sporadic rather than gradual' and it wasn't until the mid-seventeenth century that the layout resembled it's nineteenth century appearance as seen in figure I.2 below.[121]

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[115] *Ibid*. p. 106.
[116] Coxe, *Historical tour*, p. 125.
[117] J. K. Knight, 'Usk Castle and its affinities', in M. R. Apted, R. Gilyard-Beer and A. D. Saunders (eds.), *Ancient monuments and their interpretation* (Chichester, 1977), pp. 150.
[118] NLW, BUTE M58/1. Bute estate records, presentment relating to injuries done to the lp by the removal of buildings and fittings from Usk castle, 7 Oct. 1564.
[119] Coxe, *Historical tour*, p. 125; Mein, *Norman Usk*, p. 80.
[120] Courtney, *Report on the excavations at Usk*, p. 108.
[121] G. Mein, 'The development of the Norman town', p. 79.

Figure I.2. *Map of Usk, 1801.*

Source: W. Coxe, *An historical tour in Monmouthshire* (London, 1801).

There are few surviving sources pertaining to the population of Usk. Matthew Griffiths has used the number of burgage plots to give Usk a population of approximately 1500 people in 1300 which, according to his estimates, would have made it the fifth largest

town in Wales after Cardiff, Haverfordwest, Holt and Chepstow.[122] This however was followed by a period of decline and by 1563 Usk had an estimated population of 500.[123] By the time of the 1801 census this had risen to 734 and although subsequent censuses show that the population continued to grow, it peaked in 1871 at 1616 after which it shrank to 1,470 in 1881 and 1,417 in 1891. An increase by 1901 indicates that the town was beginning to experience growth again by the start of the twentieth century.[124]

Research questions and thesis structure.

As demonstrated, the existing historiography is inclined to focus on the urbanisation of larger, English towns and cities. The neglect of both small towns and of Welsh examples means that the nature of nineteenth-century, British urbanity has yet to be fully understood. To contribute to and expand this scholarship, this thesis will address the following key questions.

1. How did the broader political, economic and social changes that reshaped urban Britain impact a small town like Usk?
2. What was the nature of the specific challenges faced by small towns?
3. In what ways did the urban elites of small towns respond and adapt to nineteenth-century urban change?
4. To what extent was the elite able to reinforce its position within the urban community?
5. Was it possible for small towns to maintain their urban status despite the changing definition of what it meant to be urban?

In addition to these, this thesis will also consider the evolution of Welsh towns in order to identify what problems they experienced and to what extent these problems hindered their urban development. Although this research question may not be answered fully by this thesis, it is hoped that by posing it the need for further research will be highlighted.

[122] M. Griffiths, "Very wealthy by merchandise'? Urban fortunes', in J. G. Jones (ed.), *Class, community and culture in Tudor Wales* (Cardiff, 1989), p. 230.
[123] Powell, 'Do numbers count?' p. 50.
[124] Census population tables 1891 and 1901, www.histpop.co.uk [accessed 14.06.22].

This thesis will address these key questions by considering the impact that broader political, economic and social changes had on a small-town such as Usk. It will explore how the urban elite responded to these changes and the ways in which they were able to adapt to a world that was rapidly changing around them. It will also investigate the nature of the challenges specific to small towns such as diminishing authority, a shortage of capital and the absence of an effective form of urban government needed to maintain an urban settlement. These questions will be considered against the specifically Welsh context of Usk, giving due consideration to its impact on Usk's urban development. Focusing on these main issues will demonstrate that small towns and their urban elite were not passive observers of the changes that transformed the urban world during the nineteenth century. Despite the problems that they faced they strived to find ways to establish and adopt characteristically urban traits. This will enrich the current historiography which, as shown, tends not to consider the experiences of small towns during the nineteenth century.

In order to achieve the aims of this study the thesis has been divided into four substantive chapters, each of which will look at a different aspect of urban development and how it manifested itself within Usk. These chapters will build on the underlying themes that are fundamental to this thesis and by doing so will help answer the research questions outlined above.

Chapter one will focus on the formal structures of local government within Usk at the start of the nineteenth century: the lord of the borough, the corporation, and the parish. The changing role of these bodies will be investigated to explore the impact that centrally introduced reforms such as the Reform Act of 1832 and the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 had on the government of small towns and their ability to establish their autonomy from the influence of powerful aristocratic landowners and the encroaching authority of the county. The changing nature of Usk's urban elite will also be considered and the ways in which it responded to these changes. By doing so it will highlight the challenges faced by small towns when it came to governing the urban settlement and how their elites attempted to overcome these problems while still maintaining their elevated status.

Both the second and third chapters will work with the existing historiography on urban improvement and development to draw comparisons between the fortunes of English and Welsh towns to demonstrate that the latter did not experience the same processes and advancements as their English counterparts during the eighteenth century and were, therefore, at a different stage of development at the start of the nineteenth century. These chapters will then look at the changes that occurred within Usk. Chapter two will address the process of urban improvement while the third chapter will examine the development of an urban leisure culture within a small town. Both chapters will consider the specific problems faced by small towns in their attempts to adapt to the changing expectations of what it meant to be urban and the ways in which the urban elite attempted to overcome them.

The final chapter will then widen the focus to look at the how Usk's nonconformist congregations and its female inhabitants interacted with the urban elite. By doing so it will analyse how the efforts of the elite to secure and consolidate their position were received by the wider community. It will also demonstrate that in addition to the wider external changes, the elite also had to respond to internal pressures as those outside the elite challenged the former's influence over the community and were increasingly able to participate in local urban governance. At the heart of this chapter will be two case studies: the debate over the denomination of the town's elementary school that occurred during the 1860s and 70s and the almshouse question that culminated in the election of charity trustees in 1891. The exploration of these conflicts will demonstrate the extent to which Usk's urban community was divided between church and chapel as those outside the traditional, Anglican elite challenged the status quo. It will also show how the elite responded to these challenges as it attempted to maintain its hegemony over the urban settlement.

The thesis will then be concluded by drawing the threads together to answer the research questions outlined above but also to outline opportunities for further research based on the observations and conclusions of the study.

Together, these chapters will contribute significantly to our understanding of the small-town experience during the nineteenth century and the nature of urbanisation at the bottom of the urban hierarchy. The thesis will also show that current assumptions that

Wales simply lagged behind England are misjudged and that further research is needed before it can be determined whether it followed a similar pattern of growth or whether, like its Scottish and Irish counterparts, the process differed.

Methodology, scope and limitations.

In order to achieve the aims of this thesis, research has focused on a single town, Usk. It would have been interesting to compare and contrast a number of case studies in order to determine whether what happened in Usk was indicative of how other small towns developed during the period in question. However, there were many small towns of a similar size, and the time constraints of this thesis did not allow for a thorough review of the source material of these settlements to identify suitable case studies. Original archival research has focused on Usk and reference to other towns is, in most cases, based on information derived from the existing scholarship. It is hoped that the observations of this study and the patterns that it identifies provides the foundations for further research and demonstrates that there is sufficient source material to support the in-depth study of small Welsh towns during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The research on Usk has taken a primarily archival approach which involved the close examination of primary sources pertaining to nineteenth-century Usk. These records will be essential to this study as the secondary sources on Usk are almost non-existent. Most of the source material for this project is available at Gwent Archives, Ebbw Vale. The borough of Usk records is a large collection of disparate source material dating from 1740 to 1922. The records of the court leet and borough court include court papers, warrants and presentments; administrative records including proceedings of meetings held between 1829 and 1885; and correspondence sent or received between 1821 and 1885. It also includes miscellaneous accounts, records of elections and registration and records of corporation property. These are, on the whole, fragmentary and do not always provide a comprehensive picture of how the corporation managed the urban settlement. Despite this, they provide a valuable insight into the business of the corporation and its intentions which has been extremely useful, especially in chapter one where the formal structures of Usk's local government are discussed and in chapter two where the process of urban improvement and how the elite managed the physical environment are analysed. Most of this collection consists of miscellaneous bundles

that contain a variety of different materials which have not been given individual codes. Consequently, footnotes and references provide descriptions of the source material and their dates of creation to aid identification.

The parish of Usk records are also housed by Gwent Archives. These include the vestry and parish meeting book that has been used to clarify the role played by the parish in the government of the town and has contributed to the identification of the urban elite. Another valuable item in this collection is the churchwarden's accounts which were used to determine how many ratepayers were in Usk during the mid-nineteenth century. The collection also includes documents pertaining to the overseers of the poor and the surveyor of the highways from 1773 to 1831, but these are fragmentary and therefore shed little light on the subsequent period. The accounts of the surveyor of the highways are in the National Library of Wales but no other parish records appear to have survived. The absence of the overseer's accounts is particularly disappointing as it has made it impossible to examine the nature of poverty within Usk. It is not possible to determine who received relief, how much was paid out in relief and the issues that the overseers had to deal with. Although Poor law records do exist for the Pontypool poor law union, they are extensive as the union covered 22 parishes and there has not been enough time to go through them to determine the number of Usk residents receiving relief.

Articles and reports in the provincial press have been a valuable source of information and have helped fill many of the gaps in the surviving archival material. From 1855 onwards, Usk had its own newspaper, the *Illustrated Usk Observer and Raglan Herald,* which became the *County Observer and the Monmouthshire Central Advertiser* in 1867. [125] These English language publications provide an invaluable amount of material as the editor of the paper, J. H. Clark, was not just an inhabitant of the town but also a prominent member of the urban elite. As mentioned above, he was often at the meetings and events reported on and therefore his newspaper provides first-hand accounts of what happened, and he often relays speeches and conversations verbatim. Again, it must be remembered that he was a key figure in many of the developments that

[125] For further information on these newspapers and any others mentioned in this thesis see the National Library of Wales website https://www.library.wales/

occurred during the second half of the century, especially the establishment of the Local Board, so his accounts need to be treated with some caution as he often used the paper as a means of promoting his own agenda. Also, as a member of the elite, Clark was conservative in outlook and was writing for a similar readership. His paper was therefore supportive of conservative politics and upheld the principles of the Church of England.

In contrast other local newspapers such as the *Bristol Mercury and Monmouthshire Merlin*, provide a more liberal perspective. The former was a radical newspaper that spoke openly against the dominance of the Tories and aristocratic abuses of power and was particularly critical of the sixth Duke of Beaufort. The *Monmouthshire Merlin* shared a similar viewpoint to its Bristolian counterpart. It was founded by Charles Hough and the future Liberal M.P. Reginald J. Blewitt in 1829 but was particularly critical of the Conservatives between 1835 and 1858 when it was published by Irishman Edward Dowling, a Roman Catholic, who served as mayor of Newport in 1844 and was a vocal supporter of Blewitt. Both publications are a good source of information for the decades preceding the establishment of Usk's paper. Other important publications are the *South Wales Daily News*, one of the chief organs of Welsh Liberal politics that was published between 1872 and 1900 and *The Cardiff Times*, to which William Abraham (aka Mabon) was a contributor.[126] Both prove to be a valuable source of information, especially in chapter four where the relationships between church and chapel are examined, as they provide an alternative assessment of events and are more sympathetic to Usk's liberal and nonconformist inhabitants.

The newspaper coverage is not comprehensive. Despite the odd mention in the *Cambrian* and the *Bristol Mercury*, events in Usk were only reported with any frequency after the establishment of the *Monmouthshire Merlin* in 1829. As a county paper, however, it was primarily interested in events that had a wider county appeal. There is a significant increase in material following the establishment of Clark's newspaper, but it gives little insight into the activities of the lower middle and working classes nor the nonconformist congregations. Information regarding these groups,

[126] Mabon was a pioneer trade-unionist who was sat as M.P. for Rhondda from 1885 which made him a prominent figure in Welsh politics during the closing decades of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

however, can be found in liberal newspaper such as those mentioned above that were published within the more industrial regions of Monmouthshire and Glamorgan. It should be noted that reference to Usk is limited in scope and these papers were only published during the second half of the nineteenth century, however, they provide an insight into sections of the community that are absent from the other sources.

All the newspaper material used within this thesis has been digitalised by the National Library Wales and is available online. Search engines were used to locate articles of interest and while generic words such as 'Usk' were used, more specific terms, names and dates were often employed to locate relevant material. By cross-referencing information from the other source material with the digitalised newspaper archive it was also possible to further an understanding of the events in question and the role played by certain individuals. For example, the minutes of the Local board do not mention any controversy that may have surrounded the election of new members, it was only when newspaper articles were consulted that it became possible to understand the true nature of these proceedings. Unfortunately, editions of the *County Observer and the Monmouthshire Central Advertiser*, published between December 1884 and January 1899, are missing from the digitalised collection so there is a limited amount of source material relating to the developments that occurred during the closing decade of the century.

Other collections that have been used in this thesis include the records of the Badminton Estate and Llangibby Castle Estate, both of which are housed at the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth.[127] Both are extensive collections that date back to the thirteenth century and although the majority of the documents regarding Usk originate from before the period covered by this thesis, there are a number of sources which are of use such as the records of Usk's Lancastrian School and the account book and pocket book of Iltyd Nicholls, one of Usk's wealthiest inhabitants. There is also a private collection of papers referred to in this thesis as the Usk Church papers that belong to the Priory Church of St Mary's, Usk. These are an assortment of

[127] The records at the NLW have catalogued the Langibby estate records using the English spelling of Llangybi which will therefore be used when referring to this collection. When referring to the village of the same name, the Welsh spelling, Llangybi, will be employed unless quoting directly from a primary source.

papers that pertain to the 1891 election of four representative trustees for Usk's almshouse charity and include annotated newspaper cuttings, election pamphlets, private correspondence, and a detailed record of the votes cast. These are a valuable source of information and are used extensively in chapter four.

Also available at Gwent Archives and online is a collection of printed and digitally reproduced sources such as trade directories, contemporary topographical literature, and other miscellaneous publications. These provide contemporary descriptions of nineteenth-century Usk and by comparing these sources this study is able to chart changes and developments to the fabric of the town. This was also done by comparing maps of the town. There are a number of nineteenth-century maps of Usk including a street map from 1801, a map of Usk and the surrounding area drawn by Charlie Budgen in 1813; a map of the new parliamentary borough from 1835 drawn by Robert Creighton, the Tithe Map of 1846 and two OS Maps which were published in 1881 and 1901.[128] These comparisons were augmented with data from the census which was used to chart the growth of the urban community, its social composition and the number of female heads of household. The reports of the registrar-general of births, marriages and deaths were used to help explain the fluctuations in population seen between 1871 and 1901. Both sets of data are available on the University of Essex's online historical population reports website, www.histpop.org. Finally, the physical fabric of Usk was used to complement and extend information derived from the written sources. Online Listed Building reports provided by Cadw and reports on the built environment by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales have been used to support observations based on the surviving architectural evidence.[129]

As the above shows, there is a considerable amount of different sources for nineteenth-century Usk. Although the collections are often fragmentary, when used together to cross reference dates, compare descriptions of events and to identify the names of Usk's urban elite, it is possible to get a more complete picture of what was happening within

[128] The T. Morris map is published in W. Coxe, *An historical tour in Monmouthshire* (London, 1801); Charlie Budgen's map of 1813 is accessible online at http://www.bl.uk/; Robert Creighton's map of 1835 is in S. Lewis, *View of the representative history of Britain* (London, 1835); the Tithe Map of 1846 is available at https://places.library.wales/ and two OS Maps are available at https://maps.nls.uk/.
[129] See relevant pages at https://cadw.gov.wales and https://coflein.gov.uk.

this small, Welsh town. That being said, the initial aim of this thesis was to explore the growth and development of Usk to analyse the scope and limits of its urban dimensions. The surviving source material, however, has made it difficult to take the holistic approach that was originally intended. As with many small towns, the archival material was produced by the urban elite and therefore it predominantly relates to their actions. Therefore, it has been necessary to look at the experience of Usk during the nineteenth century through the prism of the upper-middle-classes.

Chapter I: Governance and Administration.

This chapter will demonstrate that centrally introduced reforms did little to modify the bodies of government within small towns. Acts such as the Reform Act of 1832 and the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 failed to provide small towns with an alternative and effective form of local governance. They were slow to disrupt the hegemony of aristocratic landlords who continued to be able to maintain considerable influence over the government of small towns and the voting habits of their inhabitants. At the same time, the legislation diminished the ability of small towns to self-govern by undermining their existing agencies of administration and by failing to establish alternative structures that were 'fit for purpose' and would allow small towns to manage their own affairs. The failure of these reforms to provide small towns with an effective form of government meant that the principal inhabitants were left with little option other than to negotiate their own form of urban administration that would allow them to retain control over the government of their town and reinforce their positions as the urban elite.

At the start of the nineteenth century, Usk was governed by the traditional institutions of corporation and parish vestry. The corporation consisted of an indefinite number of burgesses who were nominated by the lord of the borough, a title assumed by the Dukes of Beaufort from 1772 when the fifth duke purchased the Manor of Usk from Robert Clive, first Baron Clive in 1772.[1] There were no restrictions on who could become a burgess nor how many could be nominated therefore the number of burgesses varied over time. A lack of evidence for the eighteenth century and the fact that the corporation shrank after 1832, the reasons for which will be explored later in this chapter, makes it difficult to determine how many burgesses there were on average in any given year. From this body of burgesses, a Portreeve was elected annually and under his direction there were two bailiffs who were expected to 'aid and assist the portreeve in the execution of his office' and to do all that was in their power 'that tends to the profit and advantage' of the borough.[2] There were also two constables and from 1826 two assistant constables who acted as the borough police force. The Municipal

[1] NLW, ROBCLI, EU6. Robert Clive papers, copy agreement for sale of the Usk estate to the Duke of Beaufort, 6 Jan. 1772.
[2] J. H. Clark, *Usk past and present* (Usk, 1896), pp. 89-90.

Corporations Report stated that there were no qualifications required for these roles other than residency.[3] They were therefore open to the wider community, which is evident in the court leet records that show offices were often filled by non-burgesses: for example, J. H. Clark served as constable in 1856 but was not sworn in as a burgess until 1873.[4]

Finally, there was the borough recorder who was appointed by the lord of the borough and was responsible for issuing warrants to the bailiffs and constables to summon the burgesses and inhabitants to the court leet and borough court. Although he did not preside over these courts, he was in attendance and responsible for keeping the court books. The primary responsibility of the corporation was to hold the court leet which was presided over by the Portreeve and where inhabitants were admonished for littering the streets, for encroachments on public highways and for not paying fines previously issued. Alongside the corporation, the Vestry oversaw the upkeep of the streets, the distribution of parochial poor relief and the maintenance of law and order within the town. Electoral reform and the reallocation of parochial responsibilities meant that the authority of these institutions and the prestige of the associated offices diminished considerably as the century progressed. Centrally introduced reforms failed to provide small towns with an alternative and effective form of local governance leaving it to small-town, urban elites to find their own solutions.

The Reform Act of 1832 was passed with the intention of reforming the electoral system in order to disrupt the aristocratic hegemony that dominated British politics and its impact has been thoroughly debated. During the early to mid-twentieth century the consensus among many historians was that the act deserved the epithet 'great'. In 1956, Asa Briggs argued that it saw 'the sizeable transfer of power from the aristocracy to the middle classes' while George M. Trevelyan described it as the point at which the sovereignty of the people was established in fact, if not by law.[5] Even in the 1970s, John F. C. Harrison celebrated the act for sweeping away 'the worst abuses and

[3] *The Municipal Corporations Report,* p. 416.
[4] GA, D156.22. Records of the borough of Usk, presentments of jurors to the court leet, 23 Oct. 1856; Clark, *Past and present*, p. 94.
[5] A. Briggs, 'Middle-class consciousness in English politics. 1780-1846', *Past and Present*, 9 (1956), p. 69-70; G. M. Trevelyan, *British history in the nineteenth century and after* (London, 1966), p. 242.

anomalies of the old parliamentary system'.[6] At the same time, however, this perception of the Reform Act came under considerable scrutiny with a growing number of historians downplaying its impact, most notably Norman Gash who argued that the changes introduced by the Reform Act were limited and that 'there was scarcely a feature of the old unreformed system that could not be found still in existence after 1832'.[7] This was a view that has been supported and developed by later historians writing during the late 1980s and the 1990s. Having looked at the electorate before and after 1832, Frank O'Gorman found that 'the men, the institutions, the values and the practices [were] remarkably similar each side of 1832'; Ernest A. Smith stated that once 'the dust had settled, the political landscape looked much as it had done before' and James Vernon found that the effects of the Great Reform Act were 'less than great and considerably less dramatic than had been previously supposed'.[8]

While these historians may have found the achievements of the act to be modest in terms of expanding the electorate, others were reviving the argument that it deserved to be considered a 'watershed'. Angus Hawkins argued in 1989 that the act 'redrew the lines of political configuration' while John Phillips and Charles Weatherall claimed in 1995 that it 'unleashed a wave of political modernisation' that 'quickly destroyed the political system that had prevailed during the long reign of George III' and replaced it with a 'modern electoral system based on rigid partisanship and clearly articulated political principle'.[9] This is a view Philip Salmon supported when he described it as 'truly innovative'.[10] But these conclusions too have been challenged. Edwin Jaggard stated that this portrait of Britain's post-1832 electoral system and the timeline of modernisation put forward by Phillips and Weatherall was 'constructed mainly from voting patterns in medium- and large-sized boroughs' which obscured 'important elements of the electoral scene up to 1868'. He argued that there continued to be constituencies where 'patrons, electioneering traditions, and localism remained

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[6] J. F. C. Harrison, *Early Victorian Britain, 1832-51* (London, 1977), p. 149.
[7] N. Gash, *Politics in the age of Peel* (London, 1953), pp. xi–xii.
[8] F. O'Gorman, *Voters, patrons and parties. The unreformed electorate of Hanoverian England, 1734-1832* (Oxford, 1989), p. 392; E. A. Smith, *Reform or revolution? A diary of reform in England 1830-2* (Stroud, 1992), p. 141; J. Vernon, *Politics and the people. A study in English political culture, c. 1815-1867* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 31.
[9] J. A. Phillips and C. Weatherall, 'The Great Reform Act of 1832 and the political modernisation of England', *The American Historical Review*, 100, no. 2 (1995), p. 412.
[10] P. Salmon, *Electoral reform at work. Local politics and national parties, 1832-1841* (Woodbridge, 2002), p. 248.

formidable … forces' but that these were mainly in the small boroughs which 'outnumbered all other constituency categories in England and Wales'. When the situation within these boroughs was explored, Jaggard concluded, 'the speed of political modernisation… was slower in many smaller boroughs' where political memory, the traditions of the unreformed system, a preference for local men and various forms of influence and control continued to be important factors.[11]

This chapter is not concerned with the role that the Reform Act played in the political modernisation of Britain, rather it is the impact it had on the relationship between aristocratic landlords and the structures of local government within small towns that is of interest. Jaggard's research, however, is interesting because it acknowledges the fact that small boroughs had a different experience from their larger counterparts. When this is considered, an alternative picture emerges of the impact the Reform Act had on electoral behaviour, on the development of rigid partisanship and on the transformation of Britain's political fabric.

There is little doubt that the act ushered in the beginnings of a new political era, but historians have demonstrated that it fell short of preventing aristocratic hegemony as the nobility continued to exercise authority and influence over the polls. Gash, as already quoted, observed that little changed following the act, arguing that 'the enfranchisement of new industrial towns sometimes meant no more than the addition of landlords…or industrialists' to the franchise.[12] Frank O'Gorman reinforced this argument stating that the 'landed interest continued to reign supreme over … the political system' with the 'politics of influence' continuing to be of 'enormous importance…in the counties and in smaller and medium-sized boroughs'.[13] More recently, David Krein concluded that 'the real diminution' in aristocratic influence did not occur until after the 1867 Reform Act when 'the rising tide of democracy finally began to overwhelm them'.[14]

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[11] E. Jaggard, 'Small boroughs and political modernization 1832-1868: A Cornwall case study', *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, 29, no. 4 (1997), p. 624 and p. 642.
[12] Gash, *Age of Peel*, p. xi.
[13] F. O'Gorman, *The long eighteenth century: British political and social history 1688-1832* (London, 1997) p. 417.
[14] David Krein, 'The great landowners in the House of Commons 1833-85', *Parliamentary History*, 32, no. 3 (2013), p. 476.

Historians have taken a closer look at the continuation of aristocratic influence within specific constituencies. Richard A. Gaunt, looking at how the 4th Duke of Newcastle reacted prior to, during and after the Reform Act, stated that Newcastle was able to continue 'as if the Reform Act had never been passed' with his parliamentary influence surviving.[15] Michael Markus' research, although designed to challenge Gash's conclusion that Ripon remained a pocket borough by arguing that elections were decided by 'a variety of factors, of which partisan allegiance and ideological conviction were at the fore', demonstrated that the outcome of elections continued to represent the political sympathies of the local aristocratic proprietor. Despite the Liberals winning the 1832 election, Ripon remained a 'bastion of Conservatism' from 1835 until the death of Elizabeth Lawrence in 1845 and then returned only Liberal candidates while in the ownership of Earl de Grey and Ripon, a prominent Liberal politician.[16] John Davies has also demonstrated the continuing influence of the aristocracy in Cardiff where the Marquess of Bute's position as ground landlord of most of the new £10 voters and as the principal employer of labour enabled him to extend his control over the new electorate ensuring that the conservative candidate, John Iltyd Nicholl, repeatedly won the seat until the Duke's death in 1848.[17]

While these studies demonstrate that aristocratic influence continued after the passing of the Reform Act, they concentrate on how the nobility was able to continue to control the voting patterns of the borough seats. There is little exploration, however, of how the act and the continuing influence of an aristocratic patron impacted the boroughs beyond its voting patterns. O'Gorman alluded to one consequence when he commented that the Reform Act led to a decrease in the size of some urban electorates as it eliminated working-class voters 'either through the new franchise or through the dying out of the old 'ancient rights' voters'.[18] O'Gorman presented Lancaster as an example where the electorate dwindled from 4,000 in 1832 to 1,000 in 1860; however, he failed to explore what the wider implications of this were. The introduction of a uniform £10

[15] R. A. Gaunt, 'A great electioneer and his motives reconsidered: the 4th Duke of Newcastle' *Parliamentary History,* 39, no. 1 (2020), pp. 202-3.
[16] Michael Markus, 'A pocket borough? Reformed politics in Ripon, 1832-67', *Parliamentary History*, 27, no. 3 (2008), p. 334.
[17] J. Davies, 'Aristocratic town-makers and the coal metropolis: the Marquesses of Bute and the growth of Cardiff', in D. Cannadine (ed.), *Patricians, power and politics in nineteenth-century towns* (Leicester, 1982), pp. 40-2.
[18] O'Gorman, *The long eighteenth century*, p. 418.

householder franchise would have had direct and immediate consequences on existing structures of local government and the composition of the urban elite, yet the current historiography does little to address how these bodies responded. The pre-reform electorate often formed the 'governing' elite of boroughs, especially smaller ones where authority was concentrated in the hands of a small but relatively influential minority of inhabitants. The continuing ability of aristocratic patrons to influence the polls may have been explored but the loss of their ability to determine who could vote also had serious consequences, especially for the structures of small-town urban governance.

According to Frederic Moret, Usk found itself in a relatively unique position in 1832. Of the 177 boroughs that were represented in parliament, either alone or in conjunction with other boroughs on the eve of the Reform Act, Usk was the only one that had a population below 3,000.[19] Usk was the smallest borough to retain the franchise and therefore is a possible anomaly in the political system. Why it was not disenfranchised is not known. As a contributing borough along with Monmouth and Newport it was not solely responsible for the election of a Member of Parliament. Newport had the largest electorate and their support of the Whig candidate, Benjamin Hall, ensured his success in the general elections of 1831 and 1832. The electorate within Usk remained small and therefore was unable to dramatically change the outcome of the poll. This suggests that the Monmouth boroughs constituency was no longer considered a pocket borough and therefore it was not deemed necessary for Usk to be disenfranchised. Although Usk may have been the only small-town electorate to survive the Reform Act, the act had a considerable impact on the town's structures of local government and their development after 1832. Therefore, these consequences need to be considered if the government and administration of this town is to be fully understood.

The absence of research into the practical implications of the Reform Act on small towns is possibly a consequence of the passing of the Municipal Corporations Act in 1835. Building on the principles of the Reform Act, this act aimed to further disrupt aristocratic influence by removing their ability to control borough corporations across both England and Wales. The fact that it followed so quickly on the heels of the Reform Act has meant that the impact of the earlier act on the structures of local government

[19] F. Moret, *The end of the ancien regime in England* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 2015), p. 99.

has been overshadowed by the much more obvious effects of the Municipal Corporations Act. In the early twentieth century, historians such as Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Ivor Jennings, Kingsley B. Smellie and George Kitson Clark argued that the act signalled a 'revolution' in urban government.[20] Kitson-Clark went so far as to say that it represented 'a real revolution in the social background of government, much more complete than anything which the reform bill had achieved'.[21] This interpretation is a difficult one to accept. Firstly, this historiography is based on the assumption that the act was a significant part of a process that saw the transfer of power from the aristocracy to the middle classes. As a result, these historians overlooked the limitations of the act, namely the fact that unlike the Reform Act, which was rolled out nationally, the Municipal Corporations Act only applied to a select number of boroughs. Secondly, the significance of the Municipal Corporation Act has undergone a process of revision since the conclusions reached by the Webbs *et al* were published. More recent historiography, having looked more closely at the towns and cities included in the act, now questions how far-reaching the changes were and describe the consequences of the act as having 'often been exaggerated'.[22]

The consensus is that the immediate impact of the act was limited. Although many boroughs saw a 'significant change' in personnel with conservative corporations replaced by liberal town councils, this pattern was not universal. As a result, claims that not a single member of the old corporations was re-elected in the municipal elections of 1836, as made by Wilfred Barnard Faraday, were simply not true. This can be seen in Oxford, for example, where 19 members of the old common council were re-elected.[23] For those towns where a change in personnel did occur, its significance is debatable. Although the establishment of municipal elections permitted individuals previously excluded from local government to participate, it was only accessible to those inhabitants who paid rates. The act simply concentrated authority in the hands of 'a solid middle-class franchise' that excluded those of a lower socio-economic

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[20] S. Webb and B. Webb, *English local government from the revolution to the Municipal Corporations Act: the manor and the borough. Part II* (London, 1908), pp. 693-755; W. I. Jennings, 'The municipal revolution', in H. J. Laski, W. I. Jennings, & W. A. Robson (eds.), *A century of municipal progress* 1835-1935 (Westport, 1935), p. 55; K. B. Smellie, *A history of local government* (London, 1946), p. 39; G. Kitson Clark, *The making of Victorian England* (London, 1962), p. 131.
[21] *Ibid*.
[22] R. Sweet, *The English town 1680-1840. Government, society, and culture* (Harlow, 1999), p. 157.
[23] W. Barnard Faraday, *The English and Welsh boroughs. An historical outline* (Hadleigh, 1951), p. 57; Sweet, *The English town*, p. 158; J. Davies, *Cardiff and the marquesses of Bute* (Cardiff, 1981), p. 128.

background.[24] Fraser argued that the act resulted in a 'change of men' and not a change of system and that control of these municipal councils became an internal power struggle between 'the traditional Tory-Anglican establishment and the new Liberal-Dissenting economic élite'.[25] This view is supported by Sweet who contended that the 'tangible change in the practice of government [was] not remarkable'. Sweet argued that the act did little to 'solve the structural problems' that had burdened the bodies of the unreformed system as its provisions were 'sketchy'.[26] Although the act may have granted these new councils certain powers, the extent to which they were 'activated' depended on local initiative. In many cases local government continued as it had before with improvement commissions continuing to overshadow the new councils.

Not all municipal councils showed the same enthusiasm for an increased role in local government. According to Sweet, in 1848 only 95 councils had sole or shared powers of draining, cleansing and paving while the councils of 92 towns had no such powers.[27] It was only the expansion of central government that forced many towns to address the problems associated with urbanisation. There is also evidence of apathy towards and from within these councils once the excitement and novelty of 1835 had subsided. In Monmouth interest appears to have flagged by 1838 due to the retirement or death of the older antagonists and the reluctance of younger men to involve themselves in the 'mundane business of producing by-laws, levying rates and supervising the police'.[28] In Newport, it was not until 1844 that the new council began to codify the town's byelaws, the first three of which imposed stiff fines on those who refused to serve as mayors, aldermen or accessors, indicating a reluctance and apathy amongst the town's inhabitants towards civic duty.[29]

Frederic Moret agrees that the act did little to resolve the issues of urban growth due to its failure to establish structures to control or standardise the governance of towns. He

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[24] B. Keith-Lucas, *English local government in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries* (London, 1977), p. 16.
[25] D. Fraser, *Urban politics in Victorian England. The structure of politics in Victorian cities* (Leicester, 1979), p. 116.
[26] Sweet, *The English town*, p. 159.
[27] G. B. A. M. Finlayson, 'The politics of municipal reform in 1835', *English History Review*, 81 (1966), p. 255; Sweet, *The English town*, p. 159.
[28] K. Kissack, *Monmouth. The making of a county town* (London, 1975), p. 108.
[29] B. P. Jones, *From Elizabeth I to Victoria. The government of Newport (Mon.) 1550-1850* (Newport, 1957), p. 124-5.

contends, however, that the act was significant for what it destroyed 'as much as it was for what it introduced'. He argues that the act abolished 'the privileges that had been the basis for organising the urban authorities of England and Wales'. By ending trade monopolies and withdrawing restrictions on access to the 'civic body' the act ensured that participation in urban governance no longer depended on 'personal circumstances' but on the 'application of general law'. By removing these attributes, the act made it impossible to return to the '*ancien* urban regime' and ensured that municipal government was permanently transformed.[30]

Many historians agree that the Municipal Corporations Act signalled a turning point in the evolution of urban government but rather than it being the culmination of a period of reform, it was the beginning. Derek Fraser argued that it was the 50 years that followed 1835 in which a 'true municipal revolution' occurred, one that saw 'merely representative institutions' transformed into 'powerful agencies with wide social purposes'. A change that was built on 'the establishment of the legal, social and political authority of town councils, on the creation and accumulation of municipal powers and the definition of a positive social role for municipal reform'.[31] The argument that 1835 was a starting point of change is evident in research that takes a more detailed look at the development of the government of a specific town or city. Brian J. Barber has shown that in Leeds, although the Municipal Corporations Act established a town council, it initially was 'assigned a very limited role' that was restricted to the finance and management of local policing. Barber demonstrated that the council's accumulation of responsibilities was not granted by the act or by local government but through 'the provision of local improvement acts'.[32]

Unlike the Reform Act, the Municipal Corporations Act was not universal and only applied to 178 named boroughs. Acknowledging this, Fraser stated that 'it was not the *system* of English local government' that was reformed by the Municipal Corporations Act but rather the 'government of 178 named incorporate boroughs'.[33] The act applied to just under three quarters of the 246 boroughs surveyed in 1834. This means that

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[30] Moret, *The end of the ancien regime*, p. 289.
[31] D. Fraser, *Power and authority in the Victorian city* (Oxford, 1979), pp. 149-51 and p. 173.
[32] B. J. Barber, 'Aspects of municipal government 1835-1914', in D. Fraser (ed), *A history of modern Leeds* (Manchester, 1980), p. 301.
[33] Fraser, *Power and authority*, p. 2. Also see Smellie, *History of local government*, p. 39.

nearly 30% of the English and Welsh boroughs identified by the royal commission continued to exist and function as urban settlements under the administration of their pre-existing forms of local government. It is understandable that these towns are not considered by Fraser as they fall outside the boundaries of his research. However, the tendency of urban historians to focus solely on the evolution of the municipal councils has produced a relatively narrow field of scholarship that ignores the nature and development of local government within the borough towns not covered by the act. As a result, the experience of towns such as Usk has been left uncharted. Fraser states that those towns that were not granted corporate status 'remained outside the mainstream development of urban local government'. While this may be the case, the structures and bodies of local government within these towns still existed, for, unlike the Reform Act, which disenfranchised rotten boroughs, the Municipal Corporations Act did not 'declassify' the boroughs that it did not reform. Therefore, the existing system continued to govern and develop as it attempted to find new and more effective ways of responding to the problems of drainage, water supply, cleaning the streets and maintaining the urban environment. The experience of these towns, many of which were smaller and less wealthy than their reformed counterparts, needs to be explored and understood if one is to have a more complete understanding of the development of urban government during the nineteenth century.

Had Usk been reformed it is possible that the form and nature of local government would have changed very little, as was the case in boroughs such as Monmouth and Newport where municipal councils, as demonstrated above, were slow to implement the new powers conferred upon them.[34] Given the small size of Usk's urban elite, it is unlikely that the composition of an elected municipal council would have brought marked differences: there was no liberal, mercantile class waiting to challenge the Tory interest. The post 1832 election results show that the majority of ratepayers supported the conservative cause and therefore there probably would not have been the 'change in men' seen in other towns and cities. Nor did Usk have the financial means of activating or accumulating further powers. Although the municipal councils were permitted to issue a rate, the size of Usk's population and the economic status of its ratepayers

[34] Sweet, *The English town*, p. 159; Kissack, *Monmouth*, p. 108; Jones, *From Elizabeth I to Victoria*, p. 124-5.

would not have given the new council access to funds sufficient to petition government for local improvements acts as the municipal council of a larger town such as Leeds was able to do.

There is, however, a similarity to be drawn between the progression of local government within the reformed and unreformed boroughs. The notion that the act was just a starting point from which the new town councils developed new means of governing and accumulated the responsibilities of local government reflects what was happening within Usk at the same time. The 40 or 50 years that followed the act also saw the principal inhabitants of Usk search for an effective means of administering their urban community. In both types of borough, this progress was fired by local initiative; the municipal councils just had more means available to them and a clearer structure through which to operate. While municipal councils could create opportunities to transform their role, smaller towns, unable to apply for private acts due to a lack of capital, were forced to wait for further centrally introduced acts that allowed them to establish and develop their structures of local government. In this respect the measures adopted by the unreformed towns of the nineteenth century may be compared with the 'ad hoc' patchwork of different authorities, ranging from parish vestries, charitable trusts, improvement commissions, county sessions – as well as corporations – that arose in response to 'local needs and circumstances' during the eighteenth century.[35]

David Eastwood's analysis of the structures of rural government that existed within the countryside is also relevant to understanding the government of unreformed boroughs. Eastwood acknowledged that before the 1830s power and authority was 'the product of negotiation' between central parliament and the localities but took issue with Keith-Lucas *et al* who suggested that the unreformed system was inefficient and irrational. He suggested that in practice, it 'was a more coherent and efficient form than its critics have alleged' and that the traditional institutions of local government were the 'products of a particular process of institutional and cultural formation'.[36] Although he discussed the role of the vestry and the county, the evolution of traditional municipal

[35] Sweet, *The English town,* p. 28; B. Keith-Lucas, *The unreformed local government system* (London, 1980), p. 13.
[36] D. Eastwood, *Governing rural England: tradition and transformation in local government 1780-1840* (Oxford, 1994), p. 3.

structures is omitted, which is understandable when his focus is rural self-government. This, however, means that once again the unreformed boroughs have slipped through the gap between urban and rural scholarship. For while their parish vestries may have experienced similar fortunes as their rural counterparts, the continued existence of their corporations meant that their pattern of self-government differed greatly. Eastwood argued that by 1870, those within rural areas became less interested in local government being less disposed to sacrifice their time and energy to the cause. As a result, they left the business of self-government to the magistrates and guardians while the majority played no public role at all.[37] In Usk, however, the opposite was happening. The second half of the nineteenth century saw the principal inhabitants of Usk challenge the authority of the magistracy and intensify their attempts to retain a form of self-government by adopting measures that reinvigorated public life within the town.

There is a considerable amount of primary evidence that helps shed light on the ways in which Usk was governed and how this changed and developed during the nineteenth century. The borough records include court leet records, minutes of corporate meetings and a variety of correspondence including letters between the corporation and the Duke of Beaufort's Monmouthshire agent who resided at Troy House, Monmouth. Although not exhaustive, they provide a valuable insight into Usk's corporation, how it operated and how it attempted to deal with issues of cleanliness, lighting and paving while overcoming a shortage of sufficient funds. These sources also provide an insight into the relationship between the corporation and the Duke of Beaufort and the impact he had on the former's ability to efficiently govern the town. The letters also show that the corporation needed to refer to Beaufort's agent on a range of issues and that he would either answer directly or take the matter to the duke on their behalf. The records for the parish are much more comprehensive and allow an insight into how the vestry contributed to the running of the town. Cross-referencing the borough and parish records has allowed for the identification of Usk's principal residents which has enabled analysis of who Usk's urban elite were and how this group evolved during the period in question.

[37] *Ibid*., p. 265.

Newspapers also prove to be a valuable source on the issue of local government. The *Monmouthshire Merlin* and *The Illustrated Usk Observer and Raglan Herald* provide interesting reports on borough and parish meetings from the 1830s onwards. The period before then is less comprehensively covered although the *Bristol Mercury* provides a few accounts of events that occurred during the opening decades of the century.

Definition of terms.

Before the changing nature of Usk's government and the reaction of the urban elite can be fully analysed, it is important to clarify the meaning of 'urban elite' and what is meant by the 'upper-middle' and 'lower-middle' classes when used throughout this chapter and the wider thesis. 'Elite' is a word often associated with the upper classes and is, therefore, frequently used in reference to the gentry, the aristocracy and the wealthy. In *An open elite? England, 1540-1880*, Lawrence and Jeanne Stone used the term to refer to those living in a country house of a minimum size and situated in pleasure grounds of a set acreage.[38] Rubinstein's exploration of Britain's wealthiest men enabled him to identify two groups within the English middle class; larger and wealthier men who were based in commerce and London and those based in manufacturing and the North and argued that together they connected for the benefits of wealth, status and power.[39] Jon Stobart used social elite in reference to the urban gentry, concluding that this social group consisted of both the landed gentry and the urban middling sort.[40] Penelope Corfield has argued that the eighteenth century saw the urban elite gradually overtaken by the 'professions', which Sweet argues, using Oxford as an example, was visible in the changing composition of the governing bodies of incorporated towns across the country.[41]

This chapter will employ the same definition of urban elite that was adopted by Richard Trainor in his investigation into the urban elites of the Black Country. It will be used to describe members of the Usk community who, despite their socio-economic

[38] L. Stone and J. C. Fawtier-Stone, *An open elite? England, 1540-1880* (New York, 1984), p. 11.
[39] W. D. Rubinstein, *Elites and the wealthy in modern British history. Essays in social and economic history* (Brighton & New York, 1987), p. 51.
[40] J. Stobart, 'Who were the urban gentry? Social elites in an English provincial town, c. 1680-1760', *Continuity and Change*, 26, no. 1 (2011), p.108.
[41] P. Corfield, *Power and professions in Britain, 1700-1850* (London, 1995); Sweet, *The English town*, p. 181.

background, contributed to the government and administration of the town.[42] By focusing on those individuals who were active within the corporation, the parish vestry and other committees, boards and bodies it is possible to identify who belonged to Usk's urban elite. Although theoretically accessible to all those that paid rates, it was initially dominated by lawyers, members of the clergy and gentlemen who lived on their own means. These men were able to occupy numerous positions across a range of different institutions which allowed them to exercise power within the town. The reforming efforts of central government, however, impacted the authority and prestige of civic office and as a result the elite was gradually infiltrated by prominent shop and business owners, and it was these individuals who went in search of a new form of self-government that would preserve their new place within the urban community.

Research on nineteenth-century Welsh urban elites is somewhat limited and much of what does exist focuses on the urban elites of towns such as Cardiff and Swansea that were reformed by the Municipal Corporations Act.[43] The exception is Merthyr Tydfil which, like Usk, was not subject to the Municipal Corporations Act, but, unlike Usk, Merthyr was not a borough town and had no civic past. Joe England described Merthyr as an 'explosion of industry and urban squalor' that did not develop the institutions of local government seen elsewhere.[44] England's research indicated that Merthyr possessed an active and reforming, albeit small, middle-class which challenged the more popular belief that it lacked 'quantity and quality'.[45] He argued that the tendency to define the middle-classes as the leisured gentry has prevented historians from recognising that within Merthyr there existed an increasing lower middle-class of 'small manufacturers, shopkeepers and merchants, schoolteachers, brewers and innkeepers, ministers of religion and clerks' as well as 'a smattering of those traditionally recognised as being of middle class status; lawyers, surgeons, former military officers'.[46] According to England these men sought and gained election to a range of local committees, boards and institutions which permitted them to play a role in local

[42] R. Trainor, 'Urban elites in Victorian Britain', *Urban History Yearbook*, 12 (1985), pp. 1-2.
[43] L. Miskell, '*Intelligent town'. An urban history of Swansea, 1750-1855* (Cardiff, 2006); J. Davies, *Cardiff and the marquesses of Bute* (Cardiff, 1981); M. J. Daunton, *Coal metropolis Cardiff 1870-1914* (Leicester, 1977).
[44] J. England, 'Unitarians, freemasons, chartists: the middle class in Victorian Merthyr', *Welsh History Review*, 23, no. 4 (2007), p. 56.
[45] *Ibid*., p. 36.
[46] *Ibid*., p. 56.

government despite fierce opposition from the ironmasters and working class. Although Usk was at the opposite end of the urban scale to Merthyr, England's research is of relevance to this study. Rather than identifying a middle-class dependent on their economic or social status and then analysing how they interacted with the bodies of local government, England focuses on who was active within these bodies as a means of identifying the urban elite.

In contrast, Julie Light has investigated the urban elites of the smaller towns of Pontypool, Bridgend and Penarth. Her research showed that the middle classes 'provided the personnel that formed urban elites who were active in the social, cultural, economic and political life' of their town.[47] Light observed that the urban elites of small towns were unable to command the social cachet or economic resources of the industrial magnates of northern England and therefore needed to rely on a public profile which supported 'their claim for power and position in the town'.[48] Light's observations provide useful comparisons that can be applied to Usk. It should also be noted that Pontypool is in close proximity to Usk and as a result the two and their relative environs were often combined forming, for example, the Pontypool poor law union in 1834 and the Pontypool and Usk highway board in 1868. Pontypool, Bridgend and Penarth differed from Usk as they benefitted from the industrialisation of the coalfield and, in the case of the latter two, their proximity to Cardiff. They were also relatively new urban settlements that, like Merthyr, did not possess the civic traditions that Usk did. The nineteenth century saw the emergence and establishment of their urban status and institutions of self-government while Usk's came under considerable threat.

Discussions on Usk's urban elite will make reference to Usk's upper-middle and lower-middle-classes therefore these terms also need to be defined. It has proved difficult to reconstruct the class structure of Usk's population due to the nature and limits of the source material. What has survived, however, has made it possible to identify Usk's upper, middle and labouring classes and the size of these respective groups thus giving an overview of the socio-economic background of the wider community.

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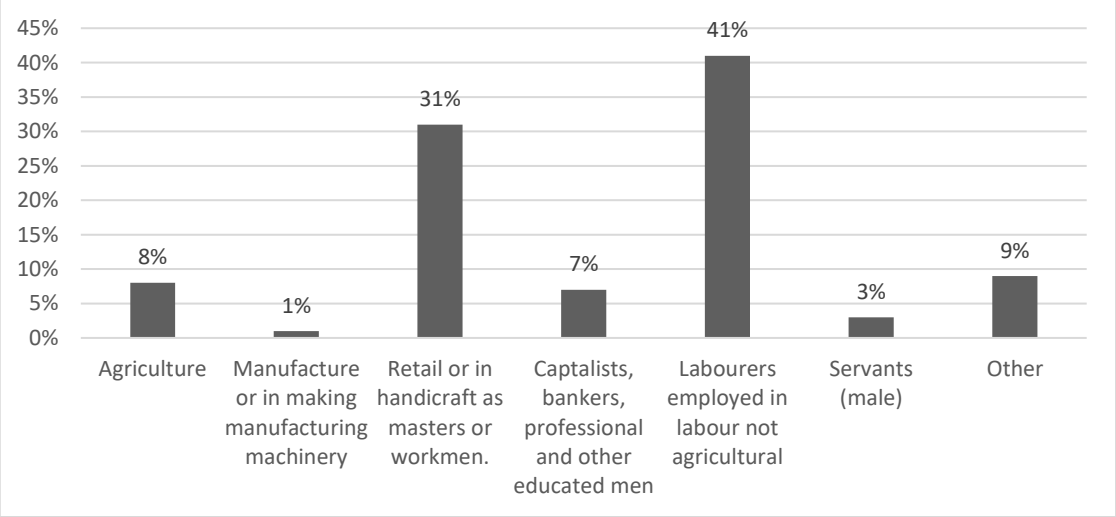
[47] J. Light, 'The middle classes as urban elites in nineteenth-century south Wales', *Welsh History Review*, 24, no. 3 (2009), pp. 29-30.
[48] *Ibid.*, pp. 47-8.

The later census returns provide valuable data that aids the reconstruction of Usk society during the second half of the nineteenth century, however, the earlier censuses did not record the same occupational information. It is therefore very difficult to create a similar profile for the period before 1851. The first three censuses (1801-21) recorded the employment of all inhabitants by placing them within three categories, those chiefly employed in agriculture, those in trade, manufacturing or handicraft and finally those who fell into neither group. Although this data indicates that the population was not predominantly employed in agriculture, the broad nature of the categories makes it impossible to determine in what occupations they were employed and therefore it is impossible to construct any form of class structure based on occupation.

Graph 1.1. *Occupations of males over 20, 1831.*



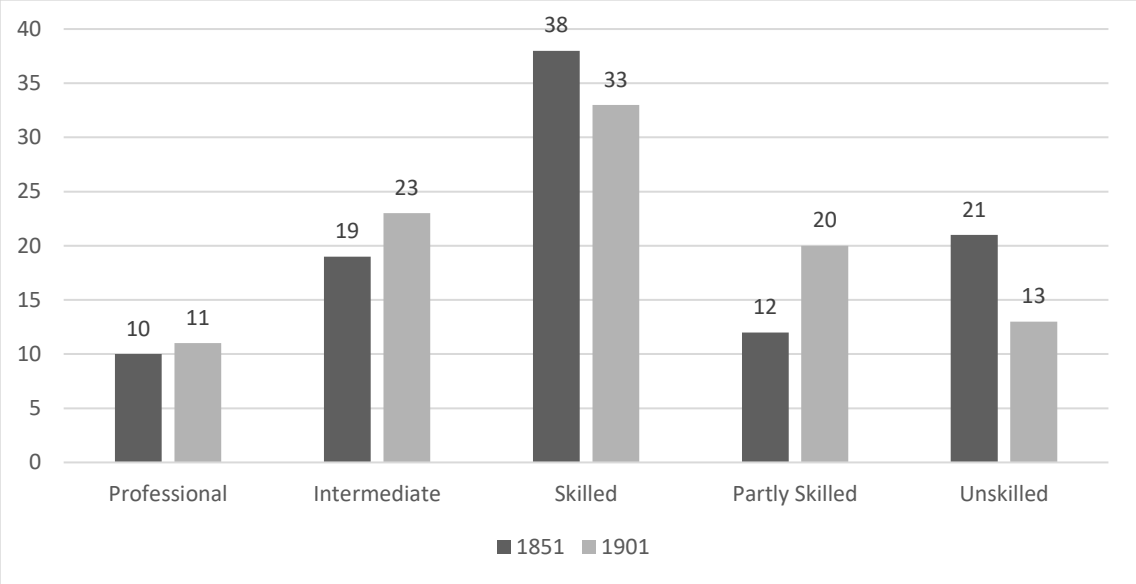
Source: Abstract of the answers and returns. Enumeration Abstract, vol. 1 (London, 1801), pp. 388-389. www.histpop.org [accessed 30.11.21]

The 1831 census was the first to record more detailed information; however, the categories used were again broad and provide limited information regarding social status. Graph 1.1 shows the categorisation of male inhabitants over the age of 20 according to their occupation. 7% were categorised as 'capitalists, bankers, professional and other educated men' while 31% were classed as being 'employed in retail or in handicraft as masters or workmen'; however, there is no indication as to whether an individual was a proprietor of a business or an employee, making it impossible to determine his social status. The data, however, does show that at least 44% of men over

20 were employed in occupations that were associated with the labouring or working class such as non-agricultural labourers and servants.

From 1851, the census began classifying the population according to occupation with the introduction of a five-class schema that identified heads of households as professional, intermediate, skilled, partly skilled, or unskilled. When this data is compared it is evident that while the percentage of heads of household considered professional remained fairly static, there was a growth in the number of intermediate occupations and despite an increase in the percentage of partly skilled occupations, a decrease is evident within the skilled and unskilled categories. Overall, the last half of the nineteenth century saw a marginal increase in the percentage of upper and middle-class households from 39% to 44%.

Graph 1.2. *Occupation of heads of household as a percentage of population, 1851 and 1901.*



Source: K. Schürer and E. Higgs, *Integrated Census Microdata (I-CeM); 1851-1911* [computer file]. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive [distributor], April 2014. SN: 7481, http://dx.doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-7481-1

Basing class solely on occupation, however, can be problematic especially when trying to differentiate between the upper-middle and lower-middle classes. While 'professional' accurately describes certain members of the upper-middle classes, 'intermediate' does not equate with the lower-middle classes nor does skilled always translate as working class as these terms fail to take into consideration the economic wealth of an individual or whether he was an employer or employee. For example, in

the 1851 census returns, a shoemaker was classed as a skilled worker, yet one of them, Charles Stockham, employed 4 men and was an inaugural member of the local board in 1873. J. H. Clark, the printer, was also considered a skilled worker, yet he ran a successful printing business and stationary shop, printed and edited the local newspaper, was an active member of the parish and sat as portreeve for eight years. Similarly, Evan Jones was categorised as a skilled worker as he was a Japanner, yet he owned Usk's Japan works with stock valued at £300 at the time of his death in 1860.[49] He also served as portreeve on six occasions. None of these men would be considered lower-middle or working class as their positions as employers, as business owners and their involvement in the civic life of the town made them leading members of Usk's urban elite alongside the professionals and the bankers associated with the upper middle class.

A lack of additional information makes it difficult to construct a more accurate picture of the size of Usk's upper and middle classes. An assessment for church rates from 1849 reveals that there were 255 ratepayers at that time but no subsequent lists of ratepayers have survived to enable further analysis.[50] The only exception is a poll for the almshouse election of 1891 which indicates that there were 316 ratepayersat this time, but a lack of occupational information in the 1849 list makes it difficult to determine within which socio-economic grouping growth occurred. This is unfortunate, for when the changes to the national and local franchise are considered, it would be expected to see a growth in the number of lower-middle class ratepayers, but this cannot be supported based on the information that has survived.

For the purposes of this thesis the term upper class will refer to the 'gentlemen' and members of the county gentry, including the county magistracy, who resided in the town during the first half of the nineteenth century. The phrase upper-middle class will refer to white collar professionals such as solicitors, surgeons and the clergy as well as influential shop and business owners who were to become key players in the civic life of the town during the middle decades. Finally, lower-middle class will refer to Usk's

[49] *Illustrated Usk Observer and Raglan Herald*, 31 May 1862, p. 1.
[50] GA, D/Pa.104.25. Church warden account book, 1830-1895. Assessment for rates, 1849.

smaller shopkeepers, businessmen and skilled artisans who became increasingly visible within the community and were often described in the local press as small ratepayers.[51]

Who were Usk's urban elite?

As there were no restrictions on who could become a burgess the corporation of Usk consisted of men from a variety of different socio-economic backgrounds, as shown in Graph 1.3. As a result, being a burgess was not the exclusive prerogative of Usk's wealthier inhabitants and a small number of men employed in low socio-economic occupations such as servants, toll keepers and labourers were able to enjoy the privilege of being a burgess. [52] There is little information, however, pertaining to their involvement within the corporation. Graph 1.4 shows that the upper classes dominated the office of portreeve. Of the 24 men who sat as portreeve between 1814 and 1885, with the exception of two Japanners, a hairdresser, a draper and a printer, all were either gentlemen, clergymen or lawyers.[53] This suggests that the role continued to be respected within the community despite it becoming diminished.

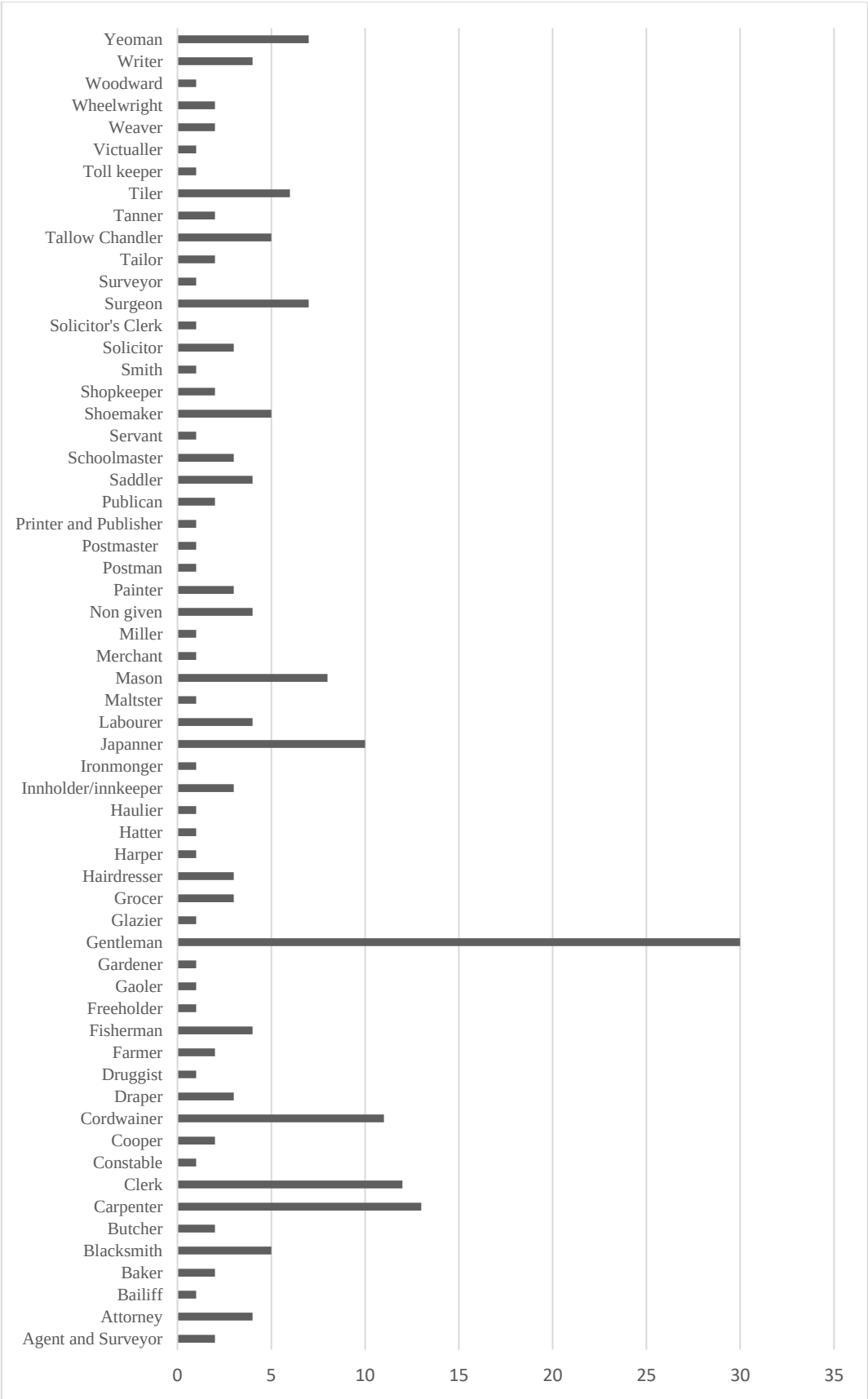
Within the corporation it was the portreeve who exercised the greatest amount of authority. Although subject to the lord of the borough, he presided over the court leet, sat as magistrate in the borough court and had the right to call and chair corporation meetings. The lack of portreeves who were employed in the trade, retail, hospitality, and other industries, even though these occupations were well-represented amongst the burgesses, indicates that while the role of burgess was accessible to men from across the socio-economic spectrum, being one did not mean that they were able to enjoy much power or authority. Those of a lower socio-economic background were able to assume the roles of constable and bailiff within the corporation while the vestry offices of surveyor, overseer and constable were similarly filled. However, these positions carried with them very little authority. Inhabitants who failed to fulfil their responsibilities adequately were subject to the court leet, presided over by the portreeve, where they could be admonished for not carrying out their duties. The records of the court leet show that the surveyors of the town, the surveyors of the

[51] *County Observer and Monmouthshire Central Advertiser*, 14 Apr. 1877, p. 5.
[52] Clark, *Past and present*, pp. 91-4.
[53] *Ibid*., p. 95.

highways and the overseers of the highways were frequently presented to the jury, often more than once at each court. As a result, between 1806 and 1856 there were at least 117 presentments made against them.[54]

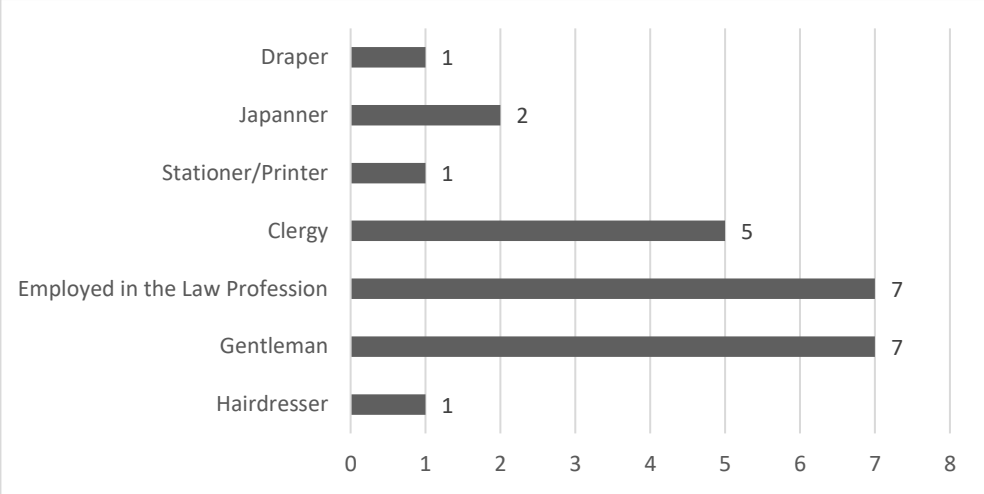
Graph 1.3. *Occupation of Usk burgesses, 1752-1879.*

[54] GA, D156.20-22. Records of the borough of Usk, presentments of jurors to the court leet, 1806-1856.



Source: J. H. Clark, *Usk past and present*, pp. 92-4.

Graph 1.4. *Occupations of Usk portreeves, 1815-1886.*



Source: Clark, *Past and present*, p. 95.

It was with the wealthiest inhabitants that local authority resided, and it was these individuals who were at the heart of Usk's urban elite for in addition to their dominance over the corporation, these inhabitants also filled important roles within the parish vestry. When the records for these bodies are cross referenced, it is evident that although they were theoretically independent of each other, individuals played influential roles within both. This is particularly apparent in 1825 when a select vestry was appointed 'for the concern of the poor'.[55] All 25 men appointed were members of the corporation with the exception of William Hughes, one of the overseers, who never appeared to enjoy the privilege of being a burgess. Of the 25, five men served as portreeve while a sixth had been offered the role but turned it down. As with the corporation, this select vestry comprised of men 'employed' in a variety of different occupations and included a shoemaker, a maltster and a carpenter. The professions, however, that occur most frequently were those of 'gentleman' and vicar. Within this select vestry a committee was formed which was responsible for bringing about the sale of the existing almshouses and the construction of new ones.[56] This committee consisted of seven men, all of whom were burgesses and the majority of whom had either been portreeve or would fill the position before the end of the decade. The exception was Alexander Jones, a local solicitor, but he was the borough recorder until his death in 1848. The committee also included Rev. Thomas Addams-Williams, the incumbent Vicar of Usk and a county magistrate and his brother, William Addams-Williams, owner of the Llangybi Castle Estate, patron of St Mary's, a county magistrate

[55] GA, D1651.31. Minute book of vestry and parish meetings, Usk, 1819-1872.
[56] Clark, *Past and present*, pp. 132-3.

and a Member of Parliament for Monmouthshire. Both men were burgesses and had sat as portreeves in 1822 and 1823 respectively.

Whilst it was possible for those of a lower socio-economic background to be part of the corporation, they contributed little to the actual business of government. The decision-making process was the preserve of Usk's professionals, resident gentlemen and members of the clergy who were able to dominate both the corporation and the vestry. In a town with such a relatively small population it is perhaps not surprising to find men fulfilling more than one role but as a consequence, 'power' was concentrated in the hands of a very small section of society who assumed responsibility for the urban settlement and its community. This chapter will show that although the nineteenth century brought changes to the social composition of this urban elite, its hegemony over the government and administration of Usk remained steadfast until the closing decade of the century.

Aristocratic authority and the borough of Usk.

The Duke of Beaufort, as lord of the borough, was entitled to certain burgage rents, able to exercise power over the corporation and was the principal landowner within the town; all of which gave him a means of wielding influence over the urban settlement. While the presence of an aristocratic overlord might suggest that a borough had failed to develop any governmental autonomy, it is important to note that it was not uncommon in Wales to find towns that had all the characteristics of a developed municipal structure yet remained 'in strict subordination to the Lord of the Manor'.[57] Of the 38 Welsh boroughs in south Wales that were covered by the municipal corporations report, a manorial lord played an active part in the government of at least 65% of them - usually through the appointment of a steward, a constable of the castle or a bailiff of the borough who supervised, supported and appointed borough officials. 90% of the Monmouthshire and Glamorganshire towns visited by the commission had a lord of the borough who enjoyed a variety of rights and privileges that enabled him to dominate the institutions of urban governance.

[57] Webb and Webb, *English local government from the Revolution to the Municipal Corporations Act: the manor and the borough. Part I* (London, 1908), p. 233.

In Cardiff, the Marquess of Bute possessed the right to appoint a constable of the castle who sat as a magistrate, attended the quarter sessions and selected and swore in a variety of officials including the bailiffs, common attorneys, sergeants at mace, and all the inferior officers of the corporation. By using this privilege wisely, Bute ensured his authority over the corporation was absolute; so much so that Sidney and Beatrice Webb observed that in Cardiff there existed 'a subjection to the lord of the borough that was greater than that which lay in many a humbler borough'.[58] Similarly, in Swansea, the Duke of Beaufort as lord of the borough was permitted to appoint a steward who presided at local courts, selected a plethora of senior officials and appointed the town mayor. As a result, the duke was able to enjoy 'supreme authority in every department' and the corporation of Swansea was described by the commissioners for municipal reform as being 'wholly under the control of the lord of the borough'.[59] This was evident with the appointment of Gabriel Powell who was able to wield great power as steward, as indicated by his moniker, the 'uncrowned King' of Swansea.[60]

Control of towns such as Swansea and Cardiff, with their growing economies and associated wealth, brought with it the potential to extract considerable financial benefits and it is therefore understandable why it was important to the aristocracy to maintain their authority. For small towns such as Usk, although there was little potential for significant financial gain, control was just as important as it ensured electoral success for them at the polls. Within Usk it was the burgesses of the corporation who were entitled to vote in the election of a Member of Parliament for the Monmouth borough constituency along with their counterparts in Newport and Monmouth. For aristocratic landlords like Beaufort, having MPs that were loyal to him 'emphasized the temporal glory' of his house and enhanced his prestige in political circles as well as ensuring his interests and those of the Conservative party were protected.[61] Therefore, control over the electorates of small towns such as Usk was essential.

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[58] *Ibid*., pp. 254-5.
[59] *Appendix to the first report of the commissioners appointed to inquire into the municipal corporations*, p. 392.
[60] T. Ridd, 'Gabriel Powell: the uncrowned king of Swansea', *Glamorgan History*, 5 (1968), pp. 152-60.
[61] Davies, *Cardiff*, p. 107.

Beaufort's right to nominate the burgesses and appoint the borough recorder allowed him to exercise control over both the head and the base of the corporation. By nominating individuals whom he considered loyal to his cause, the duke could secure an electorate that would vote in his favour. At the same time, the recorder was an important conduit of the duke's authority. Although he fulfilled the role of town clerk, the significance of the recorder should not be dismissed as purely administrative. The recorder could select and summon a jury of his choosing and as 'clerk and legal advisor' he was able to exercise a certain degree of influence over the portreeve 'under whose direction the bailiffs and constables acted'.[62]

The recorder also often acted as the lord's representative within the corporation vetoing decisions made by the corporation which he perceived to contradict Beaufort's wishes. This is evident in a series of events that occurred at the start of the 1820s. The general election of 1820 had seen John Hodder Moggridge stand against the Beaufort candidate, his son the Marquess of Worcester, in the Monmouth boroughs. This was the first contested election since 1715 and although the Marquis of Worcester won, Moggridge managed to poll 40 votes to Worcester's 90 indicating that Beaufort's monopoly over the seat was slipping. At the same time, Beaufort's control over the corporation of Monmouth had been successfully challenged and it was becoming apparent that an increasing percentage of the electorate in Newport no longer supported the Tory cause.

It is not clear whether these developments encouraged Usk's burgesses to contest the duke's authority, but it is evident that at the court leets of 1820, 1821 and 1822 it was necessary for the recorder, Alexander Jones, to defend the rights of Beaufort and take steps to strengthen his control over the corporation. It was reported in the *Bristol Mercury* that during the court leet of 1820, the recorder, on behalf of the lord of the borough, had stated that 'the right of electing burgesses was not exclusively in the burgesses' and to make their act valid, it was necessary to obtain his sanction'.[63] The fact that it had been necessary to state this suggests that the duke's influence over the nomination of burgesses had been questioned although it is not known what form this challenge took as the court leet presentments for 1820 have not survived. This was

[62] Webb and Webb, *English local government. Part I,* p. 239, fn. 1.
[63] *Bristol Mercury*, 30 Oct. 1820, p. 3.

followed in October 1821 when an existing burgess, James Blyth, proposed his brother-in-law as a new burgess only for the recorder to refuse as the lord of the borough 'had not given directions' to do so.[64] The court leet records for 1821 show that it had been presented to the jury that the 'right to elect the burgesses of the borough is in the burgesses' to which the recorder noted in the margin that 'the jury cannot have anything to do with the rights of the burgesses, but if they had the burgesses have no such rights as here presented'. [65]

This minor rebellion culminated the following year when the portreeve-elect, the same James Blyth as mentioned above, was prevented from taking office. The *Bristol Mercury* reported that ducal influence had been used to 'prevent a humble individual from enjoying the highest mark of esteem he can receive from his fellow townsmen' when 'Officious lynx-eyed toad-eaters of the county' reported that the duke's political opponent, Moggridge, had been seen leaving Blyth's house.[66] While it should be remembered that the *Mercury* was a pro-reform newspaper and was highly critical of Beaufort, surviving correspondence indicates that the recorder, two former portreeves and Arthur Wyatt, Beaufort's Monmouthshire agent, conspired and succeeded in putting forward an alternative candidate despite the election process having already taken place.[67] Whether these men were acting on Beaufort's orders is unclear but a letter from Beaufort indicates that he was pleased that Blythe had been prevented from assuming the office of portreeve and that he hoped that 'the radicals … will curb their courage' and that the incident would 'prevent them from making another attempt at mischief'.[68]

These incidents demonstrate the role the recorder played in maintaining Beaufort's position and authority over the corporation. They also highlight why it was so important. In a world where the political hegemony of the aristocracy was increasingly threatened, control of the corporations of small towns, and by extension the MPs that they returned, was vitally important if the nobility were to maintain their influence over

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[64] *The Royal Cornwall Gazette*, 17 Nov. 1821, p. 4; *The Hereford Journal*, 31 Oct. 1821, p. 2.
[65] GA, D156.21. Records of the borough of Usk, presentments of jurors to the court leet, 16 Oct. 1821.
[66] *Bristol Mercury*, 28 Oct. 1822, p. 3; *Ibid*., 2 Dec. 1822, p. 4.
[67] GA, D156.31. Records of the borough of Usk, letter from Wyatt to Jones, 4 Oct. 1822; *Ibid*., draft of letter from Alexander Jones to the Duke of Beaufort, no date.
[68] *Ibid*., letter from the Duke of Beaufort, 22 Oct. 1822.

the house of commons and preserve their political agendas. Control was considerably easier to establish and maintain over towns like Usk that did not see a rapid growth in its middle classes, the latter being more likely to oppose the political supremacy of the aristocracy, as was the case in Newport.

The impact of reform.

The Reform Act removed the ability of the aristocracy to determine who could vote as it expanded the electoral franchise to include all male householders living in properties worth at least £10 a year. However, because it and the Municipal Corporations Act failed to abolish the manorial system and the rights and privileges held by manorial and borough lords, noblemen such as the Duke of Beaufort were able to continue to exercise considerable authority over the governance of small towns. It is evident that despite the inclusion of £10 householders, there was little change to Beaufort's political dominance over Usk. Between 1715 and 1831, the Beauforts had successfully reduced the electorate of the Monmouthshire boroughs constituency from nearly 2000 freemen to a mere 250; however, 1832 saw a newly registered electorate of 899 men consisting of 280 freemen and 619 £10 householders. Within Usk, those allowed to vote increased from 69 in 1831 to 100 the following year due to the inclusion of 33 £10 householders; however, this accretion of voters did little to alter the voting habits of the town.

Table 1.1. *Polling results for the Monmouth boroughs constituency, 1831 and 1832.*

	Newport		Monmouth		Usk		Total		% in favour of Hall
Candidate	Hall	Worc.	Hall	Worc.	Hall	Worc.	Hall	Worc.	-
1831	141	61	19	57	8	31	168	149	52.9
1832	289	96	94	169	10	90	393	355	52.5

Source: M. Escott, 'Parliamentary representation', in C. Williams and S. R. Williams (eds.), *The Gwent County History. Vol. 4, Industrial Monmouthshire, 1780-1914* (Cardiff, 2011), p. 269 and p. 272.

When the results for the general elections of 1831 and 1832 are considered, it is evident that the Reform Act made little difference to the result. Table 1.1 shows that Hall polled just under 53% of the vote in both elections. Further examination shows that within the

towns of Monmouth and Usk the Tories remained the most popular candidate polling 64% and 90% of the 1832 vote respectively. Of the 33 householders in Usk that were eligible to vote in 1832 only four polled in favour of Hall. Only six of the 74 freemen – two fewer than in 1831 - followed suit. This demonstrates that the Reform Act did little to lessen Beaufort's grip on the electorate, a fact that is reinforced by the continued success of the Tories within Usk. Between 1832 and 1868, the last election before the secret ballot was introduced in 1872, the Conservatives continued to win the poll in Usk. Although it is evident that the Whigs were gaining ground within the borough, the ongoing success of the Conservatives indicates that Beaufort continued to exercise considerable influence over the vote.

There is considerable evidence that alludes to the continuing influence of the Beauforts over the electorate. An article published in the *Monmouthshire Merlin* claimed that 61 of the 69 burgesses who voted for the duke's candidate in the 1831 election did so despite the fact that 'many professed themselves favourable to the political opinions of the other'.[69] The implication that burgesses were not able to vote freely was more explicitly made in a celebratory dinner speech delivered by one of the two county Members of Parliament, William Addams Williams, following the general election of 1832. In his speech, Addams Williams stated that it was his opinion that 'many persons… wore the blue colours and supported the blue candidate, who wished at the same time that he would be unsuccessful' and that 'if protection were given to voters he felt satisfied the friends of freedom in the borough of Usk would be increased ten-fold'.[70] Election speeches that described the Beauforts as 'powerful', letters published in the local press that called for the 'final liberation of the united boroughs' and post-election dinners at which liberal voters were praised for rescuing the constituency 'from the thraldom of the House of Beaufort' reinforce the suggestion that Beaufort continued to influence over the voting habits of Usk's inhabitants.[71] Further, the expression of hope in 1837 that 'electors will resist the sinister influences which will be brought to bear on them' indicates that voters remained subject to ducal pressure following the Reform Act.[72]

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[69] *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 31 Dec. 1831, p. 3.
[70] *Ibid*., 22 Dec. 1832, p. 3.
[71] *Ibid*, 15 Jul. 1837, p. 3.
[72] *Ibid*., p. 2.

Table 1.2. *Borough of Usk election results, 1832-1868*.

	Liberal	**Conservative**
1832	10	90
1835	20	68
1837	28	67
1852	24	78
1868	67	98

Source: Escott, 'Parliamentary representation', p. 272.

The Beauforts were able to use their wealth and influence against voters of Usk who did not support their cause and the consequences of falling foul of them could be serious and far-reaching. An account in the *Monmouthshire Merlin* published in 1832 described how an Usk inhabitant by the name of Evans 'had been nearly ruined in consequence of having independently exercised his elective franchise at the election in 1831'. According to the report, Evans, the owner of the Llangybi Arms, had built up a thriving business that provided constant employment for six men. However, 'custom had entirely deserted him' after he voted against Worcester at the election. The report, stating that voters in Usk were subject to intimidation, went on to describe another burgess who is said to have pleaded with a Hall campaigner 'pray sir do not ask me for my vote. I would give it to you with all my heart if I dare, but if I were to do so it would bring myself and family to a state of starvation'.[73]

Beaufort's position as lord of the borough provided him with other ways of exercising influence over Usk long after the Reforms of the 1830s. The title granted him jurisdiction over the fairs and markets of the town, and it is evident that he continued to exercise this right. A letter published in the *Monmouthshire Merlin* in December 1849 indicates that efforts made by the portreeve, local butchers, farmers and other tradesmen to move the date of the Christmas Fair was objected to by the recorder who issued notices 'forbidding it to be holden on that day'.[74] The court leet proceedings of 1869 indicate that Beaufort had decided to move St Luke's Fair from New Market

[73] *Ibid*., 22 Dec. 1832, p. 3.
[74] *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 22 Dec. 1949, p. 3.

street to the Twyn without considering the inhabitants of the town.[75] Although the court leet questioned the legality of this decision, a letter from the borough recorder stated that the lord of the manor 'may hold a fair or market any place within his jurisdiction' and therefore Beaufort was within his rights to move it.[76]

As lord of the borough, Beaufort was also the principal landowner within the town and owned substantial parcels of land. Surviving archival evidence shows that Beaufort prevented the corporation from enclosing and letting the waste land at Pontsampit and from erecting a purpose-built marketplace on various occasions during the nineteenth century. These instances will be more fully investigated in chapter two as they are examples of how the corporation attempted to implement improvement schemes but need to be mentioned here as Beaufort's refusal is symptomatic of a change in approach to borough lordship following the Reform Act. While the 6th Duke of Beaufort needed to maintain a more amicable relationship with the burgesses in order to secure their support at the polls, both the seventh Duke of Beaufort who succeeded his father in 1835 and his son, who became the eighth Duke in 1853, needed to find alternative methods of controlling the borough.

Evidence suggests that before the 1830s burgesses were able to use their right to vote as a negotiating tool. This is apparent in two letters sent to the duke's agent in 1821. In one letter, a burgess by the name of T. West complained about the recorder of Usk imposing fines on burgesses who had failed to form a jury at the court leet. West claimed that although he was a 'staunch friend' of the house of Beaufort and that he 'always means to support them' it was on the proviso that 'they and their agents (kept him) pleased and no longer'. He went on to warn Wyatt that there was unrest amongst the burgesses and if the duke was not careful there were at least 40 men who would be willing to vote for 'Moggridge or any other gentleman who will have spirit enough to come forward to approve the Marquis at the next election'.[77]

[75] GA, D156.23. Records of the borough of Usk, presentments of jurors to court leet and borough court, 28 Oct. 1869.
[76] GA, D156.29. *Ibid*., letter from G. W. Nicholl to A. Waddington, 6 Nov. 1870.
[77] GA, D156.31. *Ibid*., letter from T. West to A. Wyatt, 6 May 1821.

Similarly, James Barnard Davis had written to Wyatt the year before to complain that he had not been granted the living at Llanishen despite being led to believe that he would. In this letter he informs Wyatt that although he hopes the 'interest of the Duke of Beaufort' is still supported in Usk, there is 'a party hostile to that interest', thereby insinuating that he might be inclined to vote against the Tories if he was not kept happy.[78] Consequently the sixth duke took a more conciliatory approach towards the corporation. He gave a piece of land on which to build a schoolroom in 1812, donated more land for the construction of twelve new almshouses in 1825 and then granted permission for the corporation to enclose and let two pieces of waste land in 1829.[79] By refusing to cooperate with the corporation, the later dukes were taking a different approach to borough lordship. With no control over who could vote it is evident that they felt that their authority was rooted in their position as the principal landowner and therefore it was necessary for them to hold on to their property in order to maintain and assert their dominance over the borough.

Diminishing authority

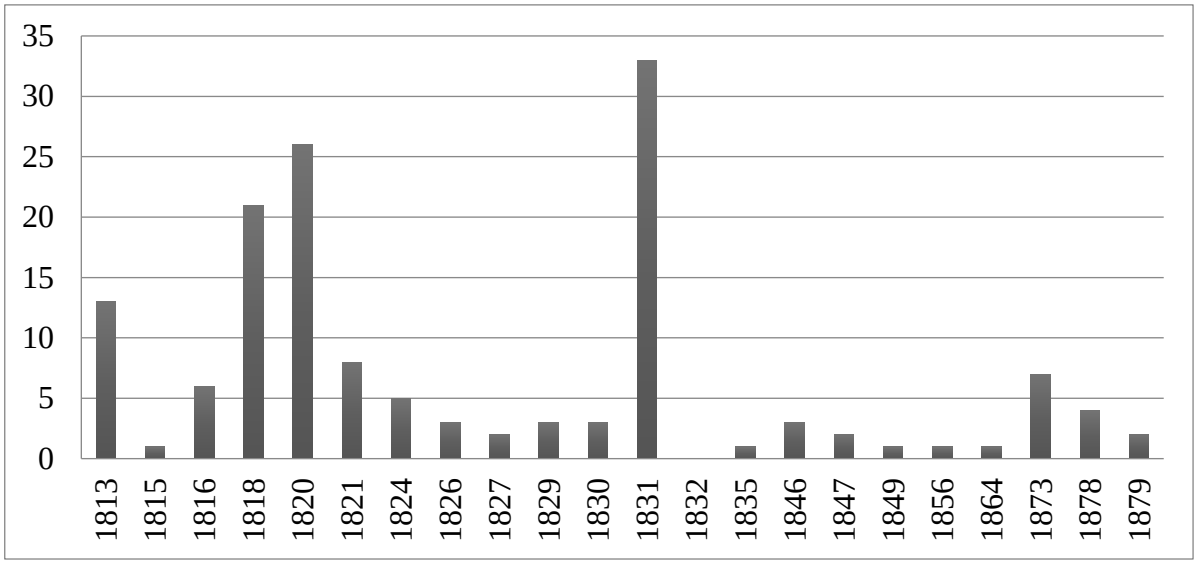
In addition to their failure to stem the influence exercised by aristocratic landlords, centrally introduced reforms further disadvantaged small towns as they undermined their ability to effectively self-govern. The removal of the political usefulness of the corporation and the reallocation of parochial responsibilities resulted in the decline of the existing bodies of governance and a loss of autonomy and authority that allowed small towns to be dominated by the county magistracy.

It is evident that Beaufort lost interest in Usk's corporation following the Reform Act. Graph 1.5 demonstrates that there was a notable fall in the number of new burgesses, with only nine sworn in between 1832 and 1873, when efforts were made by the urban elite to revive the corporation by inviting local professionals to become a burgess.[80] This is in stark contrast to the 83 that were co-opted in the decade preceding the act. Consequently, the lack of new burgesses coupled with the loss of those who died or left

[78] *Ibid.*, letter from James Barnard Davies to Arthur Wyatt regarding the curacy of Llanishen, 12 Apr. 1821.
[79] Clark, *Past and present*, pp. 132-3.
[80] GA, D.156.29. Records of the borough of Usk, appointments of new burgesses, 1873, 1877 and 1878.

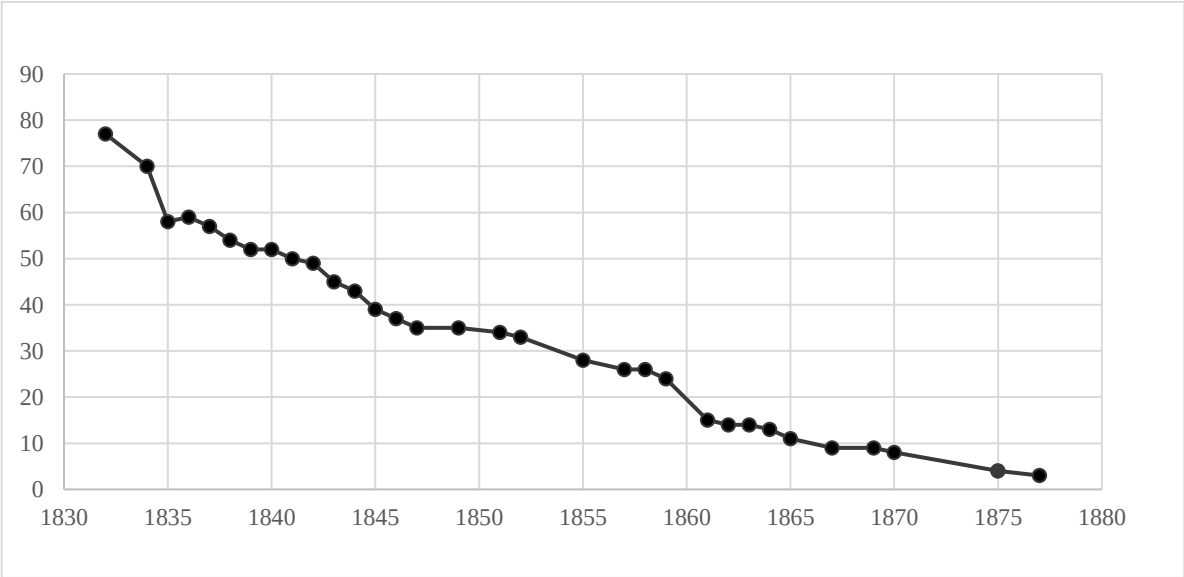
the borough, meant that the corporation went into a period of rapid decline as shown in graph 1.6.

Graph 1.5. *Number of burgesses sworn in between 1812-1880.*



Source: Clark, *Past and present*, pp. 92-4.

Graph 1.6. *Number of burgesses per year, Usk, 1832-1875*.



Source: GA, D156.27. Records of the borough of Usk, list of freedmen able to vote in the election of a member for the Monmouth Boroughs, 1834-1877.

The decreasing number of burgesses is also evident in the frequency with which individuals were re-elected to the position or portreeve. A list of the portreeves from 1814 to 1886 shows that although it was initially unusual for individuals to hold office more than once, re-election became increasingly common after 1836. For the last 50

years of the corporation's existence a total of 14 men occupied the position, four of whom filled the role for 32 years between them.[81] The frequency of re-election is also indicative of the diminishing role of the portreeve as centrally introduced reforms reallocated the responsibilities of the corporation and its officers to other agencies of government, namely the county, resulting in a rapid decline in the magisterial authority of the portreeve. The borough court that had been held every three weeks ceased to sit in 1827 and by 1834 the *Municipal Corporations Report* stated that the county court was already 'much resorted to' for the recovery of small debts, a trend that was formalised by the County Courts Act of 1846 (9 & 10 Vic c.95). [82]

Although the portreeve continued to possess magisterial authority, July 1855 was the last time a portreeve exercised any jurisdiction as a Justice of the Peace.[83] The presence of the petty and quarter sessions in Usk meant that it was often easier to bring cases in front of the county magistrates than hear them within the borough, especially if there was an overlap in personnel. During the 1840s the portreeve, John Shepard, was also clerk to the magistrates and as an attorney he favoured bringing cases in front of the county justices rather than 'carrying it out in his own right'.[84] This further encouraged the transition of authority from the corporation to the county, a process that was completed by 1876. In the minutes of evidence for the municipal corporations commission the portreeve stated that although he believed he still had the power to try criminal and petty offences such as 'vagrancy, assaults, petty larcenies and similar things', this power was no longer exercised.[85] Although this transition of power undermined the ability of the urban elite to self-govern, it is likely that the county courts were able to provide a more effective form of authority than the portreeve and the local courts. County magistrates had greater authority to impose fines and penalties for those found to have broken the law. It also served to formalise local justice, removing it from the unceremonious surroundings of the portreeve or recorder's office to the more official setting of the county court.

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[81] Clark, *Past and present, p. 95.*
[82] *Municipal Corporations Report*, p. 416.
[83] NLW, ROBCLI, EU3. Robert Clive papers, a draft survey and valuation of the Usk/Trellech estate, c.1770; Clark, *Past and present*, p. 97; *Report of the commissioners appointed to inquire into municipal corporations not subject to Municipal Corporations Acts (other than the city of London; together with minutes of evidence, index &c. Part I, report, special reports &c.* (London, 1880), p. 299.
[84] *Ibid.*,
[85] *Ibid.*, p. 300.

With the loss of his magisterial authority, the portreeve's role presiding over the court leet was also becoming increasingly redundant. Even as early as the 1830s, the municipal corporations commission had reported that very little business was being carried out 'except elections and the presentment of nuisances'.[86] By 1866 the recorder, George Whitlock Nicholl, stated that the business of the court leet was 'now devolved upon the quarter sessions' and that 'ampler and simpler modes of abating' nuisances and encroachments had been provided 'under several modern acts of parliament'.[87] Court leet records support these observations and show that the business of the court consisted entirely of swearing in new officers and issuing fines to burgesses for non-attendance, corporation and parish officers for not carrying out their responsibilities and inhabitants for causing nuisances, encroachments and blockages within the streets of the town.[88] 1870 was the last time a summons was issued, the last time a jury was formed and the last time a presentment was made against the perpetrators of nuisances and encroachments.[89] Although the court leet continued to be held, from that point forward it was purely concerned with the swearing in of the new portreeve and the setting of a time for the dinner that followed. Minutes of the courts leets held during the 1870s show that the business of the court was often concluded within half an hour and promptly followed by the dinner which at times was more populously attended than the meeting beforehand.[90]

At the same time the other significant body of local government, the parish, was experiencing a similar erosion of its authority. As urban populations increased it was apparent that the parish, the traditional unit of local government, was unable to provide effective administration and therefore a significant number of reforms were introduced, reallocating many of the parish's traditional responsibilities to the county. The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, the Highway Act of 1862 and the Parish Constables Act of 1842 reduced the parish's influence over poor relief, construction and maintenance

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[86] *Appendix to the first report of the commissioners appointed to inquire into the municipal corporations*, p. 416.
[87] GA, D156.29. Records of the borough of Usk, opinion of the recorder, G. W. Nicholl, on the powers of Usk's court leet, 8 Oct. 1866.
[88] GA, D156.19-23. Records of the borough of Usk, presentments of jurors to court leet and borough court, 1778-1870.
[89] GA, D156.23. *Ibid.*, presentments of jurors to court leet and borough court, 27 Oct. 1870.
[90] GA, D156.27. *Ibid.*, presentments of jurors to court leet and borough court, 23 Oct. 1877; Clark, *Past and present*, p. 114.

of parish roads and bridges and policing of the town. Although the work continued to be carried out by parochial officers they were increasingly directed by and therefore answerable to county magistrates. The Poor Law Amendment Act placed Usk within the newly formed Pontypool poor law union while the Highways Act of 1862 put Usk under the jurisdiction of the Pontypool and Usk highways board to which Usk was required to contribute financially. This was a significant diminution of authority for it meant that Usk lost control over the expenditure of its rates. This severely reduced the ability of the town to govern itself as it lacked the capital needed to pay its parochial officers, implement improvement schemes and look after its own inhabitants. There was also a growing concern that rates paid by Usk were being absorbed by Pontypool, a much larger, industrial town.[91]

The search for effective, self-government.

In response to these centrally introduced reforms the principal inhabitants needed to find their own means of regaining control over their rates and their ability to self-govern. It is evident that there was a growing frustration with the county's control over Usk's rates. The failure of parliamentary reform to provide Usk with a form of self-government that allowed them to raise a rate restricted the town's ability to govern and administer its own urban environment. This is most apparent when the ratepayers, under their own direction, formed a board of health under the Nuisance Removal Act in 1857. The committee only lasted three years as it was disbanded in 1860 when the surveyors of the highways withheld the inspector's salary, as they claimed that they could 'fully and efficiently' carry out the duties of the committee. Despite its relatively short existence, a letter published in the *Illustrated Usk Observer and Raglan Herald* in 1865 suggests that the committee was somewhat successful, recalling that 'under its strict surveillance many nuisances prejudicial to the health of the inhabitants were removed and others prevented from being formed'.[92] The publisher of this newspaper, Clark, had been an inaugural member of the committee, therefore the publication of this letter may have formed part of a wider agenda to regain influence over the maintenance of the streets. The limited source material makes it difficult to determine the details of

[91] *Illustrated Usk Observer and Raglan Herald*, 26 Jan. 1856, p.1.
[92] *Ibid*., p. 8.

this power struggle, but it is evident that the partial authority granted to this body meant that they had been unable to raise a rate in their own right and consequently it was dependent on financial assistance from the highway surveyor. When this support was withdrawn the committee was unable to function and was forced to fold. Despite the belief that the surveyor could absorb the responsibilities of the committee it was quickly apparent that he struggled to do so. By 1865 it was reported that nuisances 'had been gaining ground for several years'.[93]

The county's control over the expenditure of Usk's rates was a significant concern. This is evident in an article published in the *Illustrated Usk Observer and Raglan Herald* in 1855 which complained that the county magistracy had 'the power to put their hands in our pockets without our permission'.[94] While this again may reflect the opinion of the editor who, as a ratepayer, would have likely had concerns regarding the amount of the rates charged by the county, it is clear that it was a concern shared by other inhabitants. In 1855 a memorial was passed to the poor law board petitioning for Usk to be separated from the Pontypool Poor Law Union. This was requested as Usk was contributing more money to the Union than they were drawing out and as a result it was believed that the town would be better off if they were to form their own union with the surrounding parishes.[95] Although they were ultimately unsuccessful, the desire to form a separate union demonstrates that the residents of Usk were actively looking to regain control of their own rates and establish their autonomy from the county.

It was not until 1873 that Usk was able to achieve its aims when it adopted the Local Government Act of 1858 and established its own local board. An amendment to the Local Government Act in 1863 made it possible for towns with a population of less than 3,000 inhabitants to form a board, if granted permission to do so by the local government board in Whitehall. It was resolved in a vestry meeting that the act would be adopted in Usk. Newspaper reports and Clark's accounts of the discussions that preceded this decision make it very clear that a frustration with county administration, the lack of autonomy and the desire to control the expenditure of town rates were the driving force behind the move. The application to the local government board made it

[93] *Illustrated Usk Observer and Raglan Herald*, 24 Jun. 1865, p. 8.
[94] *Ibid*., 27 Oct. 1855, p. 1.
[95] *Ibid*., 24 Nov. 1855, p. 1.

clear that the ratepayers felt that the drainage and water supply of Usk was poor and that the Usk and Pontypool highway board had failed to carry out the necessary work to improve it.[96]

References to a polluted and inadequate water supply, ineffective drainage, an insufficient number of sewers and outbreaks of disease demonstrate that the existing system of government had failed to deliver adequate provision. The highway board was described as consisting 'almost exclusively of farmers representing the surrounding rural parishes' suggesting that the ratepayers of Usk felt that the needs of the town were not understood or prioritised.[97] Although not included in the petition, the desire for autonomy is explicit in Clark's accounts, which point out that a local board would give the ratepayers the 'power to spend [their] own money, instead of having it expended at the whims of others'; that by being 'judicious' in their selection of the members of the board the ratepayers would be able to reduce their rates and that if the ratepayers were dissatisfied at the end of the first year 'a portion will go out of office', and others would be elected 'in their stead'.[98] An advert, published in the *County Observer* following the election of the first local board in February 1873, reassured the ratepayers that 'it shall be our constant care to watch over and protect the pockets of the whole body of ratepayers'.[99]

By adopting the Local Government Act the ratepayers were able assume responsibility for their own roads, streets, sewers, drains and water supply. It also equipped them with the ability to make and collect a rate and the authority to enforce its resolutions. They were also able to establish for themselves a more effective means of self-government. The board had the authority to serve individuals with notices to build drains, clean out water closets and remove nuisances. Failure to do so could lead to a summons being issued or the use of compulsion. Having an income allowed the board to pay for the materials and labour necessary to fix and build roads, pave footpaths and have the streets cleaned. It also employed a number of officers including a medical officer, a surveyor and an inspector of nuisances who were responsible for reporting back to the

[96] Clark, *Past and present*, pp. 119-20.
[97] *Ibid.*, p. 120.
[98] *Ibid*, pp. 128-9.
[99] *County Observer and Monmouthshire Central Advertiser*, 15 Feb. 1873, p. 1.

committee. As these were salaried positions it meant that the individuals concerned could afford the time to carry out their duties but also that they could be held accountable for not carrying out said duties adequately. These officers were reappointed on an annual basis and were at risk of losing their jobs if the role was not fulfilled properly. These powers also granted them a degree of autonomy from the county and established a form of local government in which the lord of the borough's influence was limited to that of landowner.

The fact that it was necessary for Usk's principal inhabitants to instigate and implement this development demonstrates the extent to which central government failed to consider how small towns were being governed. While the programme of great reforms that commenced in the 1830s transformed local urban government within the towns and cities that dominated the urban landscape, smaller towns were overlooked and left without an alternative to the antiquated and ailing institutions of the unreformed corporation and the parish vestry. As a result, in order to instigate change they needed to rely on their own initiative in order to effectively govern the urban community.

The evolution of Usk's urban elite

An earlier section of this chapter demonstrated how Usk's urban elite traditionally consisted of gentlemen, members of the clergy and individuals employed in the legal profession. Although the latter remained prominent, the changes discussed above, in addition to changing how the urban community was governed, had an impact on the composition and role of small-town urban elites. Following the Reform Act, changes to the franchise, the withdrawal of Usk's wealthiest inhabitants and the growth in the number of institutions meant that the middle classes were able to become more active in the government and administration of the town.

The Reform Act restricted Usk's urban elite to its upper- and middle-class inhabitants as the franchise was no longer accessible to Usk's poorer, albeit Tory-voting, inhabitants. Although those of the labouring classes who had been made a burgess prior to 1832 remained enfranchised the opportunity for others to enjoy the same privilege disappeared. At the same time the act, by opening up the franchise to the middle-classes, diminished the prestige of being a burgess. The ability to vote was no longer

indicative of aristocratic favour but a right enjoyed by all those that qualified and therefore being a burgess no longer enhanced an individual's social standing within the community. The act also changed the nature of civic life. as the right to vote no longer brought with it any civic responsibility. As burgesses, the elite had been obliged to form juries, preside over the court leet and oversee the spending of parochial rates; however, from the middle of the century, the majority of these responsibilities were reallocated to the county while the court leet was becoming increasingly redundant. Small town urban elites became increasingly insignificant and therefore less attractive to individuals looking to maintain their social standing, especially within the wider county community. Many either moved away or were succeeded by sons less interested in civic duty and who looked to either escape small town life or pursued careers that required 'their presence elsewhere'.[100]

As a result, the names of wealthy individuals such as Iltyd Nicholl, Francis McDonnell, Thomas Reece and the Addams-Williams brothers disappeared from Usk's institutions of governance during the middle decades of the century leaving a vacuum that was quickly filled by less prominent inhabitants. The membership, therefore, of Usk's bodies of local government increasingly comprised tradesmen and retailers rather than the gentlemen, clergy and white-collar professionals that had dominated previously. This shift is even more visible when looking at the inaugural members of the local board. Only one of the twelve men elected in 1873 was a solicitor and although two were described as gentlemen they were in fact a retired maltster and a retired corn merchant. The only exception to this pattern was Col. Greenhow-Relph, one of three Justices of the Peace who resided within the town during the second half of the century. Unlike the other two magistrates, Greenhow-Relph was an active member of Usk's urban elite and demonstrated a concern for town matters by sitting on various committees and attending public meetings. However, it is apparent that his position within the county often saw him come into conflict with other principal inhabitants. As chairman of the Pontypool and Usk highway board, Greenhow-Relph was a vocal opponent of the establishment of a local board and his objections, although they ultimately proved unsuccessful, delayed the process considerably. This did not, however, prevent him from standing and being elected as a board member in 1878, a

[100] Clark, *Past and present*, p. 99.

triumph that was likely due to him being a prominent member of Usk's nonconformist congregations and one of the first to stand.

Further examination of those involved in these committees show that Usk's new urban elite were able to dominate local government by fulfilling roles within many, if not all, the bodies of urban governance and administration. Thomas Dunn, for example, who in addition to becoming a burgess in 1846 and the portreeve for 1849 also served as guardian of the poor, churchwarden, chairman of Usk gas board, sat as a committee member on both the nuisance removal committee and the parochial sanitary committee and was elected to the Local Board in 1873. Dunn also served as a trustee for the Roger Edwards Charity. This was an organisation established to administer the legacies left by Roger Edwards, a local merchant, who 'bequeathed property' to 'found and endow a free grammer school' in Usk and to 'support almshouses previously built by him in the parish of Llangeview' amongst other charitable causes.[101] James Parker, a grocer, also sat on the nuisance removal committee, was a member of the local board and a trustee of the Roger Edwards Charity. The records also show that he was an active member of the community who attended a variety of public meetings where issues such as parochial expenditure and parish rates were discussed.[102]

It is difficult to determine how far this was simply because there were a limited number of ratepayers amongst whom these responsibilities could be spread. As discussed earlier in this thesis, there is limited information on how many ratepayers there were in Usk. However, it clear that the body of ratepayers was divided between those deemed to be 'principal inhabitants' and those referred to as 'small ratepayers'. These terms were used by the local press when reporting on public meetings.[103] It is impossible to determine to whom these terms refer, but it is clear that they reflect the amount of rates an individual paid. The use of 'principal inhabitant' suggests that these individuals held an elevated position within the community and were perceived to be more suitable for carrying out the duties of public office. At a meeting to determine who would stand for

[101] S. Lewis, *A topographical dictionary of England. Vol. IV* (London, 1835).
[102] Appendix 1 lists the key members of Usk's urban elite, their occupations, religious affiliations and what offices they held in the town. This further demonstrates the extent to which the elite dominated public office within the town during the nineteenth century. See pp. 208-212.
[103] For examples see *County Observer and Monmouthshire County Advertiser*, 29 Oct. 1870 and 14 Apr. 1877, p. 5.

election for the local board, it was the 12 men who had formed the committee to obtain the board that were put forward with Clark stating that the inhabitants of Usk could 'not do better' and he attempted to persuade any opposition to this by stating that if individuals stood against them 'a considerable sum' would be spent on the subsequent election.[104]

As burgesses and officers of the corporation, as officers of the parish and as members of the various committees that emerged before the local board was formed, the urban elite enjoyed positions of authority that elevated them above other residents increasing their social capital within the urban community. However, the continual erosion of the town's autonomy resulted in the decline in the social status of those holding civic office. The establishment of the local board, however, not only enabled Usk to regain a degree of autonomy from the county but also allowed the urban elite to redefine themselves and their position within the community. Of the first twelve board members, at least ten of them had actively campaigned for its formation demonstrating that the impetus for a new form of local government came from those who faced losing their social standing within the community.

The board also enabled the urban elite to maintain their monopoly over the government and administration of the town as there is evidence of continuity in personnel between the corporation and the local board. The board's first chairman was Alexander Waddington who had sat as portreeve in 1844 and 45 and had fulfilled the role since 1867. He continued to act in both capacities until his death in 1874. Of the twelve inaugural members of the local board, at least six were also burgesses. The occupational profiles of these individuals, however, did shift. None would have been considered upper class or belonging to the gentry, nor were they members of the clergy. Instead, all twelve had occupations or were retired from occupations that indicate they were members of either the upper middle-class or despite having an occupation that might considered as lower middle-classes, had managed to gain an elevated position through their involvement in local government.

[104] *County Observer and Monmouthshire Central Advertiser*, 14 Dec. 1871, p. 4.

Table 1.3. *Usk's ratepayers according to valuation and location,1849.*

	0-£5	**£6-£10**	**£11-£20**	**£21-£30**	**£31-£40**	**£41+**	**Total**
Bridge St	8	16	13	5		2	44
Porthycarne St			1	3		2	6
Four Ash St	35	15	7	3			60
Church St	9	5	2	1		1	18
Walcheren	7						7
Maryport St	22	14	2	1			39
Old Market St	7	8	3	2	1		21
Walker St	10	3	2	1			16
New Market St	4	13	9	3	2		31
Baron St	12			1			13

Source: GA, D/Pa.104.25. Church warden account book, 1830-1895. Assessment for rates, 1849.

Although the initial board members were elected, newspaper reports indicate that subsequent vacancies were filled by members nominating and electing candidates amongst themselves.[105] It is also apparent that although the Public Health Act stipulated that 'one third of the number elected… shall go out of office on such day in each year subsequently' the majority of times the retiring board members were re-elected unopposed. This happened so frequently that when the election was contested in 1887 the *South Wales Daily News* reported that 'a great deal of interest was taken in the contest, as an election had not taken place for some years'.[106] Neither can it be argued that the local board was representative. The electorate was restricted to those who paid rates or owned property and those eligible to vote did so according to a sliding scale with those paying more rates having a greater number of votes. Also, in order to be considered eligible for election, prospective board members needed to meet the necessary qualifications ,which for Usk would have been that they were resident in the town or within seven miles of it and in possession of an estate worth not less than £500 or rated to the relief of the poor for an annual value of not less than £15.[107] As the overseers' accounts have not survived, it is difficult to determine how many inhabitants

[105] *South Wales Daily News*, 5 Jan. 1883, p. 3.
[106] *Ibid*, 6 Apr. 1887, p. 4.
[107] W. G. Lumley, *The new sanitary laws: namely, the Public Health Act, 1848, the Public Health Act, 1858 and the local Government Act, 1858: an introduction, notes and index. And an appendix, containing the various statutes referred to therein* (London, 1859), pp. 249-50.

were qualified to stand for election; however, it is clear that the establishment of the local board allowed the wealthier inhabitants of the town to reclaim their positions within Usk society and secure their dominance over the government of Usk.

For those lower down the social spectrum, it must have seemed that very little changed with the adoption of the local board as the town continued to be dominated by the same people. Usk's urban elite, however, was about to undergo further changes. Standing in this election of 1887 was Frank Jennings, a railway carrier, a prominent member of Usk's nonconformist community and a self-described 'working man'. He was elected to the board with the greatest number of votes. This was the first time that an inhabitant who could justifiably be called 'working-class' infiltrated the urban elite.

The local board survived until 1894 when it was replaced by an urban district council established by the Local Government Act (56 & 57 VICT. c. 73) of that year. There is little in the source material regarding the establishment of the urban district council, so it is difficult to know how the people of Usk felt about it. Editions of the *County Observer* covering the transition are missing from the collection digitalised by the National Library of Wales. Clark also appears to have withdrawn from public office having retired as chairmen of the local board in 1887 and says nothing about the new district council in the books he published on Usk. The minutes of the new council show that of the 12 men elected in 1894, 10 had been members of the local board ensuring continuity and that the urban elite's hold over the bodies of urban governance remained in place. However, the election of working-class, nonconformist candidates, Frank Jennings and J. O Nicholas who had been members of the local board indicates that the changing role of ratepayers meant that these new forms of local government made the elite increasingly vulnerable to ambitious and popular working-class residents looking to challenge the status quo, the consequences of which will be explored in chapter 4.

Conclusion

This chapter, having demonstrated how the Duke of Beaufort, as lord of the borough, was able to use the privileges of his position to exercise authority over the corporation of Usk within the unreformed system, has shown that the Reform Act of 1832 and the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 did little to disrupt his hegemony. Although the

intention behind these acts was to limit the power of the aristocracy and provide towns with a more effective form of local government, their failure to abolish the manorial system and the rights and privileges of manorial lordship meant that small-town inhabitants remained susceptible to aristocratic coercion and corruption. Polling data showed that the voting habits of the electorate changed very little despite the expansion of the franchise while surviving archival evidence provides proof that the Beauforts were able to use their wealth and position as Usk's principal landowner in order to continue enjoying considerable influence over the governance of the town.

Not only did centrally introduced reforms fail to restrict the power of aristocratic landlords but they further disadvantaged small towns as they undermined the ability of these settlements to effectively self-govern. The removal of the political usefulness of the corporation meant the Dukes of Beaufort lost interest in the institution, evident in the rapid decline in the number of new burgesses sworn in after 1832. At the same time, the Municipal Corporations Act left Usk unreformed while a further cascade of acts reallocated corporate and parochial responsibilities to the county magistracy. Together these developments meant that the corporation shrank in size, the role of portreeve lost its magisterial authority, the court leet became increasingly redundant while the vestry lost a large proportion of its administrative functions.

The haemorrhaging of responsibilities and the subsequent decline of the existing bodies of governance meant that small towns were increasingly dominated by the county magistracy resulting in a loss of autonomy. Frustrated at the county's failure to remedy problems with the water supply, provide adequate drainage and prevent outbreaks of disease; their limited ability to maintain and improve their own surroundings and control how their rates were spent, residents of small towns such as Usk were compelled to find their own form of local government. In Usk this was achieved by the adoption of the Local Government Act and the subsequent establishment of a local board which enabled the residents to regain a degree of autonomy over their environment. The fact that it was necessary for small town ratepayers to instigate and implement new forms of self-governance demonstrates the extent to which central government overlooked the governance of small towns leaving them without an alternative to the archaic institutions of the unreformed corporation and the Parish vestry which were rapidly proving obsolete.

Finally, it was demonstrated that governance within Usk was carried out by a small group of principal inhabitants who remained predominantly Anglican and Conservative. The consequences of the centrally introduced reforms that have been the focus of this chapter directly impacted their positions, both politically and socially, within the urban setting. It was not, however, the Municipal Corporations Act that transformed Usk's governing elite but the long-term effects of the Reform Act. At the start of the nineteenth century, although it was possible for the lower-middle and labouring classes to be part of Usk's administrative bodies, authority was concentrated in the hands of resident gentlemen, solicitors and members of the clergy. During the second third of the century, their withdrawal, changes to the franchise and a growth in the number of institutions allowed the middle classes to become more active in the government and administration of the town thereby transforming the social profile of elite while excluding the lower classes.

The growing restrictions on Usk's ability to self-govern forced them to go in search of a new form of local government. While the establishment of a local board allowed the town to regain a degree of autonomy, it also provided a means for Usk's beleaguered urban elite to reinforce their standing within the town. The in-house nomination and election of new candidates and the re-election of retiring members unopposed meant that the elite could ensure that their monopoly over the formal structures of local government remained steadfast. By the end of the century, however, smaller ratepayers were asserting their right to be heard. Although initially successful, by establishing a form of local government that was based on a ratepayer democracy, the urban elite left themselves vulnerable to future attacks – this time they would come from below – which will be discussed more fully in chapter four. The next chapter will identify the changes that occurred to the physical landscape of Usk and examine the role the urban elite played in bringing about these changes despite its lack of wealth, interference from the Duke of Beaufort, and the resistance of the ratepayers who feared an increase in town rates.

Chapter II: Change and Continuity.

The last chapter demonstrated the impact centrally introduced reforms had on the urban elite and their authority within Usk. This chapter will explore the ways in which the urban fabric of Usk developed during the nineteenth century and the role the urban elite played in bringing about these changes. Archdeacon Coxe visited Usk during the closing years of the eighteenth century and described the town as 'exhibiting the appearance of having been sacked, and recently quitted by an enemy'.[1] By 1895, however, *Kelly's Directory of Monmouthshire and South Wales* indicated that the town included a town hall, a 'large and handsome' courthouse and a sizeable prison. There were also two banks, three schools, a workingman's conservative club, a newspaper office, and a wide array of shops, offices and workshops.[2] In addition to these developments roads had been widened and paved, the town was supplied with gas and the Medical Officer of Health's annual reports for the last decade of the century show that the town had made significant improvements to its drainage, water supply and the removal of nuisances.[3] While these attributes were not unusual, their presence demonstrates that a process of urban improvement was occurring within towns as small as Usk.

Historians have identified three principal factors that resulted in urban change: population growth, increased economic prosperity and the aspirations of the ruling elite. However, the research that has led to these conclusions has either been based on eighteenth-century towns or on larger nineteenth-century towns and cities that experienced considerable growth to their populations and economies. They were also towns with a powerful and wealthy elite who, equipped by a range of powers granted by local and national acts of parliament, were able to fund and bring about significant changes to their urban surroundings. There is little consideration of how these factors impacted smaller towns that never experienced the rapid and momentous urban and economic growth that helped transform other towns and cities across England and Wales.

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[1] W. Coxe, *An historical tour in Monmouthshire* (London, 1801), p. 125.
[2] *Kelly's directory of Monmouthshire and south Wales* (London, 1895), pp. 157-60.
[3] TNA, MH 97/115. Annual reports of the medical officer of health in Wales, Usk Urban District Council, 1880-1917.

This chapter will first employ the current historiography on the urban renaissance to question whether Wales experienced the same process of urban improvement as England. It will then investigate the impact limited population and economic growth had on the appearance of small towns such as Usk. It will be demonstrated that although the principal inhabitants desired change, a lack of wealth, the interference of the Duke of Beaufort and the resistance of an urban population, for whom the ideals of improvement were not a priority, made it very difficult. Unlike other aspects of Usk's urbanity that are explored elsewhere in this thesis, a variety of different sources have survived that pertain to the transformation of the town during the nineteenth century. These include various maps, census data, corporation and local board records, parish records, newspaper articles and the memoirs of J. H. Clark. These provide an insight into how the driving forces of urban change manifested themselves within Usk, the obstacles that were encountered and how these were overcome.

A Welsh urban renaissance?

For historians familiar with the urban development of English towns, the changes that occurred in Usk during the nineteenth century occurred much later than in England where most towns had made similar advancements a century or so beforehand. There is little doubt amongst urban historians that following the restoration of Charles II in 1660, English towns underwent a physical and cultural transformation that was the result of a prolonged period of growth and development, one that Rosemary Sweet has argued brought 'greater changes than in any preceding period'.[4] According to Clark, English towns became 'notable centres of economic and social innovation, of political discourse and cultural enlightenment with a growing impact on national society and beyond'. Even the smallest towns lost their 'bucolic image and agricultural functions' having acquired visibly urban characteristics that included shops, public buildings, fashionable housing and a variety of sociable leisure and cultural activities.[5] As a consequence of their changing functions and their increasing wealth, the physical appearance of English towns underwent a significant transformation. Streets were

[4] R. Sweet, *The English town 1680-1840. Government, society and culture* (Harlow, 1999) p. 2.
[5] P. Clark, 'Introduction', in P. Clark (ed.), *The Cambridge urban history of Britain, Vol. II, 1540-1840* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 1-4.

widened, public buildings constructed, and houses rebuilt and/or re-fronted to create a more 'ordered, integrated and therefore 'urban' appearance'.[6]

Differences of opinion emerge when attempting to explain why these changes occurred as there are several schools of thought. A number of historians propose a London-centric model where ideas and fashions that were formulated in the metropolis filtered down the urban hierarchy as a consequence of its size, its authority and the efforts of smaller towns to imitate it. This is a notion subscribed to by Roy Porter who has argued that provincial towns were 'painfully aware that they existed in the shadow of the metropolis' and therefore they aspired to 'assimilate metropolitan culture and values'.[7] According to Porter, 'provincial culture was more imitation than innovation'.[8] Peter Borsay has disputed this argument and argues that provincial towns such as Oxford, Bath and Lancaster were more than capable of 'bypassing London and importing design concepts from source'.[9]

In place of the London-centric model, Borsay has proposed that an urban renaissance occurred during the century that followed the restoration.[10] This was a widespread urban movement that originated within the provincial towns of England and saw them transformed by the appearance of leisure activities, the improvement of public amenities and the introduction of new styles of architecture. However not all historians agree with Borsay or in the use of the term 'urban renaissance'. Angus McInnes, while in agreement that there was a 'growing presence of luxury and leisure in urban life' after 1660, has argued that for a majority of towns 'change was tardy in arriving and incomplete in nature' and a far cry from the 'all conquering' process suggested by the term renaissance. Instead McInnes proposes that the period saw 'not an urban

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[6] P. Borsay, *The English urban renaissance. Culture and society in the provincial town 1660-1770* (Oxford, 1989), p. 42.
[7] R. Porter, 'Science, provincial culture and public opinion in enlightenment England', in P. Borsay (ed.), *The eighteenth-century town, 1688-1820. A reader in English urban history* (London, 1990), p. 251. See also E. Hart, *Building Charleston: town and society in the eighteenth-century Atlantic world* (Virginia, 2010).
[8] R. Porter, 'Science, provincial culture and public opinion', p. 251.
[9] P. Borsay, 'The London connection: cultural diffusion and the eighteenth-century provincial town', *The London Journal*, 19, no. 1 (1994), pp. 21-35.
[10] P. Borsay, 'The English urban renaissance: The development of provincial urban culture c.1680-c.1760', in Borsay (ed.), *The eighteenth-century town*, pp.159-87.

renaissance but… the emergence of the leisure town'.[11] Using Shrewsbury as a model, McInnes argued that the period saw an increase in the services and professions, the luxury trades and the leisured class so that by 1760 there had been a substantial shift in the whole character of the town.

The studies that have concentrated on English, eighteenth-century urban development provide little insight into the situation in Wales. Although they provide a clear framework through which to view urban change, they are of limited use when trying to understand the process in Wales which underwent very little urban growth or improvement during the eighteenth century. It did not experience rapid population growth and calculations based on data from hearth, house and window taxes show that the population of Wales increased marginally from an estimated 392,000 in 1690 to 586,000 in 1801.[12] In addition to slow rates of growth, the population remained dispersed evenly throughout the country so that urban populations remained small and by the time of the 1801 census only a handful of towns had populations of over 5000 people. Such population patterns, therefore, would not have put the same pressure on the existing townscape as it had done in larger English towns.

In addition to its limited growth in population, the eighteenth century was also a period of economic stagnation. Wales was slow to recover from the Civil Wars and suffered a prolonged period of economic inertia that had an adverse impact on its urban landscape, with some historians arguing that it was a period of decline rather than growth and renewal.[13] There was also very little improvement to the transport and communication network. Although the turnpike era had come to Wales in the 1750s, travel remained slow and hazardous due to the poor condition of roads and the difficult terrain. It could also be contended that Welsh towns did not possess the same aspirations or the capabilities of English towns to emulate London or English provincial towns. Borsay describes seventeenth-century English towns as not being big enough 'to possess any serious pretentions nor wealthy enough to engage in anything other than modest

[11] A. McInnes, 'The emergence of a leisure town: Shrewsbury 1660-1760', *Past & Present* (1988), pp. 83-4.
[12] P. D. G. Thomas, 'Society, government and politics', in D. Moore (ed.), *Wales in the eighteenth-century* (Swansea, 1976), pp. 9-11.
[13] G. H. Jenkins, *The foundations of modern Wales 1642-1780* (Oxford, 1993), p. 30.

improvements', an observation that can be applied to Wales during the eighteenth century and, as it will be shown, to smaller towns during the nineteenth century.[14]

While the urban historians discussed above are very clear that their research has been limited to English towns, the lack of reference to Scotland, Ireland and Wales has led to the assumption that the chronology, causes and patterns of the process of urban improvement witnessed in England applied to them. However, the increasing amount of research on Scottish and Irish urban growth has shown that the existing models of urban development do not necessarily help explain the process outside England. Harris, when considering the occurrence of a Scottish urban renaissance, argued that far from following what happened in England, Scotland experienced an urban renaissance that had 'strong indigenous roots', that occurred much earlier than generally assumed and was a far cry from being imitative of the patterns of urban change seen south of the border.[15]

Toby Barnard, when looking at Ireland, acknowledged that many towns experienced similar developments to their English counterparts but drew attention to several factors that differed. Firstly, Irish towns were 'accorded the role' of civilizing and anglicizing the island while, secondly, the source material for Borsay's chosen period was 'extremely patchy'.[16] He also argued that the presence of the army and the subordination of the Catholic majority were important differences. Garrisons were welcomed as 'protectors and customers' despite adding to the problems of 'bastardy and disorder' and being 'targets for civilian violence' while the presence of a significant Catholic population leads one to question what contributions that may have made to an Irish urban renaissance.[17] Barnard concluded that 'alluring models of urban improvement' if applied to Ireland 'may rely on aspiration rather than actuality'. He states that most towns remained 'a site of riot and impoliteness' while only the few who had made 'strenuous efforts to remove or at least conceal such blemishes' were the ones that 'most nearly met Borsay's criteria'.[18]

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[14] Borsay, *Urban renaissance*, p. 41.
[15] B. Harris, 'Was there a Scottish renaissance?', in J. Hinks and C. Armstrong (eds.), *The English urban renaissance revisited* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2018), pp. 146-7.
[16] Barnard, T. 'An Irish urban renaissance?', in *Ibid*., pp. 167 and 169.
[17] *Ibid*., p. 177 and 184.
[18] *Ibid.*, p. 187.

Following Barnard, David Dickson has argued that 'many of the elements of Peter Borsay's urban renaissance were adapted and adopted in eighteenth century Ireland'. He divides the process into 'hard' improvements that 'affected the physical appearance and facilities' of a town while 'soft' improvements were policies that 'promoted order, industry and enlightenment' amongst urban inhabitants.[19] Dickson, rather than suggesting that Irish urban improvement was organic, argues that it was driven by 'English and Scottish fashions, ideas, consumer preferences and technical know-how' which 'profoundly affected all departments of Irish urban society during the eighteenth century.[20] These studies on Scotland and Ireland show that the other British countries did not simply absorb the fashions and ideas from England, nor were they just lagging behind and the fact that the process of urban improvement differed demonstrates that it is a lot more complex than the English models suggest.

There are a number of indicators that support the argument that Welsh towns did not implement improvement schemes during the eighteenth century. The limited amount of urban improvement is evident when the construction dates of Welsh town halls are examined. Borsay identified an increased investment in the construction of public buildings in English towns during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He argued that buildings such as town halls were of 'critical importance in establishing the overall image of the town' as they were perceived to 'symbolise the prosperity, humanity and prestige of the whole community'.[21] Using data from the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales and Cadw's listed building database, it is apparent that it was not until the nineteenth century that there was a widespread construction or reconstruction of town halls.[22] Those that were built during the eighteenth century were a far cry from the elaborate examples built within towns such as Abingdon, Worcester and Doncaster, all of which were constructed before 1750. Welsh town halls usually consisted of a room or number of rooms above an arcaded marketplace, that were multi-purpose buildings designed to meet the administrative, judicial and entertainment needs of the inhabitants.

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[19] D. Dickson, *First Irish cities: an eighteenth-century transformation* (New Haven and London, 2021), p. 3.
[20] *Ibid*., p. 263.
[21] *Ibid*, pp. 101-4.
[22] See relevant pages at https://cadw.gov.wales and https://coflein.gov.uk

Another indicator is the very small number of Welsh towns that had established town improvement committees by 1800. According to Harris, improvement commissions were the favoured instruments of urban change amongst English towns.[23] Corfield states that within England 'at least a hundred commissions in towns, or parts of towns, had been established' by the end of the century.[24] In Wales, Cardiff became the first Welsh town to obtain an improvement act in 1774 but it was one of only four that had done so by the end of the century and one of six by the time of the Municipal Corporations Report. Admittedly, the report only considered those with a corporation and therefore omitted towns such as Abergavenny, which had established an improvement committee in 1794. However, the number of improvement acts in Wales remained low and was in stark contrast to England where the Webbs estimated over 200 towns outside of London had established an improvement commission by 1835.[25]

Sweet has suggested that the chronology of Borsay's urban renaissance needs to be adapted. Sweet acknowledged that London was 'the arbiter of taste and fashion' but states that the trickle-down theory is too simplistic and denies the provinces 'any sense of their own traditions and cultural integrity, or the possibility of alternative patterns of cultural transmission'.[26] Sweet's research focused on smaller towns and argues that Borsay's model needs to be 'adapted and modified' when one looks 'beyond 1770 and at towns which were less obviously cultural centres'.[27] Sweet contended that for many towns it was not until the last third of the eighteenth century that the impact of urban improvement became evident. This argument could be applied to Wales for, as shown, a small number of towns had started taking steps to improve their urban environments by the end of the century which could be interpreted as an indication that the process took longer to take hold in the Principality.

There has been little research on whether eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Welsh towns experienced their own urban renaissance or whether they simply absorbed the

[23] Harris, 'Was there a Scottish renaissance?', p. 147.
[24] P. Corfield, *The impact of English towns 1700-1800* (Oxford, 1982), p. 157.
[25] S. Webb and B. Webb, *English local government. Vol. 4, statutory bodies for special purposes* (London, 1963), p. 242.
[26] Sweet, *The English town*, p. 258.
[27] *Ibid*., p. 6.

changes that were occurring in England. The historiography tends to view Wales as an extension of England and therefore the assumption is that it experienced the same process of improvement, albeit at a later date. Although the wider picture has not been explored, there are a number of studies that address the ways in which the larger towns of Swansea, Merthyr Tydfil and Cardiff transformed during this period.[28] The concept of urban improvement is given particular attention by Louise Miskell in her study of Swansea between 1780 and 1855. Although she explored the ways in which Swansea transformed its landscape, she stated that her observations are not intended to represent the 'wider trends in urban Wales'.[29] However the fact that Miskell did not date Swansea's 'coming of age' until the start of the nineteenth century shows that the Welsh process of urban improvement was not an eighteenth-century development.

The fact that Welsh towns were slower to implement changes is not indicative of an absence of the improvement ethos evident in English towns. It is difficult to determine the extent to which the bodies of eighteenth-century Welsh urban governance were interested in transforming their townscapes; however, there are indicators that suggest that the improvement of the urban settlement was of concern even if limited in its implementation. In Carmarthen, for example, a small number of measures were taken during the first half of the eighteenth century that included repairs to 'the little Kay' in 1722, to the bridge and town goal in 1724 and to the well and Bathing house in 1740. These improvements increased in significance during the second half. Quay Street was paved in 1770, a new guildhall was opened in 1777 and a parade was laid out in 1782. A decade later the first meeting of the Carmarthen commissioners of paving and lighting was held, and they successfully obtained an improvement act the year after.[30]

It is not the lack of an improvement ethos but the lack of wealth that prevented Welsh towns from implementing urban change. If urban improvement was the result of

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[28] For examples see: R. Anthony, '"A very thriving place": the peopling of Swansea in the eighteenth century', *Urban History*, 32, no. 1 (2005), pp. 68-87; L. Miskell, 'The making of a new Welsh metropolis: science, leisure and industry in early nineteenth-century Swansea', *History*, 88, no. 1 (2003), pp. 32-52; C. Evans, *The labyrinth of flames, work and social conflict in early industrial Merthyr Tydfil* (Cardiff, 1993); H. Carter and S. Wheatley, *Merthyr Tydfil in 1851: study of spatial structure of a Welsh industrial town* (Cardiff, 1987); J. Davies, *Cardiff and the marquesses of Bute* (Cardiff, 1981); M. J. Daunton, *Coal metropolis, Cardiff 1870-1914* (Leicester, 1977); W. Rees, *Cardiff: A history of the city* (Cardiff, 1969).
[29] L. Miskell, *'Intelligent town' An urban history of Swansea, 1780*-1855 (Cardiff, 2006), p. 42.
[30] J. Lodwick and V. Lodwick, *The story of Carmarthen* (Carmarthen, 1994), pp. 171-3.

increased prosperity, then when one considers the sluggish nature of Wales's economy during the eighteenth century, its geographical remoteness, and the later date of its industrial revolution, it cannot be a surprise that the majority of Welsh towns were unable to implement improvement schemes until the nineteenth century. Carmarthen's attempts to implement improvement measures were hindered by the corporation's limited finances; construction of the Guildhall took eleven years to complete due to a lack of capital while The Parade was paid for by public subscription. Although towns such as Carmarthen, Brecon and Cardiff could afford to make improvements at an earlier date, three towns do not an urban renaissance make. In their chapter on urban improvements in Scottish towns, McKean and Harris observed that there was an initial, early period of urban improvement where a small number of towns made some changes during the 1720s and 1730s.[31] This seems to be reflected in Wales. While a handful of towns were able to start the process in the closing decades of the eighteenth century, it was not until the nineteenth century that the majority could follow suit.

The nature and process of Welsh urban improvement needs considerably more research carried out on it before it can be fully explained or before the ways it reflected or differed from what was happening elsewhere in Britain can be fully understood. The fact that it occurred during the nineteenth century alongside the seismic economic, social and cultural changes that were experienced during the period must have had an impact on the ways in which urban improvement manifested itself across south Wales. Hannah Barker argues there was more than one type of urban renaissance. Her research on the process of urban improvement in the Northern industrial towns of Manchester, Leeds and Sheffield, demonstrates that there were two waves of urban improvement. The first, as identified by Borsay, was driven by the elite and was leisure-orientated, while the second was the product of middling, consumerist cultures that were 'firmly rooted in their localities and subject…to the sobering influences of hard work and religion'.[32] This was an urban renaissance that shared many characteristics with urban improvement in Wales, a process that was initiated by an emerging middle-class who, shaped by Victorian ideals of hard work, were looking to improve their living

[31] B. Harris and C. McKean, *The Scottish town in the age of the enlightenment 1740-1820* (Edinburgh, 2014), p. 92.
[32] H. Barker, 'Smoke cities': northern industrial towns in late Georgian England', *Urban History*, 31, no. 2 (2004), pp. 176-7.

environment, develop their commercial interests and fulfil their civic duty to the wider community.

Whatever form Welsh urban improvement took, what is clear is that most towns did not initiate changes to their urban landscapes until the nineteenth century. Usk, therefore, was evolving alongside its urban contemporaries. While its size may have meant that it was slower than larger Welsh towns to implement certain schemes, this was not due to an absence of an improvement ethos, but the result of its financial position, the limited authority of its agencies of urban governance, the dominance of the Duke of Beaufort as lord of the borough and principal landowner and the reluctance of its ratepayers who were unwilling or unable to fund significant changes.

Physical growth and transformation.

The century between the censuses of 1801 and 1901 saw the urban population of Usk increase from 734 to 1,460 inhabitants, an increase of over 100%. This, however, was not remarkable as even the period saw the smallest and most rural of Welsh towns experience an increase. This growth, however, was accompanied by a redistribution of the national population with the industrial counties of south-east Wales being the primary beneficiaries. In 1801, Wales was sparsely populated and not one county had more than 12% or less than 3% of the national population. By 1851, however, Glamorgan was home to a third and in 1901 43% of those living in Wales lived within the county.[33] Similarly, Monmouthshire experienced an initial increase of 117% between 1801 and 1841, the 'highest percentage for any shire in Britain', and by 1901 its population had grown by 554%.[34] In contrast those counties that were predominantly rural experienced minimal growth and counties such as Anglesey, Cardiganshire and Montgomery were left with less than 3% of the Welsh population. Although these areas experienced a natural growth in population, their populations were decimated by the migration of rural workers to the industrial settlements of the coalfield.[35] Jenkins

[33] D. G. Evans, *A history of Wales 1815-1906* (Cardiff 1989), p. 81.
[34] D. A. Williams, *A history of modern Wales* (Llandybie, 1977), p. 229.
[35] Evans, *A history of Wales*, p. 81.

estimates that between 1851 and 1911 close to half a million people left rural Wales in favour of Glamorgan and Monmouthshire.[36]

This redistribution had an immediate impact on the urban populations of Welsh towns. While those on the coalfield and the coast experienced a considerable growth in population, those to the east and west of the region saw a much smaller increase. Towns across the counties of Cardigan, Carmarthen and Brecon, having experienced initial periods of growth, saw a fall in population during the second half of the century. Even Brecon and Carmarthen, two of the largest towns in early modern Wales, experienced similar fortunes.[37] These trends were reflected within Monmouthshire. In 1801 the bulk of the county's population was to be found in the flatter and more agriculturally prosperous areas of east Monmouthshire; however, by the mid-nineteenth century, it was the industrial regions of west Monmouthshire that accounted for 74% of the population.[38]

This shift in population density had a direct impact on the six settlements that could claim urban status at the start of the nineteenth century: Monmouth, Abergavenny, Chepstow, Newport, Usk and Caerleon. Their experiences in the nineteenth century reflect the nationwide redistribution of population discussed for while all towns experienced growth, it was not equally distributed and resulted in a re-ordering of the county's urban hierarchy.[39] Newport, Monmouthshire's urban success story, benefitted from the industrialisation of the valleys and flourished in its new role as Monmouthshire's 'principal port and retail centre'.[40] Consequently, Newport's population increased from 1423 people in 1801 to over 67,000 in 1901.[41] By the end of the century, Newport, having been made a county borough in 1891, consisted of over 11,000 inhabited houses and had absorbed the neighbouring settlements of Maindee, Crindau and St Woolos. In contrast the county town of Monmouth, situated to the east of the county and not far from the Anglo-Welsh border, experienced comparatively low

[36] Jenkins, *A history of modern Wales 1536-1990* (London, 1992), p. 237. For analysis of the impact of rural-urban migration see K. J. Cooper, Exodus from Cardiganshire. Rural-urban migration in Victorian Britain (Cardiff, 2011).
[37] Census population tables 1851-1901, www.histpop.org [accessed 14.04.20].
[38] W.T.R. Pryce, 'Population and population movements' in C. Williams and S. R. Williams (eds.) *Gwent County History. Vol. 4. Industrial Monmouthshire, 1780-1914* (Cardiff, 2011), p. 1.
[39] C. Roy Lewis, 'Urban society', in *ibid*., pp. 112-13.
[40] *Ibid*., p. 115.
[41] *Pigot & Co's directory of Monmouthshire* (London, 1835), p. 266.

levels of growth. Having been the county's largest town at the start of the century, its population increased from 3,345 in 1801 to 5,095 in 1901, while the number of inhabited houses grew from 638 to 1,159.

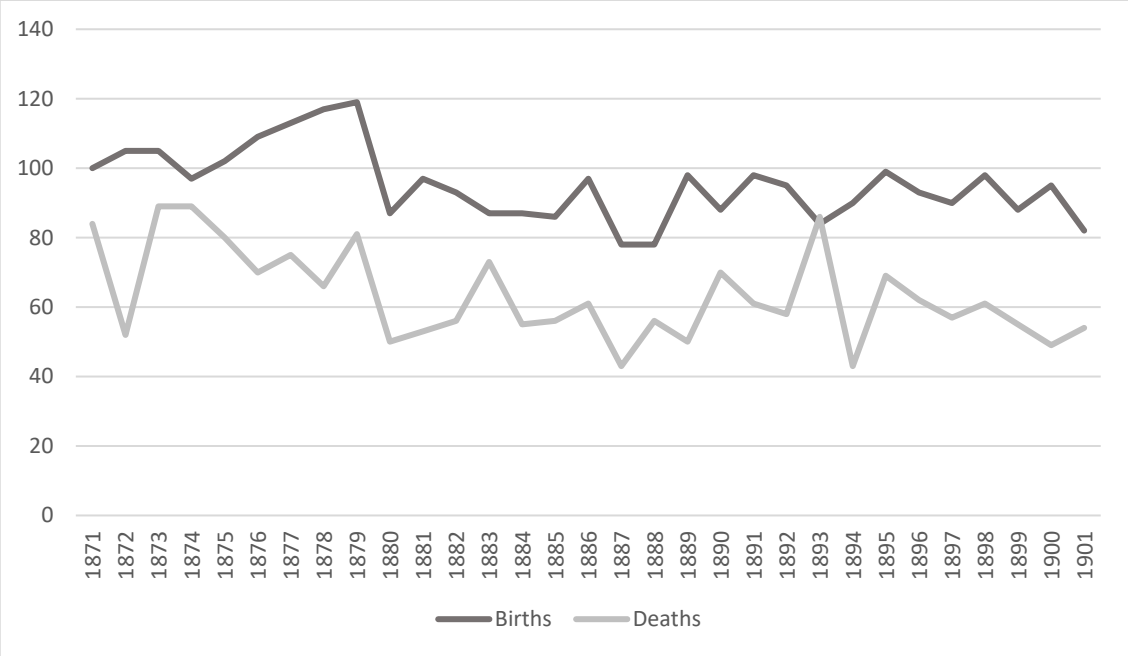
The population growth experienced by Usk, therefore, was in keeping with the wider county and national trends. Although closer to the coalfield than Monmouth, it saw very little of the growth experienced by Newport and the new urban settlements of western Monmouthshire. Despite its overall increase in population, the census records demonstrate that Usk was impacted by the redistribution of population caused by the movement of workers to the coalfield. Having enjoyed an initial period of growth that saw the population increase steadily from 734 inhabitants in 1801 to 1,616 in 1871, the data for the next two decades show that the population decreased to 1,470 in 1881 and 1,417 in 1891. Data published in the *Annual reports of the registrar-general of births, deaths and marriages in England and Wales* show that there was not a natural decrease in population which is shown in graph 2.1 below. The fact that there was no notable spike in the number deaths between 1871 and 1901 suggests that the decrease was due to outward migration.[42]

The rise and fall of Usk's population echoes that of other non-industrial towns. Looking at the census data for towns across South Wales, it is evident that many experienced similar fluctuations in population growth. While small towns such as Kenfig, Talgarth and Presteigne experienced this during the 1860s and 1870s, larger and more significant towns such as Welshpool, and the county towns of Cardigan, Carmarthen and Brecon, saw their populations either stagnate or fall as the century drew to a close.[43] It is evident that even within the heavily industrialised counties, non-industrial towns experienced similar fortunes. Keith Kissack argued that Monmouth's population stagnated after 1831 as there was only an increase of 353 between then and the end of the century.[44] However when the census data is examined more closely it is evident that Monmouth continued to experience population growth until 1871 when it peaked at 5,879. The data, however, shows that the population then started and continued to fall at each

[42] GA, D. Pa/104.4. Records of the parish of Usk, register of baptisms, 1839-1963, pp. 95-213; D. Pa/104.12. *ibid*., register of burials 1849-1882, pp. 65-100; D. Pa/104.13. *ibid*., register of burials 1882-1913, pp. 1-66.
[43] Census population tables 1851-1901, www.histpop.co.uk [accessed 14.04.20].
[44] K. Kissack, *Victorian Monmouth* (Ledbury, 1984), p. 2.

subsequent census reaching 5,095 in 1901. Considering it was the county town of Monmouthshire, one of Wales' most industrialised counties, the fact that it did not benefit from the extraordinary population growth demonstrates the growing divide between industrial and non-industrial towns. Towns like Monmouth, that had sat comfortably a top of the urban hierarchy before the industrialisation of the coalfield found themselves falling victim to outward migration and the shifting order of Welsh towns during this period.

Graph 2.1. *Registered number of births and deaths in Usk, 1871-1901.*

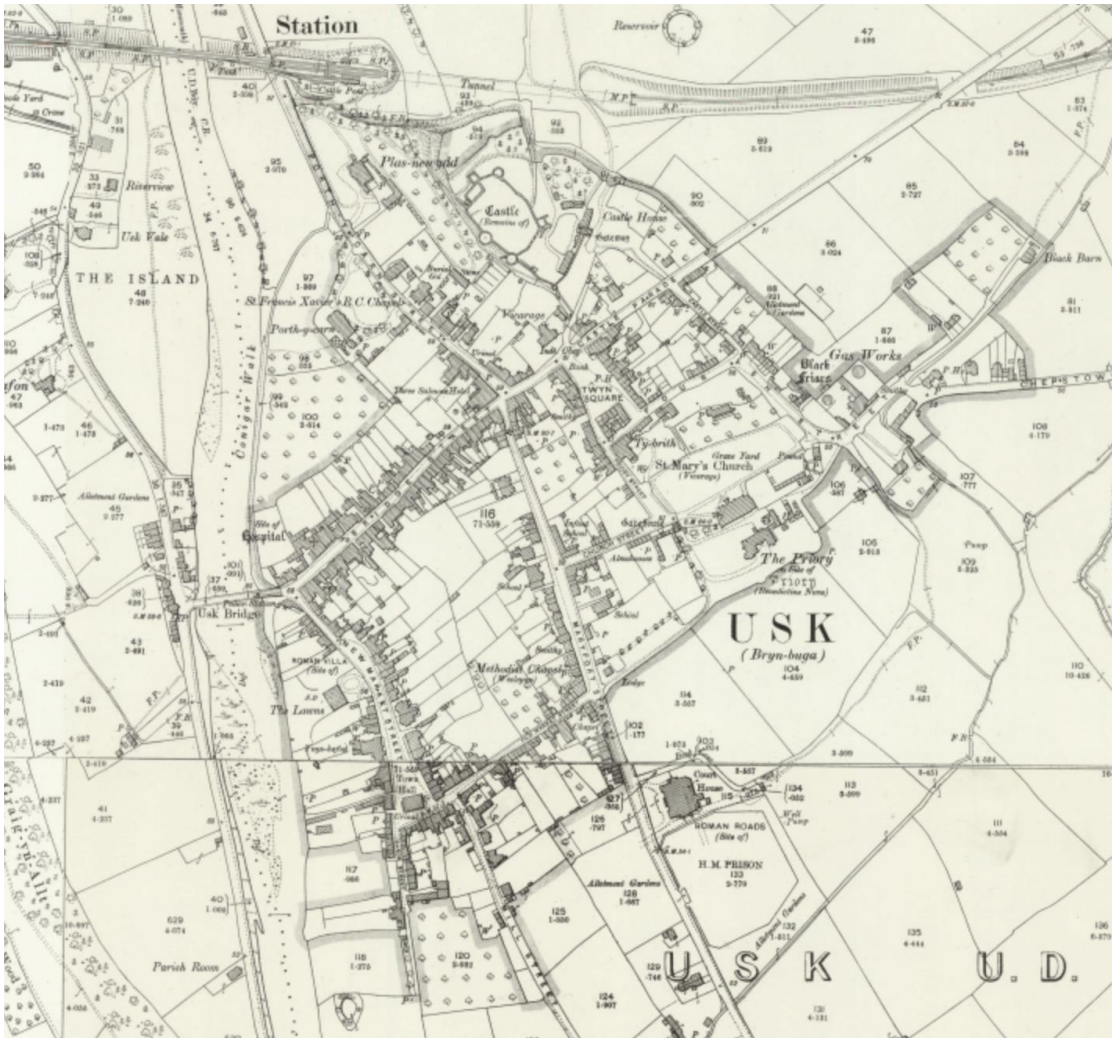


Source: *Annual reports of the registrar-general of births, deaths and marriages in England and Wales*, 1871-1901. – www.histpop.org [accessed June 2022].

Small towns were more likely to feel the impact of outward migration earlier than their larger counterparts as they contained fewer economic opportunities and therefore people were more inclined to leave the area sooner. For Usk the decrease in population coincided with the completion of the sessions house in 1873. This, along with the completion of the new county goal in 1843 and the railway in 1856 would have resulted in a fall in demand for labourers. At the same time, the railway made the move to the coalfield much simpler while the increased circulation of newspapers made it easier for employers to advertise employment opportunities. The 1870s also saw a widespread agricultural depression that would have had a knock-on effect on Usk's retail and

service trade and again left workers with little choice but to leave the area in search of work.

Figure 2.1. *OS Map of Usk,1901*.



Source: Ordnance Survey, (1901) Monmouthshire XXIV.15 & XXIV.3
https://maps.nls.uk/ [accessed 12.09.21].

Limited population growth meant that small towns such as Usk did not see the physical growth evident in towns such as Newport, Cardiff and Swansea where there were significant changes to the urban environment in response to the pressures of a rapidly increasing population. As a result, there was very little change to the size and layout of Usk during the nineteenth century. While its limited population growth rendered it unnecessary, geographically there was also very little scope for outward expansion. Under the Reform Act of 1832, the borough was extended from 383 acres of land to 637 acres. However, this increase had little impact on the size of the population. It simply brought a small number of local farms and individual properties under the

borough's jurisdiction and therefore their inclusion did little to change the shape, layout and density of the urban settlement.

Figure 2.2. Georgian townhouse, Twyn Square,

Figure 2.3. Late Victorian Italianate villa, Maryport Street.

The growth in population, albeit marginal, had an impact on the appearance of the town, however, as it resulted in an increased demand for housing. By comparing the map of 1801, that can be found on page 28, with the OS map of 1901 shown above, it is possible to identify moderate growth to the north of the town along Porthycarne Street;

eastwards with the development of Monmouth Road and the area east of the church and finally to the south along Maryport Street, Baron's Street and Walker Street, now known as Mill Street. While this expansion consisted of only a handful of buildings in the areas specified, the census returns indicate that there was a sizeable increase in the number of buildings within the town. The census returns show that in 1801 there were 152 inhabited houses and six uninhabited houses which increased to 317 inhabited houses and 17 uninhabited houses by 1901, an increase of 111%. By comparing the two maps it is evident that this increase happened within the confines of the town, particularly around the central square created by Bridge Street, New Market Street, Old Market Street and Maryport Street. There is also visible development between the Twyn and the church. This process of 'infilling' was well underway by 1844, as documented in a letter published in the *Monmouthshire Merlin* that described areas of the town where 'buildings are in progress' and 'houses are being re-erected'.[45]

Figure. 2.4. The Catholic Church, Porthycarne Street, built 1847.

The process in Usk was gradual and piecemeal. This is reflected in the haphazard appearance of the townscape which consists of buildings that vary in shape, height and age. The older areas of Usk such as the Twyn, Maryport St, Bridge St, Old Market

[45] *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 3 Feb 1844, p.4.

Street and New Market Street comprise sixteenth and seventeenth-century houses alongside those of Georgian and Victorian origins. As a result, a number of different architectural styles can be seen throughout the town such as classical Italianate as well as Victorian Tudor and gothic revival. In addition to new properties being built or rebuilt, Cadw's listed building register shows that at least 60 properties that have an outwardly, nineteenth-century appearance were buildings of an earlier date. This particularly applies to the row of small cottages along Maryport Street and the buildings surrounding the town hall on Old and New Market Street whose frontages belie their earlier origins.

Table 2.1. *Number of listed buildings either refronted/refurbished or built in Usk during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.*

Street	**Refronted/refurbished C18th & C19th**	**Built C18th & C19th**
Twyn Square	8	3
Priory Street	2	-
Maryport Street	12	11
Old Market Street	16	3
Baron Street	-	5
Mill Street	-	1
New Market Street	10	13
Four Ash Street	6	2
Castle Street	-	1
Monmouth Rd/ Castle Parade	2	3
Bridge Street	5	9
Porthycarne Street	2	8

Source: Cadw Listed Building reports, https://cadw.gov.wales/ [accessed 03.08.21].

The growth of a town, especially for those associated with industry, coincided with the development of the urban economy, another driving force of urban change. Economic development resulted in increased prosperity for most towns, which in turn allowed towns to invest in their urban environment. For a small town such as Usk, however, a lack of source material makes it difficult to determine how well its economy fared

during the nineteenth century. Usk's only industrial endeavour, the Japanning works, which had been established in 1763 by members of the Allgood family, had declined throughout the first half of the century and was closed in 1860. Although it was never a major industry it is thought to have employed up to 20 people at its height and its products were sold in London, Bath and on the continent.[46] An entry in Beaufort's steward's account book shows that the duke was also a customer, having paid Evan Jones £12.17.0. for Japan goods in 1836.[47] The decline of the works in Usk was caused by the production of cheaper Japan ware by rival works in Birmingham, a development that had seen the original works in Pontypool close in 1822. The nineteenth century, however, did see Usk consolidate its position as a retail, service and judicial centre for the surrounding communities and the wider county; a development that resulted in several changes to the urban landscape.

The role of market town had been at the heart of Usk's development and its identity since its foundation in the eleventh century and this function remained a key element in the symbiotic relationship between the urban centre and its surrounding hinterland. While the rural communities depended on Usk to sell produce and access services, the town looked to its environs to supply food and raw materials and to provide customers for its businesses. This mutually beneficial relationship meant that by the start of the nineteenth century Usk's role as a central market for the surrounding countryside had been clearly established. At this time, Usk had two markets, a weekly market on Friday and a monthly market for farming stock the first Monday of every month, as well as a three-day fair that started on 18 April and others on 29 October and the Monday before Christmas 'for farming stock generally'.[48]

There is little surviving evidence that indicates how successful the markets were; however, what does exist suggests a period of buoyancy during the first half of the century followed by one of decline as the second half progressed. The town hall had been expanded in 1816 to extend the market space; however, when it was renovated again in 1859 the southern half of the market hall was enclosed and turned into offices.

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[46] R. Nichols, *Pontypool and Usk Japan ware* (Pontypool, 1981), pp 27-34.
[47] NLW, Badminton, (III) BME 1/18. Badminton estate records, steward's account book with the Duke of Beaufort, 1835-1836.
[48] *Pigot & Co's directory of Monmouthshire* (London 1830) p. 526.

The annual income from the toll gates indicates the number of people travelling in and out of the town. These tolls hit a peak of over a £1,000 a year in the mid-1830s and remained within this range throughout the 1840s until they started to gradually drop towards the end of the 1850's.[49] The income of the tollgates would have been impacted by the opening of the railway in 1856 but the majority of those who visited the market would have lived within the neighbouring parishes and therefore they would not have travelled to and from Usk via train. The decrease in tolls coincides with newspaper reports of thin attendances, low prices and hesitant buyers which reinforces the notion that the second half of the century was a period of decline.[50] This downturn occurs at the same time as an agricultural depression that swept across Wales during the 1870s. It appears, however, that the markets survived the downturn as *Kelly's Directory* of 1906 indicated that the monthly market was held twice a month suggesting a revival in its fortunes.[51]

Table 2.2. *Occupation of families living in Usk, 1801-1831.*

Year	**% employed in agriculture**	**% employed in trade, manufactures or handicraft**	**% not included in previous categories.**
1811	> 0	85	14
1821	24	52	24
1831	9	37	54

Source: *Abstract of the answers and returns. Enumeration Abstract 1801-1831* - www.histpop.org [accessed April 2020].

The ongoing presence of a market meant that Usk also developed into a local retail and agricultural service centre. The early census returns show that an average of 58% of families within the town were employed in 'trade, manufactures or handicraft' between 1811 to 1831. Analysis of early trade directories show that the business being carried out in Usk were primarily those which provided everyday services such as boot and shoemakers, tailors or grocers and shopkeepers.[52] Examination of the directories has

[49] GA, Q/TTR.1/1-2; 4/3-4, 11, 18, 24, 29; 5/7, 66; 6/2, 8, 12-14, 19-20, 27, 32; 7/15, 18, 31, 39, 42, 49, 57, Monmouthshire court of quarter sessions, calendar of turnpike trust returns, 1829-1862.
[50] *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 7 Apr.1849, p. 3 and 11 Dec. 1858, p. 2; *County Observer and Monmouthshire Central Advertiser*, 9 Jul. 1879, p. 5 and 9 Aug. 1884, p. 5.
[51] *Kelly's directory of Monmouthshire and south Wales* (London, 1906), p. 213.
[52] *Pigot and Co's directory of Monmouthshire* (London, 1830), p. 526.

made it possible to chart the development of Usk as a retail and service centre. When the lists of those employed as shopkeepers and traders are compared the number and variety of commercial premises increased as the century progressed (see Table 2.3 below). Not including the white-collar trades such as solicitors, surgeons and teachers and those of an agricultural nature, *Pigot and Co's directory* of 1830 listed 52 individuals delivering 28 trades and later directories show that while this number fluctuated it increased gradually as the century progressed, so by 1895 *Kelly's directory* listed 100 individuals carrying out 40 trades.[53]

Table 2.3. *Numbers of individuals and trades listed in published directories.*

Date of Directory	Number of Individuals	Number of Trades listed.
1830	52	28
1844	74	29
1859	123	31
1868	95	33
1876	97	37
1880	94	31
1895	100	40

Source: *Pigot & Co's Royal national and commercial directory and topography* (London, 1830), p. 526; *Pigot & Co's Royal national and commercial directory and topography* (London, 1844), pp. 23-4; *Slater's Royal national and commercial directory and topography* (London, 1859), pp. 56-7; *Slater's Royal national and commercial directory and topography* (London, 1868), pp. 62-4; *Mercer & Crocker's General, topographical & historical directory* (Leicester, 1876), pp. 109-111; *Slater's Royal national commercial directory* (Manchester, 1880), pp. 77-80; *Kelly's directory of Monmouthshire and south Wales* (London, 1895), pp. 157-60.

While an increase in the number of shops and businesses is to be expected considering the growth in population, it also demonstrates that Usk developed its role as a central retail centre that could support a larger number and increasing variety of businesses. *Kelly's directory* of 1895 list, amongst the day-to-day retailers such as bakers, butchers, grocers and drapers, luxury retailers including photographers, wine and spirit merchants and a china and glass dealer demonstrating the extent to which trades had diversified within the town.[54] The Slater directories of 1868 and 1880 also listed commercial premises in the parishes that surrounded Usk. This demonstrated that while certain

[53] *Ibid.*; *Kelly's directory of Monmouthshire and south Wales* (London, 1895), p. 213.
[54] *Kelly's directory of Monmouthshire and south Wales* (London, 1895), pp. 159-60.

trades were operating in neighbouring villages as well as in Usk, others were only to be found in the town. These included bakers and confectioners, ironmongers, drapers and saddlers. The location of such services in Usk meant the town was a fundamental part of everyday life for both its inhabitants and those of the rural communities that surrounded it. It was home to multiple businesses that provided everyday essentials and services that were fundamental to rural life.

The development of Usk as a retail centre brought change to the outward appearance of its townscape as retail and trade premises were updated. In his memoirs, Clark recalls how a cooperage that had 'a shed that extended over the footpath' was converted into 'a neat and commodious grocery and drapery establishment', an 'old, thatched stabling' that opened onto the street was turned into 'shops with plate-glass fronts' and existing premises were extended. According to Clark, these improvements 'induced other tradesmen to build and improve their residences'.[55] Although gradual, this process of improvement resulted in the eventual overhaul of the appearance of Usk's principal streets as businesses adopted new architectural styles and more modern technology which in turn encouraged others. An article in the *Monmouthshire Merlin* from 1848 described how a 'worthy burgher', having seen the use of portable gas light in Manchester, introduced it 'into his establishment at Usk' which 'induced his fellow townsmen to follow his example'. As a result, by the time the article was published, all the shops were 'now lighted as they were never lit before'.[56]

While the consolidation of Usk's position as a retail and agricultural centre saw a transformation of the main commercial areas of Bridge Street, New Market Street and Twyn Square, Usk's growing role as the civil and judicial administrative centre of Monmouthshire also brought about change to the appearance of the town's urban landscape. Although Monmouth had been the county town since 1536, Usk was situated in the middle of the county and had increasingly become the locale for county business. A lack of suitable premises meant that the Monmouthshire quarter sessions had been held at the town hall since 1788.[57] The industrialisation of western Monmouthshire and

[55] J. H. Clark, *Usk past and present* (Usk, 1893), p. 3.
[56] *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 28 Oct. 1848, p. 3.
[57] T. Hopkins, 'The quarter sessions and the Justice of the Peace', *The Monmouthshire Antiquary*, 29 (2013), p. 57.

the associated rise in poverty saw the county's reported crime rate increase dramatically so that the Criminal Statistics of 1898 placed Monmouthshire top with 339 crimes per thousand people, ahead of Glamorgan with 257 and London with 218.[58] The subsequent increase in workload meant that by 1852 the quarter sessions sat seven times a year instead of the usual four until the Criminal Justice Act of 1856 transferred a substantial number of cases to the local petty sessions. The presence of these sessions was of considerable benefit for Usk.[59] It sustained the growth of the town's legal profession, its hospitality industry and it became the meeting place of choice for county bodies, the location of several county offices and home to the county's first police force.

The position of Usk as the judicial centre of Monmouthshire was reinforced by the erection of a new House of Correction, which later became the county gaol, and the sessions house which reflected Victorian architectural trends and styles that were to be found in more significant towns and cities. The gaol, built circa 1841/2, was in keeping with early Victorian prison architecture as it was laid out on the Benthamite Panopticon plan as set by Pentonville Prison which, built in 1840, 'defined the model for prison planning throughout the period'.[60] Despite the arrow slits and towers of the gatehouse, the symmetry and the low pitched roofs meant that gaol was more in keeping with a classical style of architecture rather than gothic revival which informed the design of other prisons of the time.[61] Although little of the prison building is visible from the street, the walls and gatehouse dominate the street scene and other buildings within the immediate vicinity and therefore would have changed the landscape of an area that had previously been agricultural. The sessions house, built between 1875-7, is located between the town and the prison. The presence of Italianate features such as rusticated Tuscan pilasters, the triple arched porch and the contrast between its red coursed rock-faced sandstone and pale-yellow limestone ashlar gives it an air of grandeur that is in contrast to its surroundings. Although it is only a single-storey structure and overlooked by the gaol, it was a grand addition to the Usk townscape and the town's finest public building.

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[58] Kissack, *Victorian Monmouth*, p. 74.
[59] Hopkins, 'The quarter sessions', p. 57.
[60] *Usk Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Proposal*, (2016), p. 53.
[61] For examples see HMP Leicester (1828), HMP Leeds (1847) and HMP Holloway (1853).

Figure 2.5. HMP Usk, Maryport Street.

Figure 2.6. The Sessions House, Maryport Street.

Both buildings were designed by architect, Thomas Henry Wyatt, who possessed an impressive portfolio that included the assize courts in Cambridge and Brecon; the Wiltshire and Buckinghamshire lunatic asylums and a number of private houses including Cefn Tilla Court for the second Baron Raglan in Monmouthshire. Such associations gave Usk an elevated sense of importance and a more modern and impressive appearance and their presence within the town reinforced its urban credentials. In addition to differentiating it from other small towns and large villages, there presence allowed Usk to compete with larger towns such as Monmouth and

Abergavenny. Both buildings also provided the town with an air of gravitas that had previously been missing.

Another important change that had an impact on the physical appearance of the town was developments to its transport system. The nineteenth century saw the building of new roads, the construction of the Coleford, Monmouth, Usk and Pontypool railway and the erection of associated buildings such as new toll houses, the station house, the railway tunnel and bridge across the River Usk all of which helped change the streetscape. The arrival of the railway also encouraged the transformation of other buildings. An advert in the *Monmouthshire Merlin* published in 1853 on the opening of the Newport and Hereford line announced that the Three Salmons, Usk's largest Inn, had been enlarged and improved, 'in all its departments' in expectation of an increase in the number of guests following the opening of the aforementioned railway.[62]

More significantly, the improvements in transport changed Usk's relationship with the outside world as it opened new communication and ideological networks. Although Monmouthshire had entered the turnpike era in 1760, it is evident that travel to and from Usk remained difficult. In his *Reminiscences of Monmouthshire*, Clark recalled how he and his brother arrived in Usk on New Year's day 1834 having walked from Chepstow as there was 'no coach or other public conveyance'.[63] Clark also provided a description of the journey from Usk to Cardiff in 1835, stating that it involved 'much expense and inconvenience' which he attributed to the fact that the 'portion between Usk and Newport [was] accomplished by coach'.[64] Although Clark does not explicitly mention the condition of the roads, it is clear that the journey was time-consuming and uncomfortable and the reason why Clark eventually 'disposed of the business' he had established in Cardiff.[65] The poor transport links between Usk and its neighbouring towns would have had a considerable economic impact on Usk. Although Clark was talking about the commute to Cardiff, it would have been a similar experience for those travelling to Usk and therefore the lack of good transport links made Usk economically

[62] *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 23 Dec. 1853, p. 8.
[63] J. H. Clark, 'Autobiography' in J. H. Clark, *Reminiscences of Monmouthshire* (Usk, 1908), p. 23.
[64] *Ibid*.
[65] *Ibid*., p. 74.

inaccessible to those beyond its immediate hinterland, preventing it from expanding its sphere of influence.

It is evident that the people of Usk were aware of the benefits the railway could have on the town. In 1856 it was reported that the secretary of the Newport, Abergavenny and Hereford railway had agreed to run trains to and from Usk for the mechanics' institute annual soirée at Usk Castle. The committee was also petitioning for a 'special train to Abergavenny and Newport' as the last train left Usk at 4.15pm 'just about the time the party begins to assemble'.[66] It is evident that the number arriving in the town by train was numerous with the event attracting over 1,000 guests in 1856 following the opening of the railway, and in 1858 it was reported that a walkway from the station to the castle was constructed for the event.[67]

The importance of the railway is further highlighted by a report on another soirée that was described as 'to a great extent a failure' due to the 'absence of excursion trains for the accommodation of parties from a distance – a feature in the arrangements which had come to be regarded as indispensable of these occasions'.[68] Transport clearly remained an issue. An article in favour of moving the quarter Sessions from Usk to Newport published in the *South Wales Daily News* in December 1872, described Usk as 'a miserably inconvenient, unsuitable, out-of-the-way spot, with a townhall…that would… disgrace a farmyard'.[69] According to this report the 'railway arrangements from almost every corner of the county to Usk' were 'defective' and witnesses, jurors and others incurred 'heavy expenses' as they often had to stay in the town due 'to the limited number of trains, as well as the awkward times at which they run'. These observations were made by someone who was in favour of the removal of the Sessions from Usk to Newport and therefore it is probable that he exaggerated the situation in order to further his argument; however, the route between the two towns involved two separate railway lines, the Newport Hereford line and the Pontypool, Little Mill and Usk line, and therefore travel remained problematic.

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[66] *Illustrated Usk Observer and Raglan Herald*, 28 Jun. 1856, p. 1.
[67] *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 12 Jul. 1856, p. 2 and 3 Jul. 1858, p. 8.
[68] *Ibid.*, 23 Jul. 1864, p. 5.
[69] *South Wales Daily News*, 30 Dec. 1872, p. 2.

The Coleford, Monmouth, Usk and Pontypool line had been established for the transportation of raw materials from the Forest of Dean to the ironworks at Nantyglo, Dowlais and Ebbw Vale and was not intended to improve the transport links of towns such as Usk. Although passenger trains ran on the line, the trains did not necessarily run at the most convenient times. In June 1857 it was advertised in the *Illustrated Usk Observer and Raglan Herald* that the Manager of the railway had 'shown himself desirous of meeting the wishes…of the inhabitants at Usk' by agreeing to an extra train from Usk to Pontypool on Saturdays so people could attend the market. According to the advert, people had experienced 'unpleasantness and inconvenience' as they had to disembark at Pontypool Road, a mile outside of Pontypool from where they had to walk or catch the omnibus into Pontypool.[70] Considering these implications, it would appear that the railway was not a positive development for Usk. Although it gave the town an increased sense of modernity it did not necessarily enhance the position and economy of Usk, despite initial hopes that it would. Although the railway made it easier for those living within the town and in the surrounding areas to access neighbouring towns, it arguably disrupted the symbiotic relationship between Usk and the rural communities that surrounded it as it made travel to other towns easier and more convenient. Despite this, Usk remained an important local centre, providing everyday essentials and vital agricultural services.

Barriers to improvement.

While the local government agencies of larger towns and cities were able to commission the construction of elaborate public buildings, lay new and wider highways and introduce the latest technologies to improve their urban environments, the corporations and town councils of small towns like Usk were restricted in what they could do due to a lack of capital, un-cooperative landlords and resistant ratepayers. In addition to the sessions house and goal, the nineteenth century also saw the remodelling of the town hall and the parish church, the construction of three new places of worship, a new school building, at least two new toll gate houses and new almshouses in Church Street, however, none of these developments were funded by the corporation. The gaol and sessions house, erected at a cost of over £21,173 and £13,000 respectively, were

[70] *Illustrated Usk Observer and Raglan Herald*, 20 Jun. 1857, p. 1.

funded by the county, the town hall was paid for by the Duke of Beaufort, parish rates and voluntary subscriptions were used to fund the remodelling and rebuilding of the church and almshouses, the Baptist and Methodist chapels appear to have been paid for by loans taken out by their congregations while the Catholic church was funded by private subscription.

Borough records indicate that the lack of investment in public buildings was not due to the absence of an improvement ethos within the corporation and it is evident that the corporation of Usk was willing to take responsibility for improving the urban environment. A resolution was passed in March 1832 stated that corporation rents would be used for the 'improvement of the drains, gutters, pavements, footways, lighting and general improvements for the town'.[71] The wording of the resolution makes clear the burgesses' sense of public duty as it stipulates that they were expected to act 'in such a way they deem beneficial to the town and inhabitants of Usk'. Despite their aspirations, however, a shortage of capital and an inability to increase it, restricted the abilities of the corporation to fund and implement change. Usk did not secure any private acts of parliament that bestowed additional rating powers on its local government but even if it had, the tax base of Usk was so small that it would have been very difficult for the corporation to raise a much money, nor would it have allowed it to borrow large sums on the security of these rates. Legislation such as town improvement acts allowed municipal bodies to set rates that were used to fund urban improvements; however, they were expensive to obtain and therefore inaccessible to small towns like Usk and remained the preserve of larger, wealthier settlements. Consequently, smaller towns needed to look at other sources of revenue.

The apportionment for the Tithe Map of 1846 shows that the corporation only owned three acres of wasteland land within the borough.[72] These parcels of land had been enclosed in 1829 and let as a means of generating income. According to the Municipal Corporations Report of 1835, these netted the corporation £15 a year; however, this was clearly insufficient income against which to raise a loan that would cover the capital

[71] GA, D.156.17. Records of the borough of Usk, recommendation of portreeve, aldermen, recorder and burgesses of Usk, 9 Mar. 1832.
[72] NLW, Welsh tithe maps https://places.library.wales/ [accessed 14.04.20].

costs of any improvements.[73] Another resolution passed in 1836 stated that it would be 'expedient to obtain the consent of the Lord of Borough to the enclosing, selling, letting or otherwise disposing of the waste lands … situate near Pontsampit Bridge' and that all monies gained from doing so should 'be applied in the general improvement of the town'.[74] This ambition was never realized, however. Although the corporation had been able to enclose and let other pieces of waste land in the 1820s, Beaufort, refused to allow the corporation to do the same with the wasteland at Pontsampit despite repeated applications from the corporation.[75]

A similar situation arose when attempts were made to provide Usk with a purpose-built cattle market. The market was traditionally held on the Twyn and the surrounding streets. Although the market had been held in this location for centuries, changes in expectations of what was acceptable in terms of how the street was used and the desirability of cleanliness and order within the urban settlement meant that the filth created by the market was no longer deemed tolerable. The market had grown in size and had spread beyond the Twyn and its immediate vicinity which made travel down Bridge Street, Usk's main throughfare, difficult. It had also started to spread down Porthycarne Street which was home to a significant number of Usk's wealthiest inhabitants and linked the town to the railway station. Consequently, the filth generated by the market proved an increased nuisance as it was obstructing the route to and from the station. Borough records show that efforts were made to procure a suitable piece of land on which to construct a cattle market at various points during the nineteenth century. The idea was first suggested in September 1845 when the portreeve was petitioned to call a meeting to consider 'the propriety of taking such steps' to build a new marketplace.[76] At the subsequent meeting it was resolved that holding the market in the streets was a 'great public nuisance', a suitable piece of land, the Priory Orchard, was identified and it was agreed that the portreeve, Alexander Waddington, would seek the duke's consent.[77]

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[73] *The Municipal Corporations Report*, p. 417.
[74] GA, D.156.17. Records of the borough of Usk, resolution to obtain the consent of the lord of the borough for the enclosing, selling, letting or otherwise disposing of the waste lands near Pontsampit Bridge, 26 Oct. 1836.
[75] *Ibid*., Meeting of portreeve, aldermen and recorder of Usk, 21 Oct. 1853.
[76] GA, D.156.16. *Ibid*., petition of the inhabitants of Usk to convene a meeting to consider the construction of a new market place, 25 Sep. 1845.
[77] *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 11 Oct. 1845, p. 3.

Figure 2.7. *Tithe Map of Usk, 1846.*

Source: NLW, Welsh tithe maps https://places.library.wales/

Beaufort refused to allow the corporation to use his land as he received a petition 'numerously signed' against the measure and he felt that while it would be an advantage to some, it would cause injury 'to many others'.[78] The nature of this petition is not known as it has not survived but it is probable that it was signed by the innkeepers and the tradesmen of Usk who ran businesses on the Twyn and the surrounding streets who feared that the removal of the market from the centre of the town would impact their income. This assumption is reinforced by Clark who, when

[78] GA, D.156.31, Records of the borough of Usk, correspondence relating to the new cattle market. Letter from Arthur Wyatt to Alexander Waddington, 29 Nov. 1845.

describing the attempts to build a market in 1886, states that 'the principal opposition' to previous attempts had come from 'the owners of public-house property' but that as the new site was 'within 200 or 300 yards of all the inns of the town' it could not 'injuriously affect the interests of any of the innkeepers'.[79] The issue arose again in 1863 and Beaufort was approached in the hope that he would permit the corporation to purchase the piece of land identified in 1845. Beaufort refused as he believed that if he sold the land to the corporation, it would 'affect the future letting' of Priory house which was one of Usk's grandest and oldest buildings.[80] The following year, Beaufort put the priory estate up for sale and offered it to the corporation. A newspaper report indicates that the corporation resolved to pay the £2,075 asked for, but according to Clark, while waiting to hear the duke's reply, they were informed by his solicitors that it had been sold to a different buyer at a higher price.[81]

Although scarce, the surviving source material suggests that the duke's decisions regarding the enclosure of the waste lands at Pontsampit and the construction of a new market were financial. Instead of granting or selling the land required, the duke chose to act in his own economic interests. The source material pertaining to the wasteland at Pontsampit consists predominantly of copies of letters sent by corporation, therefore, they only provide the reasons for wanting to enclose the land rather than Beaufort's responses. A letter sent from the portreeve to Beaufort's agent, however, states that he believed that the Duke of Beaufort thought he would be giving up 'valuable rights' but that he was completely mistaken as the lands did not 'produce a single farthing's benefit to the duke.[82]

The financial implication is similarly evident in the correspondence regarding the construction of a market. It is probable that many of the innkeepers that opposed the market were located within the immediate vicinity of the Twyn and were tenants of the duke. Those that did own their own premises were still required to pay burgage rents to Beaufort. The fact that their petition in 1845 was successful suggests that had he

[79] Clark, *Past and present*, pp. 228-9.
[80] GA, D.156.31, Records of the borough of Usk, correspondence relating to the new cattle market. Letter from Arthur Wyatt to Alexander Waddington, 8 Oct. 1863.
[81] *Illustrated Usk Observer and Raglan Herald*, 23 Jul. 1864, p. 8; Clark, *Reminiscences*, p. 106
[82] GA, D.156.16. The records of the borough of Usk. Letter from Alexander Waddington to Arthur Wyatt, 24 Sep. 1869.

granted his consent, this source of income might have been at risk. This economic factor is more explicit in 1863 and 64 as he chose not to sell the land because of the impact it might have on the letting of the Priory, which he then sold to the highest bidder. As shown, this clearly impacted the ability of Usk's corporation to implement changes that would improve the urban setting. This shift reflects the changing approach of the Beauforts to borough lordship noted in chapter one. Their ability to influence the voting habits of the electorate diminished as the century progressed. So, while earlier dukes may have been more willing to appease the corporation, their successors took a less conciliatory approach.

Although fragmentary, the borough of Usk records provide an insight into how the corporation tried to implement changes to better the appearance of the urban settlement by improving the footpaths and introducing street lighting. Clark's recollections of Usk on his arrival suggest that walking round Usk was pretty hazardous. Despite small patches of pavement 'here and there in Bridge Street' and in Church street, the town's footpaths were almost entirely 'pitched with pebbles from the river, or bare earth' with surface gutters 'crossing the streets in every direction' and numerous 'obstructions to foot passengers in the shape of palisades, railings and iron barriers' while in Bridge Street, a cooperage's fire was situated outside his premises on the footpath.[83] The poor condition of the footways could have only been intensified by the lack of adequate lighting indicated by Clark's statement that 'persons of very bad repute' were able to pursue their 'nefarious practices without detection owing to there being no lights in the streets'.[84] It is evident that fixing these problems was a priority of the corporation; however, due to the absence of funding they were limited as to what they could achieve and therefore improvements were gradual and done in a piecemeal fashion.

The corporation employed contractors to lay and repair paving throughout the town; however, the borough records imply that priority was given to the streets on which the gentlemen of the committee resided.[85] The introduction of street lighting followed a similar pattern. Usk only implemented oil lighting in 1834 when the corporation

[83] Clark, *Past and present*, p. 3; *Ibid*., 'Reminiscences', p. 15.
[84] *Ibid.*, p. 51.
[85] GA, D.156.16. Records of the borough of Usk, meeting of the portreeve and aldermen of Usk, 1829-1873.

purchased the old public oil lamps from Chepstow. Again, there appears to have been no strategic approach to maintain these lamps and members of the corporation were expected to erect and light them at their own expense.[86] It is clear that the use of oil proved inadequate as an article printed in 1848 described how 'in a short time not a vestige of [the oil lamps] remained'.[87] The lack of sufficient lighting was an ongoing problem for Usk and Clark states that in 1850 the town was in a 'dark and dismal state…on account of [it] being in nearly utter darkness' and that the 'scanty, miserable oil lamps, few and far between, seemed to only make the night hideous' and provided 'no protection to property and persons'.[88]

Further attempts to fix the issue saw the establishment of the Usk Gas Company in 1851 that was funded by shareholders. Clark states that there were 315 shares at £5 each that were divided amongst 56 shareholders. Unfortunately, the records of the Gas Company have not survived so it is not possible to determine who bought shares and how they were distributed. The company provided the town with five gas lamps that were paid for by the Borough at a cost of £20 a year.[89] The establishment of the Gas Company would have resulted in significant changes to the town of Usk as it allowed properties, especially shops, to be lit 'as they had never been lit before' which would have changed the domestic, social and working patterns of the town's inhabitants.[90] However, despite these developments it is evident that the process of installing effective street lighting was slow. A letter published in the *Monmouthshire Merlin* a one year after the gas works were established pointed out that although the town had a source of gas, they did not 'have the benefit of its lights' as the ratepayers were refusing to be taxed 'for the supply of a few gas lights to lighten our darkness'.[91]

Although there is little evidence that the corporation was able to implement any substantial improvement schemes, its members were able to bring about changes to the urban landscape through their membership of other administrative bodies. The overlap in membership between the different bodies is explored more fully in the next chapter,

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[86] *Ibid*., 7 Jan. 1834.
[87] *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 28 Oct. 1848.
[88] Clark, *Past and present*, p. 230.
[89] GA, D.156.17. Borough of Usk records, meeting of the portreeve, aldermen and recorder of Usk, 21 Oct. 1853.
[90] *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 28 Oct. 1848, p. 3.
[91] *Ibid.*, 11 Jun. 1852, p. 5.

but many of the leading burgesses also held positions within other bodies of urban government that allowed them to exercise powers that the corporation did not hold, for example, as members of the parish they were able to form a Select vestry in 1825 to oversee the rebuilding of the almshouses and in 1844 they were instrumental in the restoration and extension of St Mary's which they intended to fund through the church rate.

The work on the parish church of St Mary's provides an interesting case study that highlights the overlap in personnel but also provides a valuable insight into the obstacles that the leading inhabitants encountered when trying to bring about change in a small town. In 1844, St Mary's underwent extensive 'enlargement, reseating and restoration' in order to carry out repairs on the building, erect an organ gallery and to 'afford additional accommodation with a due proportion of free sittings for the poor'.[92] The planning and management of the work carried out on St Mary's has been well documented by Iltyd Nicholl, one of Usk's principal inhabitants who was a member of the committee responsible for overseeing the work.[93] His notes show that the committee consisted of 15 of Usk's leading inhabitants, 12 of whom were burgesses, seven of which had either served as portreeve or would do so at a later date.

Nicholl's notes also allow for a fuller understanding of how the duke was able to impact improvement plans, even those he supported. It was Thomas Henry Wyatt, the same 'eminent London Architect' who would later design the sessions house, who was employed to carry out the work. While this may seem extravagant for a small town such as Usk, it is clear from Nicholl's notes that the Duke of Beaufort put considerable pressure on the committee to employ him. Wyatt was the cousin and brother-in-law of Beaufort's land agent and had enjoyed the patronage of the duke who had employed him to carry out work on Badminton House and other projects on his estates. A letter from Beaufort to his agent Osmond Wyatt demonstrates the influence Beaufort was able to exercise over the committee. In this letter, the duke explicitly stated that 'he' by which he meant Wyatt and had written in capitals and underlined was 'to be charged with the execution' of the work to the church making it clear that the committee were

[92] NLW, MS.18549B. Notes on Usk Church, Iltyd Nicholl (1814-1867).
[93] *Ibid*.

expected to do as instructed. As the designs required a parcel of land owned by the duke, his co-operation was essential. In the letter referred to above, the duke describes how he was so impressed by Wyatt's plans that he 'could not hesitate to give the land required' making it clear that his co-operation was dependent on the employment of Wyatt. The duke also subscribed £50 towards the cost of the work. Beaufort also gave his financial donation on the proviso that the plan to remove the medieval screen 'has been abandoned'. Despite his support of Wyatt, Beaufort felt he was entitled to assert his own opinions on the architect's plans, suggesting a sense of ownership and authority. The fact that the screen remained in the church is evidence that his influence within the town and over its principal inhabitants remained steadfast. Although the Reform Act of 1832 had limited the duke's ability to influence how the electorate voted, he continued to have a considerable impact on the town's fortunes. There appears to have been little consideration on his part as to whether the committee could afford the work or how they would raise the capital needed.

In addition to the obstacles and provisos provided by the Duke of Beaufort, Iltyd Nicholl's notes also indicate that the urban elite had to contend with considerable opposition to the plans from the wider population of Usk. He records that there was much opposition to the proposed renovations to the parish church from the ratepayers who feared that extortionate rates would be levied in order to pay for them. These concerns were clearly widespread and deeply felt which is evident in Nicholl's description of a parish meeting called to discuss the project as the 'largest parish meeting ever known as great numbers attended to oppose the proposed rates'.[94] A newspaper article published after the meeting states that the parishioners 'consented' to contribute £400 by rates with the remaining amount to be made up from support from the church building society and voluntary contributions.[95]

While it is accepted that a number of ratepayers would have opposed paying for the renovations to the parish church as they belonged to one of Usk's nonconformist chapels, the fact that so many were concerned about the economic impact of the renovations implies that financial concerns superseded any desire to transform their

[94] NLW, MS 18549B, Notes on Usk Church, Iltyd Nichol (1814-1867).
[95] *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 7 Jan. 1843, p. 3.

town. Resistant ratepayers remained an obstacle to improvement throughout the nineteenth century. When the local board proposed, once again, to build a market in 1886, it was not the Duke of Beaufort that prevented them from doing so but the wider community. *The Cardiff Times* reported that a meeting of ratepayers had been held on the Twyn to 'enter their protest against the…local board in seeking to force a cattle market on the town' at which it was carried 'unanimously' that it was 'totally unnecessary', and the idea was once again shelved.[96]

While the reluctance of ratepayers could indicate that the lower-middle and working classes did not possess the same improvement ethos that their socio-economic superiors did, it also brings one back to the argument that small-towns did not have the wealth to support ambitious improvement schemes. Although the town was home to a small number of individuals who were financially well off, they were few in number and did not possess the wealth required to help fund schemes of urban improvement. That being said, there are examples of wealthy individuals taking the initiative. Thomas Reece was a former agent of the Ironmaster Crawshay Bailey and one of Usk's wealthiest inhabitants, having lived in the town's most impressive residence, Porthycarne House. In 1825 he bought up the old Almshouses on Bridge Street and resold them 'subject to the condition' that they be rebuilt back from the road so that 'a footpath four feet wide might be obtained'.[97] Reece is also credited with addressing the issue of public lighting and, according to an article in the *Illustrated Usk Observer and Raglan Herald*, the first lighting of the streets of Usk at night was through his instrumentality'.[98] Reece, however, was an exception and although his contemporaries were happy to sit on committees and provide support through small subscriptions or donations, very few were willing or able to do more.[99] The wider community was also smaller and did not have the disposable income to support such schemes making it very difficult for small towns to raise capital through subscriptions, rates and voluntary contributions. This is evident in the fact that the shortfall needed to pay for the renovations to the church was eventually met by a private loan.

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[96] *The Cardiff Times*, 4 Sept. 1886, p. 8.
[97] Clark, *Reminiscences*, p. 16.
[98] *The Illustrated Usk Observer and Raglan Herald*, 25 Aug. 1866, p. 8.
[99] The other exception is Francis McDonnell who gave land for the construction of Usk's Roman Catholic Church in 1847.

Although a lack of capital was just one of multiple issues that the officers of small-town local government needed to overcome, it was the most significant and the most restrictive. It also left small towns dependent on aristocratic landowners such as Beaufort as their donations, whether it be in the form of money, land or both, were essential if improvements were to be made to the urban landscape.

Conclusion.

The focus of this chapter has been to explore the ways in which the urban elites of small towns were able to implement improvement schemes to bring about change to the appearance and infrastructure of their settlement. The first section demonstrated that many of the changes that were visible within England during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were not experienced by Welsh towns. Recent scholarship on Scottish and Irish towns, in addition to Hannah Barker's research on northern towns, has demonstrated that the urban renaissance identified by Borsay did not necessarily replicate itself within these countries and regions. Although there is a need for more in-depth and extensive research, the opening section of the chapter showed that the developments identified by historians as indicative of this renaissance did not occur in Wales at the same time. It was only when the economic benefits of industrialisation filtered through that towns were able to start making improvements to their built environment. The dependency on industrialisation meant that towns began to make these changes at different times. Although Swansea and Cardiff may have begun the process at the end of the eighteenth century it was not until the nineteenth century that other towns could follow suit.

Having considered the Welsh context, the changes that occurred within Usk were considered to demonstrate that small towns did undergo a process of development during the nineteenth century. While limited population growth did not see the expansion of the town, building projects altered the appearance of the town while changes in retail practice saw a shift from the market to purpose-built shops which transformed the face of the main throughfare, Bridge Street. The role of Usk as the judicial centre of the county also resulted in physical changes with the construction of the gaol and sessions house. However, none of these changes were due to the actions of the urban elite. Although individuals may have made small differences it was very

difficult for the corporation and later the local board to implement change in an official capacity.

This was not due to a lack of ambition; rather the elite were in favour of modernising the town's appearance and its amenities but were hindered by their ability to raise the necessary capital. Despite their intentions to enclose and let borough wasteland, the Duke of Beaufort refused to grant the land to the town and therefore their attempts proved futile. Similarly, hopes that a purpose- built market place could be constructed were thwarted when Beaufort refused to sell them the land required. These examples demonstrate the extent to which small towns were caught between two systems. Although he no longer exercised the same political power within Usk, as lord of the borough and the principal landowner within the town, Beaufort continued to exercise considerable influence. Although his reasons are not known, he was able to prevent the urban elite from overcoming their financial problems therefore blocking them from implementing the changes and improvements that were expected of a town in the nineteenth century.

Due to these restraints, the urban elite were forced to act through other bodies of local government such as the parish. The restoration of the parish church, St Mary's, provided an example of how the elite could enact change as members of the vestry. It was also shown that despite their ability to levy a church rate, they again were faced with obstacles. The interference of the Duke of Beaufort meant they had no option but to adhere to his wishes as his support was essential if the land and resources needed were to be secured. However, this meant that the elite were forced to implement changes that were beyond their financial capabilities leaving them with the added responsibility of funding an ambitious and expensive project when a more conservative one would have probably been more appropriate.

Urban improvement was just one aspect of the process of urbanisation that occurred during this period, in the next chapter the development of urban culture, another important facet, will be explored.

Chapter III: Urban Leisure.

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, Welsh towns did not go through the same process of renewal and improvement that had transformed the physical appearance of English towns and cities during the eighteenth century. The construction of new buildings, the implementation of improvement schemes and the adoption of more modern amenities did not occur for the majority of towns until the nineteenth century. Even then, towns as small as Usk struggled to realise change and often needed to rely on wealthy inhabitants, aristocratic landlords and outside bodies to finance improvements to the urban fabric. According to Borsay, the physical improvement of England's provincial towns was accompanied by a by a 'parallel transformation' in the social lives of towns.[1] He argued that as they became more attractive and sophisticated, towns 'created an appropriate physical setting' for the development of a range of leisure and cultural activities that eighteenth-century urban historians refer to as 'urban culture'. This chapter will investigate the nature of this parallel process within Usk to determine the development of urban leisure within small Welsh towns.

The term 'leisure' is a complicated word. At the end of the 1970s, James Walvin and Peter Bailey both adopted a definition of leisure that was based on the concept of how people spent their free time. The former defined leisure as 'the ways in which people voluntarily chose to spend their non-working hours of rest' while Bailey described it as the time that lay outside of the 'demands of work, direct social obligations and the routine activities of personal, and domestic maintenance'.[2] Hugh Cunningham argued that the term was problematic and described it as a 'highly ambiguous' word that 'cannot be pinned down to a neat, one sentence definition'.[3] He argued that at the end of the eighteenth century leisure was considered 'free non-obligated time' while sports and pastimes were organized, communal events that were 'more or less obligatory occasions' and that it was not until the end of the nineteenth century that the term was used in reference to 'the non-work time or activities' of the mass of the population.[4]

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[1] P. Borsay, *The English urban renaissance. Culture and society in the provincial town 1660-1770* (Oxford, 1989), p. 117.
[2] J. Walvin, *Leisure and society 1830-1950* (London, 1978), p. viii; P. Bailey, *Leisure and class in Victorian England. Rational recreation and the contest for control 1830-1885* (London, 1978), p. 6.
[3] H. Cunningham, *Leisure in the industrial revolution c. 1780-c. 1880* (London, 1980), pp. 12-3.
[4] *Ibid*., p. 12.

Cunningham's notion that leisure was used to refer to a period of time may help explain the change in terminology on the part of historians between eighteenth-century urban 'culture' and nineteenth-century urban 'leisure'. Many of the elements of eighteenth-century urban leisure consisted of forms of music, literature, art and performance that were considered elements of 'high' culture. As a result, culture has become a term employed by historians retrospectively to describe the activities and entertainments that the upper classes partook of during their leisure time. In contrast, the recreational activities on offer within the nineteenth-century town tend to be described as 'leisure', a term employed by contemporaries. To some extent this change in terminology reflects the socio-economic focus of historians. While those who have discussed eighteenth-century urban leisure have primarily focused upon forms of sociability and consumption that were socially exclusive to the wealthy upper classes, historians researching the nineteenth century have focused on the growing numbers of working-class people who were beginning to demand their own pastimes and entertainment.[5]

For the purposes of this chapter, the term leisure will be employed to refer to those recreational activities and pastimes that were available to the inhabitants of Usk during the nineteenth century to demonstrate that even the smallest towns were able to develop a leisure culture that was primarily urban based. It will be argued that the absence of a wealthy, urban based gentry, the slow development of a Welsh middle class; and the distance from London meant that Welsh towns did not develop an eighteenth-century urban culture akin to that which emerged within London and the provincial towns of England. Analysis of Usk's urban culture will show that while the local gentry were instrumental in the organization of leisure during the opening decades of the nineteenth century, their withdrawal during the 1830s and 1840s allowed Usk's middle-class urban elite to assume leadership. It will be demonstrated that the elite used the provision of leisure and recreation as a means of reinforcing Usk's urban credentials while at the same time consolidating their position within the urban community. Finally, the chapter will argue that the growth of urban leisure within small towns was hindered by a workforce that had not yet experienced an increase in free time, a population that had

[5] H. Cunningham, 'Leisure and culture', in F. M. L. Thompson (ed), *The Cambridge social history of Britain 1750-1950* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 294.

limited wealth and a lack of adequate space that was aggravated by limited municipal funds.

Over the last 40 years historians have identified that during the long eighteenth century, English towns underwent a period of change that saw new leisure and cultural activities emerge. According to Clark and Borsay, the period saw an urban elite who, benefitting from an increase in wealth and free time, went in search of activities to entertain and educate themselves while providing an opportunity to showcase their civility and social status. It was only natural that towns would play a 'key part in servicing this demand' as they were 'the traditional point of exchange'.[6] As they became more visually attractive and more pleasant to be in, they became the obvious arenas for this new form of recreation. Discussion of Borsay's thesis and McInnes' concept of the eighteenth-century leisure town, outlined in the previous chapter, has proliferated in the historiography since the 1980s and encouraged historians to take a closer look at the development of urban culture. This research has demonstrated that the eighteenth century saw London and the English provincial towns develop elements of a shared and distinctively urban culture that consisted of a variety of sociable and public activities such as balls, book clubs and visits to the theatre and coffeehouse that allowed the upper classes to display their civility and wealth while at the same time generating knowledge, debate, and cultural production.

In contrast the urban culture of nineteenth-century towns is harder to define. Due to the numerous differences in town size, urban categories and social composition, the mid to late nineteenth century saw the range of activities and pastimes become so large and varied that historians have tended to focus on particular facets rather than provide an over-arching picture.[7] However, by pulling this volume of scholarship together it is possible to recognize that the 'urban culture' of the eighteenth century that was dominated by the gentry and upper-middle classes evolved to become one that was increasingly pluralistic and in which philanthropy and sport played a more significant

[6] *Ibid*., p. 267.
[7] See, for example, P. Bailey, '"A mingled mass of perfectly legitimate pleasures". the Victorian middle class and the problem of leisure', *Victorian Studies*, 21, no 1 (1977), pp. 7-28; H. Cunningham, *The volunteer force. A social and political history* (London, 1975); R. J. Morris, 'Structure, culture and society in British towns', in M. Daunton (ed.), *The Cambridge urban history of Britain. Vol. III, 1840–1950* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 395-426.

role. It was also one in which the lower middle and working classes became more significant consumers.

The nineteenth century, however, witnessed the increased involvement of the middle classes in the provision of recreation and it was the urban elite of towns across England and Wales who helped secure space and provide new venues for entertainment and recreational activities. Bailey argued that the middle classes had a complicated relationship with the notion of leisure as it constituted a substantial threat to the 'discipline and cohesion' of their world and therefore perceived it to be a 'dangerous frontier zone' which challenged established law and order.[8] Their solution was 'rational recreation', an approach to leisure that focused on 'morally and acceptable constituents'.[9] Although this was initially a movement 'of and for the middle class', by the 1820s they had begun to look outwards to the pastimes of the working classes. [10] Alarmed at what they saw as the violent, debauched and uncivilized nature of popular culture, the middle classes employed 'rational recreation' in an attempt to reform the manners and tastes of the working classes.

Historians have put forward two key reasons why the focus of rational recreation shifted during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Bailey drew attention to the fear that unless suitable recreations were provided for the poor they would 'fly to demagogues and dangerous causes' and that therefore, rational recreation was a means of social control.[11] Chartism and civil unrest was a very real threat to social order and it was believed that appropriate amusements were essential for diverting the lower orders away from political disaffection'.[12] While Cunningham acknowledged that it would 'be foolish, indeed impossible' to ignore the social control side of rational recreation, he suggested that it had its 'origins in guilt as well as in fear' and suggests that there followed a 'positive urge to open up to the working class cultural and aesthetic experiences from which it had previously been excluded'.[13]

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[8] Bailey, 'A mingled mass of legitimate pleasures', p. 18.
[9] *Ibid.*
[10] Cunningham, *Leisure in the industrial revolution*, p. 91.
[11] Robert Slaney, MP, quoted in Bailey, *Leisure and class*, pp. 47-48.
[12] *Ibid.*, p. 48.
[13] Cunningham, *Leisure in the industrial revolution*, p. 91.

As things stand, the historiography of eighteenth and nineteenth century urban culture favours that of London and the industrial, regional and provincial towns that existed at the top of the urban hierarchy. Historians such as Penelope Corfield, Michael Reed and Peter Borsay have examined the culture that emerged within smaller towns but their research is primarily if not solely based on eighteenth-century English examples. [14] There are very few studies that discuss the urban culture of Welsh towns in the eighteenth century. Louise Miskell argued that this failure is the result of 'an intense interest in labour relations, industrial organization and the working-class experience' that has dominated research into nineteenth-century Welsh urbanisation.[15] However, those that do address it, Miskell included, have focused primarily on the urban culture of Wales' industrial centres rather than that which existed within the plethora of small towns that were a significant feature of the Welsh urban landscape.[16] By exploring the nature of urban leisure within Usk this chapter shows that even towns as small as Usk were able to support a relatively varied culture of leisure that was distinctively urban.

The evolution of eighteenth-century, urban culture: the Welsh context.

Clark and Houston state that cultural developments tended to occur a 'couple of decades' later in Wales as a consequence of its 'lagging' economy.[17] While the eighteenth century had been one of economic and industrial progress for England, the period in Wales has been described as being 'more significant as promise than achievement'.[18] This section will explore the ramifications of sluggish economic development on the growth of urban leisure in Wales as it resulted in a delayed consumer revolution, the absence of an urban gentry and an undeveloped infrastructure

[14] P. Corfield, 'Small towns, large implications: social and cultural roles of small towns in eighteenth-century England and Wales', *Journal for Eighteenth Century Studies*, 10 (1987), pp. 125-138; M. Reed, 'The cultural role of small towns in England 1600-1800', in P. Clark (ed.), *Small towns in early modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 122-47; P. Borsay and A. McInnes, 'The emergence of a leisure town: or an urban renaissance? [debate]', *Past & Present*, 126, vol. 1 (1990), p. 190.
[15] L. Miskell, *'Intelligent town'. An urban history of Swansea, 1780-1855* (Cardiff, 2006), p. 160.
[16] See, Miskell, *Intelligent town*; A. Croll, *Civilizing the urban. Popular culture and public space in Merthyr, c. 1870-1914* (Cardiff, 2000); P. O'Leary, *Claiming the streets. Processions and urban culture in south Wales c. 1830-1880* (Cardiff, 2012).
[17] P. Clark and R. A. Houston, 'Culture and leisure 1700-1840', in P. Clark (ed.), *The Cambridge urban history of Britain. Vol. II, 1540 - 1840* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 577-8.
[18] R. O. Roberts, 'The quickenings of industrial activity', in T. Herbert and G. E. Jones (eds.), *The remaking of Wales in the eighteenth century* (Cardiff, 1988), p. 91.

which hindered the ability of Welsh towns to develop an urban culture at the same pace as their English counterparts.

One consequence of Wales' immature economy and a reason why Welsh towns were slower to develop leisure and recreational forms was that the consumer revolution, as experienced in England, did not start to develop in Wales until the second half of the eighteenth century. Borsay argues that the consumer revolution was a significant factor in the urban renaissance because an expansion in commerce, industry and the demand for social and consumer services provided the essential economic foundations for a change in the quality of urban life.[19] This shift saw towns become the 'producer, displayer and distributer' of new, luxury, consumer goods and leisure activities and meant they played a central role in 'servicing the new demand' brought about by the commercialization of society.

There are several factors that indicate that Wales did not experience a consumer revolution at the same time as England, the first being an absence of a wealthy and an urban based gentry. One of the most significant aspects of the consumer revolution and subsequently the emergence of urban culture was the role played by the upper classes: Clark and Houston going as far to say that the influx of the gentry had a 'crucial' impact on the cultural life of towns.[20] Eighteenth-century urban culture was designed to cater to the upper echelons of society who, enjoying greater levels of wealth and being 'leisured', increasingly demanded high status and commercial services. As a result, towns became centres of fashionable society where the genteel classes, armed with a surplus of wealth and free time, congregated to partake in cultural and recreational activities.

Within Wales, however, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had seen a reconfiguration of the Welsh gentry caused by a combination of crippling debt, mismanagement and a widespread 'shortage' of male heirs that resulted in the lower gentry often being forced to sell their estates to their more affluent neighbours. This is evident in Glamorgan where 45 of the 83 resident or semi resident families who owned

[19] Borsay, *English urban renaissance*, p. 37.
[20] Clark and Houston, 'Culture and leisure', p. 592.

landed estates in Glamorgan in the 1660s disappeared within a century while in Montgomeryshire about 40% of the estates vanished in the 70 years before 1760.[21] This resulted in a decline in the size of Wales' genteel class. For those that survived, life was far from the conspicuous consumption that is often associated with their English counterparts and more affluent superiors, as the Welsh gentry did not enjoy the same levels of prosperity as their English contemporaries. Howell points out that in the 1790s 'few families had sufficient incomes to place them within the ranks of the great gentry of upwards of £5000 a year and of the wealthy gentry of between £2000 and £3000 a year'. As a result, the Welsh gentry 'stretched lower down the social pyramid than did their English counter parts'. [22]

The nature of Monmouthshire's gentry has been researched by Judy Jones who concluded that despite a county elite which was made up of no more than a dozen or so families, the gentry in Monmouthshire primarily consisted of men who were styled 'gent' and whose lands and interests were localized .[23] It is also worth noting that Jones states that many of the minor gentry farmed their land themselves.[24] They, therefore, did not experience the increase in free time experienced by their wealthier peers that gave them more time to pursue cultural and leisure activities. Consequently, they would have had a limited impact on the growth of urban culture within the towns of South Wales as a restricted level of surplus wealth and a limited amount of free time meant that they were not in a position to demand or consume urban culture to the same extent as their English counterparts. As Geraint H. Jenkins puts it: 'not for them the gaieties of the London season or the hazards of the turf'.[25]

In addition to the limited size and wealth of the Welsh gentry, Welsh estates had increasingly fallen into the hands of English and Scottish aristocratic landlords who very rarely resided or even visited their Welsh domains. Benjamin Malkin, travelling through Wales in 1803, commented on the absenteeism of landowners in Cardiganshire and observed that the community was thereby deprived of hospitality and the poor were

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[21] Geraint H. Jenkins, *The foundations of modern Wales 1642-1780* (Oxford, 1993), p. 94 and p. 264.
[22] D. H. Howell, *Patriarchs and parasites. The gentry of south-west Wales in the eighteenth century* (Cardiff, 1986), pp. 8-10.
[23] J. Jones, 'The patterns of everyday life', in M. Grey and P. Morgan (eds.), *Gwent County History. Vol. 2. The making of Monmouthshire, 1536-1780* (Cardiff, 2008), p. 174.
[24] *Ibid.* p. 176.
[25] Jenkins, *Foundations of modern Wales*, p. 266.

denied employment. Members of the gentry whose primary residence was in Wales also spent little time at home. In addition to the political and economic reasons for prolonged stays in the capital, the rounds of balls, assemblies and parties that constituted the London 'season' meant that many of Wales' most affluent inhabitants spent extended periods of time in the city. Philip Jenkins argues that even for the poorer country gentleman, London offered an array of social attractions such as theatres, coffeehouses and tavern clubs that were well within their reach.[26]

When at home their social lives, which consisted of a 'ceaseless round of drinking, gambling, fox-hunting, hare-coursing, cock-fighting and shooting' were concentrated on their own estates.[27] Instead of attending social events in the public space of their local towns, the gentry preferred to receive and entertain within the confines of their private homes. Consequently, it was these that became the focus of fashionable society and not the towns. The north Wales estate of Sir Watkin Williams Wynn of Wynstay included a private theatre which the leading families of north-east Wales 'flocked to'.[28] The tendency to entertain at home was a reflection of the urban fabric of Welsh towns that had yet to make the aesthetic improvements visible in English towns, as discussed in chapter two, but was also an indicator that these towns lacked the attributes of English urban culture.

The presence of the landed elite provided a demand for luxury goods and leisure that stimulated the urban economy and aided the emergence of the kinds of social and recreational activities associated with eighteenth-century urban culture. In addition to entertaining at home, it is also apparent that when they visited English towns, the Welsh gentry were also purchasing luxury items. The account book of Iltyd Nicholl of Usk shows that he would go to Bath or Bristol to buy a wide variety of goods including horses, Spanish leather for shoes, beer, wine and champagne, materials, parasols and a variety of clothes.[29] The fact that the gentry were shopping for these items outside Wales indicates that Welsh towns were not able to service this need. The gentry also brought with them a considerable social prestige that would have further enriched a

[26] P. Jenkins, *The making of a ruling class: the Glamorgan gentry 1640-1790* (Cambridge, 1983), p. 243.
[27] Jenkins, *Foundations of modern Wales*, p. 262; Howell, *Patriarchs and parasites*, p. 182.
[28] Jenkins, *Foundations of modern Wales*, p. 263.
[29] NLW, MS.18512E. Account book of Iltyd Nicholl, 1814 – 1835.

town's reputation as a centre of fashionable society. However, the tendency of the Welsh gentry to look to English towns to satisfy their demands for luxury goods, and their consumption of urban leisure coupled with their preference to entertain at home meant that local towns lacked the patronage, both financial and social, that was needed to develop what subsequent historians have identified as an urban culture.

The distance between Wales and London would have also hindered the commercialisation of Welsh society. McKendrick states that size and character of London was a prime advantage for the creation of a consumer society.[30] He argues that with as much as 16% of the English population exposed to the capital's shops, lifestyle and fashions, London's potential for 'influencing consumer behaviour was enormous' but also key to the spread of this culture to the rest of the country. For Wales, isolated geographically and with its communication links hindered by distance and a poor transport network, the impact of London was less influential. Although the wealthiest of the gentry may have spent time in the metropolis, this would have been a very small minority of the Welsh population as travel across Wales was slow, treacherous and expensive and a journey to London would have taken days, if not longer.

Jenkins has suggested that there were other means of contact with the city besides actual residence such as newspapers, correspondence and the transmission of trends through the gentry as they interacted with local society.[31] However, such communications would have remained confined to the wealthier members of Welsh society. English newspapers would have been predominantly read by the English-speaking gentry as Welsh remained the predominant language. In 1801, 70% of the population were monoglot Welsh speakers although this would have been lower in Monmouthshire. W. T. Pryce, using the Bishop of Llandaff's returns, concluded that there was a linguistic divide between the east and west of the county and although Welsh was still the 'language of daily life' in the latter, it was 'in retreat'.[32] At the same time the fact that the gentry preferred to entertain and socialise at home meant that the

[30] N. McKendrick, 'The consumer revolution of eighteenth-century England', in N. McKendrick, J. Brewer and J. H. Plumb (eds.), *The birth of a consumer society. The commercialisation of eighteenth-century England* (London, 1982), p. 21.
[31] Jenkins, *Making of a ruling class*, p. 244.
[32] J. Davies, *The Welsh language: a history* (Cardiff, 2014), p. 82; W. T. R. Pryce, 'Language shifts in Gwent, c. 1770-1981' in N. Coupland and A. R. Thomas (eds.), *English in Wales; diversity, conflict and change* (Philadelphia, 1990), p. 51.

communication of the latest fashions would have been limited. Not only were there fewer opportunities for the lesser gentry and labouring classes to see them being modelled but few would have been unable to afford them and even fewer would have had access to a shop that sold them.

Despite the hindrances discussed above, some towns did host certain recreational activities that were considered part of the eighteenth-century urban culture. Howell identified balls, card assemblies and plays being held in towns such as Haverfordwest, Carmarthen and Aberystwyth. Jenkins went a step further by suggesting that provincial towns became 'centres of leisure and cultural life' and argued that Welsh towns were 'increasingly redeveloped … with reproductions in miniature of the most fashionable theatres, assembly rooms, teahouses pleasure gardens, civic buildings and racetracks.[33] Such claims can be somewhat misleading. Jenkins uses Monmouth and Cowbridge as examples of towns that had developed these traits, but it must be remembered that to some extent these towns were an exception within the Welsh urban landscape. Monmouth, situated close to the English border and within the Wye valley, benefitted from its proximity to the cultural centres of Bath and Bristol and from the tourism boom that followed the discovery of the 'picturesque' while Cowbridge, situated in the Vale of Glamorgan, 'stood in the most prosperous and gentrified landscape found in Wales'.[34]

Jenkins' assertion that Welsh towns contained smaller versions of the buildings and facilities that were to be found in their English equivalents is also problematic. While such accommodations may have appeared on the urban landscape, a refitted room within an old, seventeenth-century inn is a far cry from the elaborate and ornate assembly rooms that were being purposely built in York or Warwick. These English examples were also constructed 20 to 30 years earlier than their Welsh counterparts. In a similar vein, historians may claim that towns such as Haverfordwest, Carmarthen and Cowbridge offered 'all year-round amusements' but these too struggled in comparison with their English counterparts. When Mrs. Morgan attended two of the three assize balls held at Haverfordwest she thought the room 'not a good or an elegant one' and

[33] Jenkins, *A history of modern Wales*, p. 37.
[34] Jenkins, 'Wales' in P. Clark (ed.), *The Cambridge urban history of Britain. Vol. II, 1540 - 1840* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 142.

noted that the Welsh ladies lacked 'the style' often seen 'in an English ballroom'. It is also evident she found the second one repetitive commenting that it 'was much the same as the other; the same room, the same company and conducted in the same manner'.[35]

Louise Miskell has demonstrated that during the opening decades of the nineteenth century, Swansea acquired a range of entertainment and leisure facilities. This included a new theatre, assembly rooms, walled parks and pleasure gardens. While these developments occurred much later than they did in certain English towns, it should be noted that Swansea's process of development differed from what was happening within other Welsh towns. One of the first regions to industrialise, Swansea benefitted from an earlier injection of wealth, but it also developed a reputation as an elite bathing resort. According to Miskell, this role was of 'greater significance in shaping the character and range of urban facilities' that developed within the town as many of the improvement initiatives were carried out 'if not exclusively for the benefit of summer visitors,…then at least with their needs in mind'.[36] Swansea, therefore, was an exception, a fact Miskell acknowledges when she states that by the 1820s, Swansea 'had reached a position of urban maturity unrivalled in Wales' and that 'no other Welsh town could boast the same range of urban amenities' at this time.[37]

Considering the context of the urban landscape of Wales during the eighteenth century, Usk was never likely to develop its own, distinctive forms of urban leisure. If towns such as Swansea, Wales' second largest settlement in 1801, did not have assemblies and other leisure facilities until the final decades of the century, then neither would Usk. Not only because it was smaller but also because the economic prerequisites did not exist in Wales until the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Organisation and consumption.

Unfortunately, the primary sources regarding urban leisure in Usk are limited. Newspaper articles provide the greatest insight into the development and growth of

[35] M. Morgan, *A tour to Milford Haven in the year 1791* (London, 1795), p. 222.
[36] Miskell, *Intelligent town*, p. 42.
[37] *Ibid*., p. 63.

leisure activities in Usk with reports and adverts providing an indication of activities that were held in Usk such as balls, dinners and card parties. Although there is an increase in material concerning the urban culture of Usk following the establishment of the *Illustrated Usk Observer and Raglan Herald*, they give little insight into the leisure activities of the nonconformist community. As a result, it is necessary to consult liberal newspapers such as *The South Wales Daily News, The Pontypool Free Press and Herald of the Hills*, and *The Cardiff Times*, which although limited in scope and only published during the second half of the nineteenth century, indicate that the chapel was an important source of leisure and entertainment for its congregations.

The other source pertaining to Usk's urban leisure is the account book and pocketbook of Iltyd Nicholl.[38] He was one of Usk's wealthiest inhabitants, living in one of its largest houses and enjoying familial links to the Duke of Beaufort's Monmouthshire agent, Arthur Wyatt. His account book covers Nicholl's household expenditure from 1814 – 1835 and provides an insight into the recreational forms available in Usk as entries detail the costs of activities that he attended. His pocketbook of 1844 shows the events that he and his family attended during the year. These sources only provide snapshots of what was happening during the years they cover and only those activities in which the Nicholl family was involved. Once again there is no mention of Usk's poorer residents and therefore the information derived from these sources and from the newspaper reports only sheds light on the leisure activities of Usk's elite rather than the wider Usk community.

When the development of Usk's urban leisure is considered, it is evident that it underwent a significant shift as the century progressed. At the start of the nineteenth century, it was the upper echelons of society who were the primary organisers and consumers of Usk's leisure activities. Newspaper articles and Iltyd Nicholls' account books indicate that during the 1820s Usk hosted balls that were organised and funded by the county elite, a book club where membership was dependant on the payment of subscription fees, a cricket club that was played by 'gentlemen' and an annual race

[38] NLW, MS.18512E. Account book of Iltyd Nicholl, 1814-1835; NLW, MS.18518A. Pocket book of Iltyd Nicholl, 1844.

meet.[39] Apart from the races which, although organised by the upper classes, would have been attended by all sections of society, the majority of these activities were restricted to the upper classes of Usk and the wider Monmouthshire community. Nicholl's account book shows that he paid £6.18s to the book club in 1814, £1.3s to attend a ball in Usk in 1817 and £6.18s.6d to attend another in 1836, costs that would have excluded those of a lower class from attending.[40]

These activities disappear from the archival record during the 1830s. The last surviving mention of Usk Book Society appears in the *Monmouthshire Merlin* in 1836 with an advertisement announcing that the society intended to sell a substantial number of volumes, which could be indicative of it closing.[41] Similarly, Usk's cricket club does not appear in the local press after 1829 and although it is possible that it continued to exist after that date, reports on the establishment of the cricket club in Usk in 1857 indicates that it had ceased to exist by that time.[42] The same can be concluded for horse racing in Usk. There is no indication when the races at Usk finished but an article printed in 1864 states that a 'movement [was] on foot to establish races' within the vicinity of the town, while a later example describes how the races at Usk 'for want of proper support … were discontinued'.[43] A newspaper article published in 1838 detailed how the races at Monmouth were at risk and listed races held elsewhere in the county but made no reference to any race meet at Usk indicating that they had ceased by that date.[44]

The limited source material makes it difficult to determine when and why these activities ceased. While their disappearance could suggest that there was a fall in the number of gentry residing in Usk and a subsequent decrease in demand for such entertainments, it is clear that it was part of a much wider pattern that was occurring across the country that saw gentry attitudes towards public leisure change. Rather than seeing such activities as an opportunity to showcase their wealth and urbanity they

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[39] *Glamorgan Monmouth and Brecon Gazette and Merthyr Guardian*, 16 Jan. 1836, p. 3; NLW, MS.18512E. Account book of Iltyd Nicholl, 1814-1835; *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 20 Jul. 1833, p. 3; *Ibid*., 14 Nov. 1829, p. 3.
[40] NLW, MS.18512E. Account book of Iltyd Nicholl, 1814-1835.
[41] *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 28 Apr. 1832, p.1; 9 Jul. 1836, p. 1.
[42] *Illustrated Usk Observer and Raglan Herald*, 9 May 1857, p. 1.
[43] *Ibid*, 15 Oct. 1864, p. 8; *Western Mail*, 18 Apr. 1874, p. 8.
[44] *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 29 Sept. 1838, p. 3.

preferred to socialise in private. As a result, they withdrew from public displays associated with eighteenth century urban culture, choosing instead to spend their leisure time at home 'in the armpit of the family'.[45] Writing with reference to the Gloucestershire gentry, Joan Johnson argued that it was the infiltration of upper class 'activities and sports' by 'people of other classes' that resulted in this withdrawal.[46] The commercialization and democratization of leisure meant that activities, which had previously been the preserve of the upper classes became increasingly available to those of a lower socio-economic background. Such developments are evident in Monmouthshire with the establishment of a 'tradesmen's' cricket team in Pontypool which played the Abergavenny team in 1837, as reported in the *Monmouthshire Merlin.* However, the article makes no reference to any friction between the two teams based on class and reports that the 'inviters had prepared for their Pontypool friends an extensive and elegantly fitted up tent, in which 40 sat down to an excellent and substantial dinner'.[47] It is difficult to argue that commercialisation resulted in the appropriation of upper class culture in Usk by the lower classes as there is not the evidence to support such a claim, however there is evidence that certain leisure activities were becoming increasingly accessible. Travelling theatre companies advertised different priced seating while local landlords started to hold their own balls, dinners and card parties.[48] According to Johnson, a preference to socialize with their own circle saw the upper classes prefer to entertain themselves at home with 'well-stocked libraries' and musical instruments that were 'easier and cheaper to obtain'.[49]

The pocketbook of Iltyd Nicholl is illustrative of this trend. It shows that in 1844 the majority of his and his family's socialising was done within the privacy of the home, both his and the homes of his social equals.[50] Except for the occasional fair, the odd Missionary meeting and the annual ploughing match, by the 1840s Nicholl engaged in very few public events. Instead, he chose to spend his time visiting and receiving friends, gardening, and travelling to places such as Bath, Bristol and Cowbridge. While this withdrawal may have been due to his increasing age, there is little to suggest that

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[45] J. M. Golby and A. W. Perdue, *Civilisation of the crowd*: *popular culture in England 1750-1900* (Stroud, 1999), p. 145.
[46] J. Johnson, *The Gloucestershire gentry* (Gloucester, 1989), p. 248.
[47] *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 2 Sep. 1837, p. 3.
[48] *Usk Observer and Monmouth Central Advisor*, 31 May 1856, p. 1.
[49] Johnson, *The Gloucestershire gentry*, p. 248.
[50] NLW, MS.18518A. Pocket book of Iltyd Nicholl, 1844.

his daughters were attending such events and is indicative that the Monmouthshire gentry were also choosing to spend their leisure time away from the public sphere. It also corresponds with the withdrawal of this class from the civic life of Usk observed in chapter one. Therefore, there were factors at play which saw the upper classes disappear from urban life.

A fear of working-class insurrection was an important contributing factor to this withdrawal. A *Monmouthshire Merlin* article published in 1840 blamed the 'wild cry of savage insurrection and … the solemn voice of justice' for the disappearance of the county's 'gay and joyous tone'.[51] Events such as the French Revolution, the Swing Riots, the Luddite protests and general outbreaks of social unrest around the issue of reform in the 1830s saw the upper classes become increasingly fearful that the rapidly growing working classes would rise up in revolution and overthrow the existing system. These fears were even stronger in south Wales following the Merthyr Riots of 1831 and the Chartist uprising in November 1839. The latter saw an estimated 8,000 armed protesters march on the Monmouthshire town of Newport where they were met by troops who opened fire, killing 22 of them.[52] The subsequent trial of the Chartist leadership was held in Monmouth and was a solemn and formal affair that found three men guilty of treason and sentenced them to death.

At the time, the editor of the *Monmouthshire Merlin* was Edward Dowling, a keen opponent of the Chartist movement. Dowling described the Chartist leaders as 'selfish, designing and profligate demagogues' who were the 'plunderers of the people' and 'enemies of social order'.[53] Considering this perspective, it is unsurprising that the *Merlin* would blame the Chartists for the loss of Monmouthshire's 'gay and joyous tone'; however, there is some truth to it. During the trial jury members were cajoled and threatened while others connected with the prosecution were assaulted and received threatening letters.[54] Many of these were members of Monmouthshire's elite as it was from the county establishment that the jury was selected. As the liberal newspaper, *The Edinburgh Review* observed, the trial of the Newport Chartists would see 'the prisoners

[51] *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 1 Feb. 1840, p. 3.
[52] For a comprehensive investigation into the Newport uprising see D. J. V. Jones, *The Last Uprising. The Newport Chartist Insurrection of 1839* (Cardiff, 1999).
[53] *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 9 Nov. 1839, p. 4.
[54] *Ibid.*, pp. 188 and 198.

… tried not by their peers but by a jury of the class they had alarmed'. [55] In addition to the threats of physical violence, and of even greater concern, was the suggestion that the uprising was the start of an attempted revolution, a theory reinforced by the press who labelled it a 'long-planned insurrection'.[56] The idea that the working classes within the region might start a violent rebellion must have terrified the local elite, a fear that was intensified by frequent reports of chartist lectures, meetings and further threats of violence in the local press.[57]

The Newport Uprising was just one of a number of working-class protests that resulted in violence. Philip Jenkins argues that these outbreaks were so frequent that during the second quarter of the nineteenth century, south Wales 'appeared to be one of the political storm centres of the British Isles' earning itself a reputation for being 'violent and insurrectionary'.[58] These incidents were the result of building frustration and anger at the injustice of low wages, long hours and minimal poor relief that was focused on members of the establishment. These incidents also did much to reinforce the notion that the working classes were 'savages' as described by Reginald Blewitt, the MP for the Monmouth boroughs constituency.[59] Considering this environment and the attitudes of the upper classes it is understandable that leisure activities that were accessible to the wider community alarmed the elite and contributed to their withdrawal.

The vacuum left was promptly filled by the middle classes who became the primary shapers of Usk's leisure and recreational culture for the rest of the nineteenth century. This can be seen in the changing nature of the activities and events on offer in Usk. The 'assembly ball' attended by the county elite of the 1830s had been replaced by a 'commercial ball' by 1845, which was for 'socialising the business circle of [the] community'.[60] Usk was no longer a hub for a wider, county-based urban culture that entertained the upper echelons of Monmouthshire society, instead it was hosting social events organized by and for the benefit of its own middle-class inhabitants. The

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[55] Quoted in D. Harrison, *Monmouth and the Chartists* (No place, 2010), p. 19.
[56] *The Times*, 11 Nov. 1839 quoted in D. Egan, *People, protest and politics. Case studies in nineteenth-century Wales* (Llandysul, 1987), p. 84.
[57] *Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian*, 5 May 1849, p. 3; *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 7 May 1842, p. 3; *Glamorgan Monmouth and Brecon Gazette and Merthyr Guardian*, 7 Nov. 1840, p. 3; *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 14 Mar. 1840, p. 3.
[58] Jenkins, *A history of modern Wales*, p. 262.
[59] As quoted in Jones, *The last uprising*, p. 3.
[60] *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 15 Mar. 1845, p. 3.

newspaper report of the event described it as being for the benefit of community business. This is a semantic shift that also ties in with middle-class sensibilities and indicates their growing role in the provision of leisure and cultural activities within Usk.

The nature of Usk's urban leisure.

As already touched upon, the Victorian middle classes used leisure as a form of social control known as rational recreation and many of the leisure activities that emerged in Usk during the second half of the century could be considered examples of this form of leisure. The mechanics institute and penny readings established in 1850 and 1865 respectively, aimed to educate; the sports clubs that emerged during the second half of the century reflected the belief that physical exercise was good for the mind and body while temperance societies, choral groups and choirs gave the working man (and in some cases, woman) an alternative to the public house. While it could be argued that the size of Usk's working class population made it unlikely that Usk's urban elite feared an outbreak of social unrest, the impact of the Chartist march on Newport in 1839 should not be overlooked. During the uprising it was believed that the protesters intended to march on Monmouth via Usk and as a consequence, 180 inhabitants were sworn in as special constables and orders were sent from Lieutenant Gray of the 45th Regiment that they were to guard the bridge until the military arrived.[61] Although this threat came to nothing, there can be no doubt that it caused considerable panic amongst Usk's principal inhabitants that was only aggravated by further reports of possible violence.

Apprehension of the working classes, especially those of the nonconformist working classes was further heightened by the publication of the *Blue Books* in 1847 that portrayed the predominantly nonconformist, Welsh speaking lower classes as uneducated, uncivilised, and unpredictable. The church-chapel dynamic will be discussed more fully in the next chapter; however, it is conceivable that Usk's principal inhabitants perceived the nonconformist, lower classes as a threat to the *status quo* and

[61] J. H. Clark, 'Autobiography', in J. H. Clark (ed.), *Reminiscences of Monmouthshire* (Usk, 1908), pp. 56-7.

given rise to the idea that they needed to be reformed and improved in order to prevent any further dangers.

Even though much of Usk's leisure adhered to the principles of rational recreation, there were other factors at play that played including a desire to reinforce Usk's urban credentials by making sure it had a similar leisure culture to other towns. A letter published in the *Illustrated Usk Observer and Raglan Herald* in 1864 demonstrates an awareness of what was happening in other urban centres, which led to individuals drawing comparisons and questioning why Usk, a town, did not have the same facilities. The author laments the fact that 'every town – and indeed, I may say village, across the country is enlivened by the popular and agreeable' penny readings and asks why Usk 'should be behind other towns?'[62] This indicates an awareness that Usk was failing to adopt forms of leisure that other towns were while the reference to villages calls into question Usk's status as a town. Plumb argued that social emulation led to the percolation of urban culture downwards from the upper classes.[63] Although historians have questioned this thesis, perhaps the theory behind it can be used to explain the growth of urban culture within small towns. Seeing what was provided in other towns, small towns like Usk strove to emulate the leisure and recreational activities that they provided in an attempt to fit the developing ideal of what it was to be urban. By providing certain forms of leisure, small towns were able to adopt some of the urban characteristics embodied by the larger towns and cities.

Such emulation was not just a means of 'keeping up with the Joneses' but part of the ongoing efforts of small towns to maintain their urban status that dominated their experience of the nineteenth century. Usk's urban credentials came under threat during this period. Its town status was based on its ancient charter, but as demonstrated in chapter one, the exclusion of Usk from the Municipal Corporations Act meant that the corporation went into rapid decline causing its urban status to be doubted. By providing leisure activities that shared elements of a wider, national leisure culture, the urban elite was able to reinforce Usk's claims to urban status. They were also able to further enhance their own position as leaders within the community. A report on performances

[62] *Illustrated Usk Observer and Raglan Herald*, 26 Nov. 1864, p. 8.
[63] J. H. Plumb, *The commercialisation of leisure in eighteenth-century England* (Reading, 1973), pp. 17-18.

given by a travelling company at the Phoenix theatre in 1865 stated that the performances on the Friday night 'were under the patronage of the portreeve'.[64] A subsequent advertisement for Usk's Histrionic Club in 1881 made it known that the upcoming programme contained entertainments that were 'given under the patronage of … the portreeve…the burgesses of Usk…and the leading inhabitants of the neighbourhood'.[65]

In addition to patronising entertainments for the community at large, it is also evident that the elite held entertainments for their own enjoyment. In 1881, an 'invitation ball' took place that was under the patronage of the portreeve and the burgesses, a number of whom served as stewards at the event.[66] It was clearly a great success with dancing continuing until five the following morning. The fact that it was for a select group of people indicates that the middle classes were also looking to provide entertainment for their own consumption. Although it is impossible to determine who wrote the letter quoted above to the *Illustrated Usk Observer and Raglan Herald* regarding the limited nature of leisure within Usk, the language used suggests that it was a middle-class inhabitant. The author of the letter states that 'there is but little occurring in the town to enliven the monotony of life spent in it' while a similar letter printed in the same column states it would be a 'great pity' if the 'long winter evenings' were to be spent 'in the same monotonous manner [as] the last two winters'.[67]

Due to the similar use of language, it seems possible that these two letters were penned by the same inhabitant, possibly Clark himself, and their publication at the same time suggests a hidden agenda, but they also demonstrate that members of his class wanted activities for their own enjoyment as much as they did for the benefit of the lower classes. Despite claiming that the mechanics institute and the penny readings were to provide 'useful instruction' to the 'abundance of young men' within the town, a report on the mechanics institute in 1856 commented that of the 50 members less than one quarter were 'tradesmen or mechanics' suggesting that the middle-classes made up the majority of the membership. [68] A letter printed in the *County Observer* suggests that

[64] *Illustrated Usk Observer and Raglan Herald*, 6 May 1865, p. 8
[65] *County Observer and Monmouthshire Central Advertiser*, 22 Oct. 1881, p. 4.
[66] *Pontypool Free Press and Herald of the Hills*, 14 Jan. 1881, p. 2.
[67] *Illustrated Usk Observer and Raglan Herald*, 26 Nov. 1864, p. 8.
[68] *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 12 Apr. 1856, p. 3.

that the resources provided by the institute were monopolised by the middle-classes. The author complains that a book he wished to borrow from the institute 'was out' and that there was already a long waiting list for it. He suggests that Judge Falconer, a prominent member of Usk's nonconformist community, had not donated the volume 'for the benefit of gentlemen who can and ought to purchase them for their own use'.[69]

While the presence and dominance of the urban elite may have been a reason why the institute was not more popular amongst the classes it was intended to serve, religion must also be considered. It is evident that Usk's nonconformist chapels organised an array of activities and events that included tea parties, anniversary celebrations, missionary meetings, lectures, concerts, celebratory services and prayer meetings.[70] Evidence of these leisure activities are to be found in liberal newspapers which suggests that Clark, an active member of the Anglican church, may have been reluctant to promote chapel events and that there may have been considerably more division between the leisure cultures of the two parties than is immediately apparent. However, their presence in Usk suggests that an alternative leisure culture existed within the town which would have kept members of the chapel congregations, which were predominantly lower middle- and working class, from partaking in activities that were organised by an elite that was closely associated with the Anglican church.

The 1860s saw the Usk community become increasingly divided between church and chapel. Although these divisions will be more fully explored in the next chapter, their impact on Usk's leisure deserves some consideration. The mechanics institute did not survive the 1850s, so it was not directly affected by the divisions between church and chapel that arose subsequently; however, newspaper reports indicate that the inclusive nature of the event was at risk as the decade ended. The annual soirée had been described as 'diffus[ing] the same amount of gratification amongst all classes and sexes' and was a whole town event with principal tradesmen closing their premises

[69] *Illustrated Usk Observer and Raglan Herald*, 9 Feb. 1856, p. 1.
[70] For tea parties see *Illustrated Usk Observer and Raglan Herald*, 20 Jun. 1857, p. 1; *The South Wales Daily News*, 23 Jan. 1877, p. 6. For anniversary celebrations see *Ibid.*, 30 Aug. 1876, p. 6. For missionary meetings see *The Pontypool Free Press and Herald of the Hills*, 23 Oct. 1880, p. 2. For concerts see *South Wales Daily News*, 2 Apr. 1877. For celebratory services and prayer meetings see *Ibid.*, 7 Oct. 1880, p. 3; *The Cardiff Times*, 8 Nov. 1879, p. 2 and *ibid.*, 30 Apr. 1881, p. 3.

earlier than usual on the day.[71] A newspaper report in 1856 stated that over 1,000 people had attended the event and although this included people from the surrounding areas and neighbouring towns, such numbers would not have been possible had it not been open to all sections of society.[72] In 1859, however, it was deemed necessary to increase ticket prices which observers condemned as an attempt to 'make the party more select by shutting out the poorer portion' and lamented the loss of an event that had seen 'the richest and poorest of the neighbourhood, meet together…on an equal footing'.[73] There is no evidence to suggest that the increase in price was done to purposely exclude Usk's nonconformist residents. However, due to the associations between nonconformity and the lower classes, any move that prevented Usk's poorer inhabitants from attending would have disproportionately impacted and further alienated the nonconformist community.

The only clear evidence of any division within Usk's leisure culture appears to have occurred within the urban elite over the organisation of the Penny Readings during the mid-1860s at a time when divisions had already started to appear between church and chapel. Reports and letters published in the local press indicate that within a year of the establishment of a committee to organise a programme of readings in 1864, a second committee had been set up with the intention of providing an alternative programme of entertainment.[74] While the first committee had been established at a public meeting and consisted of the portreeve, vicar and other leading members of Usk's elite, its rival was founded and chaired by Col. Greenhow-Relph who had selected and invited its members himself, and apparently excluded 'all the clergy and most of the principal inhabitants of the town'.[75] His refusal to allow the amalgamation of the two resulted in the former being dissolved. Although an isolated incident, Relph's actions are indicative of deepening religious divisions, also evident in the efforts made by certain members of the elite to force the closure of the nondenominational school which will be further explored in the next chapter.

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[71] *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 3 Jul. 1858, p. 8; *Illustrated Usk Observer and Raglan Herald*, 28 Jun. 1856, p. 1.
[72] *Ibid*., 12 Jul. 1856, p. 2.
[73] *Ibid*., 9 Jul. 1859, p. 1.
[74] *Ibid.*, 18 Nov. 1865, p. 8.
[75] *County Observer and Monmouthshire Central Advertiser*, 23 Nov. 1867, p. 5.

Despite these examples, leisure also had the potential to unify the community rather than divide it. Reports on the early meetings of the cricket club committee show that prominent members of the nonconformist congregations were founding members along with individuals belonging to Usk's Anglican elite. Judge Thomas Falconer and Col. Greenhow-Relph were both involved in the establishment of the club in 1856 despite becoming vocal opponents of the Anglican party in the following decade. But even as divisions between church and chapel grew, the appearance of names such as Jennings and Hiley, who were notable members of the chapel party, in later cricket match reports indicate that when it came to sport, religious differences could be put aside.[76]

Small town problems.

As shown in chapter two, the urban elite of small towns had a variety of different problems they needed to contend with and overcome in their efforts to establish an urban-based leisure culture, as many of the factors that encouraged the development of leisure in larger towns and cities were absent from towns such as Usk. Historians have identified that increases in time and wealth 'transformed the face of English leisure'.[77] Walvin and Bailey argue that the growing labour force found itself with an increasing amount of free time and an increase in 'spending power' that allowed them 'a greater freedom and opportunity in their leisure'.[78] Such benefits were not felt in a small-town community such as Usk whose main industries were retail, agriculture and the white-collar professions. Despite his earlier arguments, Walvin accepts that for clerical, office and shop workers low pay and excessive hours were 'commonplace' while the countryside was a 'harsh habitat for an oppressed and generally silent labouring force' whose work patterns remained 'unflinchingly severe'.[79]

Centrally introduced reforms such as the Ten Hours Act of 1847 and the Factory Act of 1850 that regulated the working hours of industrial workers had little impact on the working patterns of the inhabitants of Usk whose working hours remained long and arduous. This is evident in a letter to the *Monmouthshire Merlin* that refers to the long

[76] *Illustrated Usk Observer and Raglan Herald*, 23 May 1857, p. 1; *County Observer and Monmouthshire Central Advertiser*, 25 May 1878, p. 5; *The Evening Express*, 20 May 1895, p. 3.
[77] Walvin, *Leisure and society*, p. 61.
[78] *Ibid*, pp. 60-1; Bailey, *Leisure and class*, p. 95.
[79] Walvin, *Leisure and society*, pp. 61-2 and 161.

working hours of shopkeepers and their assistants as 'bodily and mental slavery' that sees them 'add nearly half the night to the toil of the day, and before the weariness of their limbs is relieved, they begin the routine of the succeeding day'.[80] The long opening hours of Usk's shops remained an ongoing concern. A letter published in 1863 described the 'hours of business' as 'unnecessarily protracted'; a later letter observed that tradesmen's assistants were 'denied a weekly half-holiday' as they were 'kept behind the counter until a late hour' while a further letter highlighted that the summer months saw shops opening at seven in the morning and closing at nine in the evening while a Saturday brought 'a weekly hardship of 16 hours work' with shops not closing until eleven.[81]

Similarly, those living and working within Usk failed to benefit from an increase in wealth brought about by higher wages. As shown in the introduction, Usk was home to a small number of 'gentlemen'. The personal wealth of these individuals, however, paled in significance when compared to that of the shipping magnates, dock owners and industrialists who shaped the growth and development of towns such as Cardiff and Newport. Chapter two demonstrated how these gentlemen contributed to the construction and refurbishment of the parish church and other modest schemes implemented to improve the urban environment, however there is little evidence of any large-scale investment in the town. This coupled with the nature of its environs indicates that Usk was not a wealthy settlement. Surrounded by rural parishes, Usk served a hinterland that was predominantly employed in agriculture and other rural pursuits and therefore one that struggled with long working hours and unsteady wages. These were further exacerbated by the agricultural depressions that followed the Napoleonic war in 1815 and that which crippled the farming economy during the 1870s. Within Usk, although only a small number were employed in farming, many provided services and goods that supported the agricultural industry and would have therefore been hit by any economic downturn that impacted the surrounding parishes.

The lack of space that hindered Usk's physical development also impacted the growth of leisure within the town. Although Usk was surrounded by countryside and

[80] *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 27 Nov. 1847, p. 3.
[81] *Illustrated Usk Observer and Raglan Herald*, 18 Jul. 1863, p. 8; *County Observer and Monmouthshire Central Advertiser*, 11 Jun. 1870, p. 5 and 6 Apr. 1872, p. 5.

incorporated numerous gardens and orchards, leisure space was not in abundance. As in larger settlements, land that existed within small towns was either in use or owned by wealthy landlords, as was the land that surrounded the town, and as a result it was not available to the community for recreational pursuits. The process of urban improvement discussed in chapter two further exacerbated the shortage of available space when waste land within the borough, that had previously been available to the public, was enclosed by the corporation and let in order to fund improvement schemes.

Land that had not been enclosed was perpetually at risk. A report printed in April 1882 detailed how 'a band of young men belonging to the various football and cricket clubs and the volunteers', pulled down and burnt an embankment and fence that had been erected by an owner of an adjoining property that was believed to encroach on a piece of common land known as the 'Island'.[82] This report indicates the threat to public recreational space but also demonstrates how important such spaces were to the inhabitants of the town. According to the report, a crowd of 200 people watched the demolition with 'evident satisfaction' and that after the 'work had been completed' a procession then 'paraded the town, singing a ditty that had been composed for the occasion'. The 'Island' had become an important space within the urban culture of Usk. It was where the football, cricket and other sport clubs played their matches; where the volunteers carried out their drills; where travelling preachers pitched their tents and gave gospel addresses; where annual events, such as Bonfire night, were celebrated and where riotous drinkers continued their bar room brawls.[83] The multipurpose use of this space and the lengths that the inhabitants went to protect it demonstrates how limited open, recreational space was within a small town and the value that was placed upon it as a resource by the population as a whole. The contest over recreational space is explored by Neil MacMaster in his article on Mousehold Heath in which he demonstrates that attempts by the Norwich elite to transform the heath into a public park was met by sustained and highly effective working class opposition.[84]

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[82] *The Cardiff Times*, 1 Apr. 1882, p. 2.
[83] For examples of sporting activity see *The County Observer and Monmouthshire County Advertiser*, 8 May 1869, p. 5; 24 Mar. 1883, p. 4 and 26 Oct. 1901. For the Volunteers see *ibid*., 24 July 1869, p. 5; for travelling preacher see 30 Sep. 1882, p. 4; for bonfire night see *The Western Mail*, 7 Nov. 1874, p. 6 and for fighting see *The County Observer and Monmouthshire County Advertiser*, 16 Apr. 1859, p. 1.
[84] N. MacMaster, 'The battle for Mousehold Heath 1857-1884: "popular politics" and the Victorian public park, *Past and Present*, 127 (1990) pp. 117-154.

An absence of adequate municipal funds was another significant problem for small town local governments. As explored in the opening chapter of this thesis, the borough of Usk records show that it struggled to finance lighting schemes, was unable to buy land on which to construct a market and any attempts made to capitalise on the fencing and enclosing of surrounding wasteland were hindered by the Duke of Beaufort. As a result, there is little evidence of the municipal funded recreational and leisure space that can be found in the larger towns and cities.

The realization of nineteenth-century municipal governments that they had some responsibility for the health and welfare of their urban populations had seen local administrative bodies initiate plans to develop urban 'lungs' in the form of public parks, a development that Reid describes as 'one of the most characteristic features of modern townscape'.[85] He argues that the creation of public parks was part of a process 'in which municipalities discovered the desire and the means to act for themselves' that helped generate a sense of urban agency and identity.[86] This newfound ability coupled with the concern for public health and a parallel concern for the educational and cultural welfare of the urban population meant that municipal councils invested in the construction of libraries, art galleries and museums.

These projects, however, were expensive. Helen Mellor observes that the 'problem of cost remained crucial' for many towns and that costs were usually ' borne by individuals or private enterprise schemes'.[87] This can be seen in Cardiff where the third Marquess of Bute provided land for a public park in 1887 and then at the end of the century when he donated Cathays Park to the corporation for the construction of a new town hall, municipal offices, the university and later the National Museum of Wales. However, although some towns benefitted from the patronage of wealthy benefactors, not all were as lucky as Cardiff. Paul Elliot observes that for some towns, large estates and enclosure could create a stranglehold that could 'hem in the whole urban population'.[88] This was the situation in Usk where the Duke of Beaufort owned

[85] D. A. Reid, 'Praying and playing', in M. Daunton (ed.), *The Cambridge urban history of Britain. Vol. III, 1840–1950* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 775.
[86] *Ibid*, p. 763.
[87] H. E. Mellor, *Leisure and the changing city, 1870-1914* (London, 1976), p. 112.
[88] P. Elliot, 'The Derby arboretum (1840): the first specially designed municipal public park in Britain', *Midland History*, 26, no. 1 (2001), p. 144.

extensive holdings within and around the town but his limited interest in the welfare of Usk and its inhabitants deprived the town of a potentially important source of income. As a result, local government, with little capital to spend on municipal development, was unable to create spaces that could be used for recreation.

Even as forms of private enterprise, the funding of leisure and recreational activities remained an issue. The minutes of an early cricket club meeting record that there had been some difficulty in 'obtaining a piece of ground contiguous to the town, without expending a considerable portion of the funds' but the problem was solved by a member who agreed to allow them to use his field 'two days a week gratuitously'.[89] Despite the inability to invest in permanent recreational space, the urban elite was able to develop leisure activities by making use of other areas. The Duke of Beaufort consented to Usk castle being used for the mechanics institute annual soirée while owners allowed their private gardens and fields to be used for fetes, ploughing matches and athletic tournaments, while the Island remained a multifunctional space. The need for indoor space was also an issue. Just as the corporation and later the local board had been unable to provide outdoor recreational ground, neither were they able to fund the construction of purposely built indoor space. As a result, lectures were held in schoolrooms, concerts were performed in chapels and the town hall was used as a ballroom, a theatre and a concert hall amongst other things.

The lack of indoor space reinforced the position of the public house within Usk's urban culture. As a market town and the home of the county quarter sessions, Usk had many public houses, and the 1851 census made reference to 19 establishments while J. H. Clarks listed 35 that were located within the town.[90] The public house was a significant source of popular recreation within the small town. Along with the provision of food and drink, Peter Clark argues that the alehouse 'acted as the centre of a network of social, economic and political activities'.[91] Bailey agrees, adding that the wide range of social and economic services' offered by a public house reinforced it as the 'institutional hub of working class recreation'.[92] Rosemary Sweet suggests that by the

[89] *Illustrated Usk Observer and Raglan Herald*, 23 May 1857, p. 1.
[90] Clark, 'Autobiography', p. 43.
[91] P. Clark, *The English alehouse. A social history 1200-1830* (Harlow, 1983), p. 306.
[92] P. Bailey, *Leisure and class in Victorian England, rational recreation and the contest for control, 1830-1885* (London, 1978) p. 22.

end of the eighteenth century the role of the multi-functional inn declined as many of the services it provided were now offered by alternative establishments.[93] However in small towns such as Usk these hostelries remained an important venue and provider of leisure due to the inability to fund the construction of dedicated spaces such as assembly rooms, theatres or concert halls. As a result, inns, and public houses remained the only viable option for events for both the urban elite and the lower classes. By the mid nineteenth century, The Three Salmons Hotel, Usk's grandest hostelry, had constructed its own assembly rooms where it hosted balls, private dinners and grand concerts for the urban elite while less prestigious establishments hosted dinners and dances, put on musical entertainments and provided meeting places for Usk's growing number of clubs and societies.

The most prominent of those that met at a public house were the friendly societies.[94] A list of those registered in 1856 shows that between 1832 and 1854, 14 different societies were established with all but one meeting at a local public house.[95] Friendly societies were an important component of urban leisure. Dot Jones has argued that 'the operation of a mutual benefit scheme might be a secondary function; mutual enjoyment and conviviality was often the main attraction of the monthly meeting and annual feast days', events which were centred around the public house.[96] In addition to their regular meetings, these societies celebrated their anniversaries and an account of one describes how the members of three societies, numbering upward of 360 people, processed to church preceded by 'bands, flags and banners' and returned to their headquarters to enjoy 'excellent dinners' where 'bands play[ed] at intervals during the afternoon' and dancing 'tripped along until the morning was far advanced'.[97] As the century progressed these club anniversaries became a much more reserved affair, a reflection of Victorian middle-class sensibilities. Instead of public processions, dinners and dancing, celebrations were limited to private dinners that were followed by a series of after dinner speeches, but these continued to be held in the inns and public houses of Usk

[93] R. Sweet, *The English town 1680-1840. Government, society and culture* (New York, 1999), p. 233.
[94] Bailey, 'Rational recreation', p. 23.
[95] Lewis, *Usk*, p. 63.
[96] *Ibid*.
[97] *Illustrated Usk Observer and Raglan Herald*, 27 Jun. 1857, p. 1.

which reflects their ongoing significance as a venue for Usk's urban leisure and highlights the lack of alternative indoor spaces.[98]

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the various factors, external and internal, that shaped Usk's leisure culture during the nineteenth century. As shown, eighteenth-century Wales had not made the requisite economic advancements for the development of an urban leisure akin to that evident in English towns and cities. The absence of a wealthy urban based gentry meant that there was a limited demand for the luxury goods and leisure activities that might have resulted in a consumer revolution. Although there are examples of urban leisure these are in an embryonic form and only visible in towns such as Monmouth and Cowbridge in areas that had a relatively high concentration of gentry. They were also very different from the urban culture and leisure that emerged in towns across England.

The delayed emergence of some of the characteristic features of urban leisure to be found in English towns was common across the urban sector in Wales, but some factors were particularly noticeable in small towns. Unlike their larger counterparts, small towns did not have a rapidly growing working-class who, due to an increase in free time and fairer wages, demanded entertainment. In Usk, it was jobs within retail, agricultural and the white-collar professions that remained prominent and as these continued to involve long hours and low wages. Consequently, the lower-middle and working classes were unable to generate the same demand seen in other towns and cities. Small towns also struggled to finance the development of both indoor and outdoor recreational space, which meant that existing spaces and the public house were utilized for multiple purposes.

Finally, this chapter has shown that the urban leisure that developed within Usk was shaped by the upper-middle classes. Although the upper classes had been the primary organisers and consumers of leisure within Usk in the early nineteenth century, their

[98] For examples see *The County Observer and Monmouth Central Advertiser*, 20 Jan. 1877, p. 4 and 22 Jan. 1881, p. 4.

cultural activities were exclusively for their own class and the elements that existed in Usk were arguably part of a wider county culture rather than ones that emanated from within the town. The withdrawal of this class following outbreaks of violence during the 1830s allowed the middle classes to assume responsibility. Whilst this followed a pattern seen across England and Wales, within Usk, evidence suggests that Usk's urban elite were able to use it to further enhance the urban credentials of the town, reinforce their positions as community leaders and to provide themselves with a form of leisure that coincided with their middle-class sensibilities.

Chapter IV: Religion and Women.

According to a newspaper article published in *The Monmouthshire Merlin* in 1875, Usk had become 'the most quarrelsome place in Monmouthshire'.[1] This was due to an ongoing struggle between the Anglican elite who wanted to hold on to their positions of authority and the leading members of Usk's nonconformist congregations who increasingly challenged the status quo. This resulted in a number of flashpoints that boiled over into the public sphere and divided the community. Gwyn A. Williams may have called the middle classes a 'half-forgotten people of Welsh history' and Bill Jones may have described them as a 'rather shadowy group in the written history of Wales' but their actions have so far dominated this study of nineteenth-century Usk.[2] The presence of internal tensions forces the consideration of the wider community and their relationship with the urban elite. The reluctance of ratepayers to support schemes proposed by the elite has been explored earlier in this thesis, however the fact that the elite met with such public resistance suggests that there may have been more to these incidents than a concern over an increase in the rates.

This chapter will examine the relationship between the elite and the wider community, to demonstrate that the relationship between the Anglican upper-middle class and the nonconformist, lower-middle and working classes became increasingly factious as the latter publicly attacked the dominance of the former. It will then demonstrate how, at the same time, prominent, middle class female inhabitants were gradually and surreptitiously infiltrating the public sphere. Finally, the broader role of women within the community will be addressed. Even within a town as small as Usk, their positions as ratepayers and their philanthropic endeavours, largely undertaken within the context of church or chapel-based activity, allowed women some scope to operate within the public sphere.

The formal bodies of urban government explored in chapter one were only one element of the institutions of urban governance. As the preceding chapter demonstrated, the urban elite were also the principal providers of social and leisure activities which not

[1] *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 14 May 1870, p. 3.
[2] G. A. Williams, *When was Wales?* (Harmondsworth, 1991), p. 183; W. D. Jones, 'Banqueting at a moveable feast: Wales 1870-1914', in G. E. Jones and D. Smith (eds.), *The people of Wales* (Llandysul, 1999), p. 153.

only met their own entertainment needs but helped strengthen their position within and over the urban community. In addition to their official positions within local government and their role as organisers of leisure and recreational activities, the urban elite also served as trustees of the Roger Edwards charity, managers of the borough school and, in 1891, attempted to become the first elected trustees of the almshouse charity. By doing so, they were able to exercise authority, not just over the formal government of the town but also over charity, poor relief and education.

Shane Ewen has argued that the rapid growth of towns during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries increased the demand for municipal services such as policing, firefighting, street lighting, cleaning, hygiene, medical care and education. As municipal councils were often unable to meet these demands, a range of clubs, societies and institutions emerged through which the increasing needs of the urban settlement could be met.[3] These organisations were also a means for members of the urban middle-classes who were deprived of the right to vote and so unable to access the institutions of municipal government and to develop an 'urban presence' within the community that became increasingly political.[4]

The growth of influential associations meant that urban elites expanded to include a much larger number of municipal and extra- municipal figures, which ties in with Trainor's definition of the elite as those people who 'got things done'.[5] Ralf Rolf identified three types of urban elite: political leaders such as municipal councillors, economic leaders and taxpayers, and opinion leaders whose authority was based on their participation in philanthropic, religious and sundry boundaries.[6] Together, these men despite being from different religious backgrounds, having opposing political affiliations and working across multiple, municipal and non-municipal institutions, formed a 'permanently changing group' that instigated strategic stimuli for the general economic, social, political and cultural development of the city'.[7] Robert Morris argued this was primarily done during the second half of the eighteenth century through the

[3] S. Ewen, *What is urban history?* (Cambridge, 2016), p. 55.
[4] R. Rodger and R. Colls, 'Civil society and British cities,' in R. Rodger and R. Colls (eds.), *Cities of ideas. Civil society and urban governance in Britain 1800-2000* (Aldershot, 2004), p. 9.
[5] R. Trainor, 'Urban elites in Victorian Britain', *Urban History Yearbook*, 12 (1985), pp. 1-2.
[6] R. Roth, 'German elites in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries', in R. Roth and R. Beachy (eds.), *Who ran the cities?* (Aldershot, 2007), p. 127-60.
[7] *Ibid*., p. 160.

formation of a wide variety of voluntary societies that were concerned with 'poor relief, medical aid, moral reform, public order, education, diffusion of science and culture and the organisation of leisure'.[8] Although these clubs, societies and organisations shared a commitment to establishing and maintaining a healthy civil society, they enabled the elite to assert their economic and cultural authority within the middle class, which in turn was able to assert its identity 'against and over the working classes'.[9]

The current historiography focuses on how the elite used bodies of urban governance to extend their authority over the urban settlement. The 'elites' discussed by the current scholarship are one of two groups; they are either of different religious denominations united by an overriding desire to improve the urban settlement, whether that be economically, socially or culturally, or as a unified religious group that shared the same principles. Simon Gunn and Rachel Bell paint a picture of the middle classes as being wealthy, liberal nonconformists who were 'excluded from the institutions of national life'.[10] Although these nonconformists may not have been permitted to enter parliament, to marry in their own chapel or attend Oxford and Cambridge, their wealth allowed them to exercise influence over urban society through clubs, societies and institutions and, following the 1832 Reform Act, local politics. They, therefore, were able to access the public sphere and exercise authority as legitimate members of the urban elite. As historians present a cohesive, nineteenth century civil society, there is little discussion on what happened when the dominance of the middle classes over the bodies of urban governance was challenged. In Usk, however, the urban elite remained predominantly Anglican and conservative and in contrast it was the lower-middle and working classes that were nonconformist. What occurred in Usk was a contest between an Anglican - middle class who wanted to maintain their authority and a nonconformist lower-middle and working class who wanted to disrupt it.

Research that looks at divisions within urban societies is perhaps of more use to this chapter. The concept of a 'contested city' has been put forward by Anthony Hepburn who defined one as a 'major urban centre in which two or more ethnically-conscious

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[8] R. J. Morris, 'Voluntary societies and British urban elites, 1750-1850: An analysis', *Historical Journal,* 26 (1983), p. 96.
[9] R. J. Morris, *Class, sect and party: The making of the British middle-class* (Manchester, 1990); *Idem.*, Civil society and the nature of urbanism: Britain 1750-1850', *Urban History,* 25 (1998), p. 291.
[10] S. Gunn and R. Bell, *Middle classes. Their rise and sprawl* (London, 2002).

groups – divided by religion, language and /or culture and perceived history – co exist in a situation where neither group is willing to concede supremacy to the other'.[11] While one would not argue that Usk was a major urban centre the notion that a settlement could be divided by irreconcilable differences sheds an interesting perspective on what was happening within Usk. Hepburn pointed to places such as Dublin and Belfast as examples of cities founded 'by incoming people of one culture within a rural hinterland occupied by another', a description that can be applied to Wales. Although this dynamic may not initially have been seen as a problem, Hepburn argued that conflict developed especially during the late nineteenth century 'as urbanism brought the groups into closer contact'.[12]

The impact of religious division has been acknowledged by Irish urban historians who have described them as 'irreconcilable' and argued that 'confessional division' shaped urban society throughout the long eighteenth century.[13] Following emancipation Catholics were able to increase their influence over the bodies of urban governance as Fergus O'Ferrall has demonstrated in his study of the rise of the Catholic middle class in County Longford. He argued that the rising expectations of a Catholic middle-class underlay 'the popular campaign challenging the elite position of the minority Protestant community' and demonstrated how they, supported by shopkeepers, traders and businessmen, were able to gain influence over the bodies of urban governance within Longford.[14]

It is possible to draw comparisons between the Catholics in Ireland and the nonconformists in Wales. Both saw an upsurge in growth and popularity during the eighteenth century, both were excluded from the political nation until the nineteenth century, and both wanted to challenge the political, administrative and judicial control of the Anglican elite. However, the scholarship on Ireland highlights a number of differences. Firstly, Welsh non-conformity did not become politicised until after the

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[11] A. C. Hepburn, *Contested cities in the modern west* (Basingstoke and New York, 2004), p. 2.
[12] *Ibid*., pp. 2-3.
[13] P. Borsay, L. Proudfoot, 'The English and Irish urban experience 1500-1800: change, convergence and divergence', in P. Borsay and L. Proudfoot (eds.) *Provincial towns in early modern England and Ireland: change, convergence and divergence* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 25-26; D. Dickson, *First Irish cities: an eighteenth-century transformation* (New Haven and London, 2021), p. 145.
[14] F. O'Ferrall, 'The rise of the Catholic middle-class: O'Connellites in County Longford 1820-1850', in F. Lane (ed.), *Politics, society and the middle-class in modern Ireland* (Basingstoke, 2010), pp. 52 and 58.

publication of the *Blue Books* whereas in Ireland the Catholics emerged as a political entity during the 1820s. Secondly, religious conflict within Irish towns has been presented as an intra-class issue which is different from Wales where the middle-classes remained predominantly Anglican until the second half of the nineteenth century. Religious division within Welsh towns, therefore, tended to have a class dynamic.

There is little research on division within Welsh towns and that which does exist concentrates on class conflict and the subsequent outbreaks of violence where towns were the target for rising tensions.[15] Ebenezer T. Davies argued that despite initially being a working-class religion, over time and in response to an increase in wealth and status, nonconformists were able to penetrate the middle-classes who in turn were able to benefit from developments in local government that offered 'greatly increased opportunities for civic leadership'.[16] Although it has been accepted that the urban elites of industrial towns were increasingly nonconformist there has been little discussion on how they managed to assume civil authority nor how the traditional elites responded to it.

The first three sections of this chapter will look at the nature of religious division within Usk to show how the informal bodies of urban governance became contested spaces. First, it will chart the growth of dissent during the late eighteenth and nineteenth century and demonstrate that changes in perception and attitude, on both the Anglican and nonconformist sides, resulted in the deterioration of inter-denominational relationships and increased tensions between the two parties. Second, it will explore two incidents of conflict to fully understand the nature of the church versus chapel conflict within Usk, arguing that although religion provided a dividing line, religious doctrine played only a small part in the struggle between the two parties. A growing frustration with the hegemony of the Anglican elite and their continuing desire to exclude nonconformist inhabitants from the bodies of urban government, along with issues of class, underpinned the tension. Through these case studies the reactions of the elite will come into focus, and it will be shown that they were far from happy to let their hold over the town be challenged.

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[15] For example, Merthyr and the Merthyr riots of 1831, Newport and the Chartist march in 1839 and Carmarthen and the Rebecca riots in 1843.
[16] E. T. Davies, *Religion in the industrial revolution in south Wales* (Cardiff, 1965), p. 145.

It is unlikely that the two case studies that are the focus of this chapter are the only instances that saw the two parties come into conflict with each other. A newspaper report from 1887 and a pre-election speech given in 1891 suggest the election for a new local board member in 1887 had caused considerable 'excitement' as it had seen Frank Jennings, a carrier with the Great Western Railway, successfully stand for election to the Local Board.[17] This, however, is the extent of the surviving archival evidence and therefore it is impossible to understand the extent of this conflict and the tensions that caused it. It is likely, however, that issues of class and religious denomination were at the heart of it for Jennings was an active and outspoken member of the nonconformist community and a self-proclaimed 'working man'. As the limited evidence prevents further research into this conflict and any others that might have occurred, this chapter will primarily be concerned with the two case studies outlined below.

The first took place during the 1860s and early 1870s when there was considerable debate over the provision of schooling within the town. Usk had a number of schools which included a grammar school endowed in 1621 and a writing school established in 1769, both of which were funded by the Roger Edwards Charity. In 1811 a Lancastrian, non-denominational School was established which later became an Elementary school in 1862. Finally, there was an Anglican school established by Rev. Baker soon after his arrival in the late 1850s. Conflict arose when Baker attempted to amalgamate the Elementary school with his school under the National system and under the management of the Church of England, a notion he first proposed in 1861.[18] The proposal was initially turned down but resurfaced again in 1870 following the introduction of the Elementary Education Act (33 & 34 Vict. c.75).[19] However, the proposal was again rejected when the inhabitants of the town voted at a public meeting to keep both schools thus providing the nondenominational school with a stay of execution.[20] This, however, was to be short-lived for in 1875 the Duke of Beaufort retook possession of the land on which the school was built and leased it instead to the Vicar and the churchwardens.[21] By doing so, the nondenominational school was forced

[17] *Weekly Mail*, 9 Apr. 1887, p. 3; Usk Church papers, newspaper cutting, no date.
[18] *Illustrated Usk Observer and Raglan Herald*, 26 Jan. 1861, p. 1.
[19] *County Observer and Monmouth County Advertiser*, 3 Dec. 1870, p. 4.
[20] *Ibid*.
[21] *South Wales Daily News*, 31 Jul. 1875, p. 5.

to close and Baker's school which had become a National school in 1869, became the sole provider of elementary education within the town.[22]

The second example of interdenominational conflict within Usk occurred in 1891 over the management of the town's almshouses. The almshouse charity had traditionally been managed by the overseers of the poor within the vestry. During the 1880s several complaints were made against the overseers regarding their management of the almshouses, namely, that the latter had fallen into severe disrepair and that inmates were breaking the rules.[23] As a result, a new scheme of management was drawn up by the overseers. Although this was unanimously accepted by the ratepayers at a vestry meeting, the vicar and members of the vestry submitted their own scheme to the Charity Commission, overturning the decision made previously. In response, the commission introduced an alternative scheme that established a board of trustees to manage the charity and to oversee and ensure the upkeep of the almshouses. These trustees were to be two ex-officio trustees (the Vicar and the chairman of the local board); four representative trustees who were to be elected by the inhabitants 'in vestry assembled' and who were to sit for five years and finally three co-optative trustees who were to be appointed by the trustees for a term of eight years.

The proposed scheme suggested that the number of almshouses should be reduced from twelve to six with the other six houses being let and the money applied to 'augmenting the stipends of the alms people'. Under this scheme, those who had received poor law relief would not qualify and a 'preference' would be shown for 'those persons who, being otherwise qualified…shall become reduced by misfortune from better circumstances'. [24] These measures clearly favoured the wealthier residents of Usk as they would have severely circumscribed the ability of the poorer classes to benefit from the charity as they would have been the inhabitants most likely to receive poor relief and the most unlikely to suffer a reduction in circumstances. Determined to prevent the adoption of this scheme four 'chapel' candidates, presenting themselves as being 'supporters of no disqualification for receipt of poor law relief, no letting of the houses

[22] There was also a Roman Catholic School in Usk but there is no evidence that this establishment was involved in the debate, and it appears to have remained independent.
[23] Clark, *Past and present*, pp. 152-154; Usk church papers, election pamphlet published by the chapel party, 13 May 1891.
[24] Clark, *Past and present*, p. xxxiii.

and no reduction of the alms people', were nominated in opposition to the four nominated by the Vestry. [25] Although a vote was held at the meeting, the Chapel party candidates won so the Anglican party insisted on a second election at which all ratepayers would be called upon to cast their vote.

Usk's incumbent Vicar, Rev. Stephen Catterly Baker, was a leading figure of the Anglican party from his arrival in Usk during the 1850s until his death in 1892. Born in Hampshire and educated at Charterhouse School in Surrey and then at St John's, Cambridge, Baker became Vicar of Usk during the second half of the 1850s. His arrival occurred at a time when the perceived threat of nonconformity was at its highest and at a time when the church in Wales, especially within the diocese of Llandaff, was actively trying to counteract its spread. He was a vocal and visible protagonist for the Anglican party and to some extent responsible for the outbreaks of conflict. It was his campaign to amalgamate the two schools under the auspices of the Church of England that caused the ongoing dispute over schooling, and it was he who acted against the wishes of the parishioners by submitting an alternative scheme for the management of the almshouses to the charity commission.

Although Baker was supported by members of the Anglican elite and the vestry during both incidents, Deaconess Eleanor emerged as a key player in 1891. Born in Middlesex, Eleanor Carbonell arrived in Usk with her father, William C. Carbonell a wine merchant, during the 1860s. As members of Usk's Anglican upper-middle class, both became significant figures within the church and the wider community. While her father became a fully-fledged member of the elite, Eleanor forged a role for herself through her charitable endeavours that included establishing and running the temperance society and serving as a manager of the National school, roles that will be explored more fully in section three of this chapter. Eleanor became Wales' first Deaconess in 1884 and as such became the first female to assume a position within Usk's vestry. [26] It was through this role that she became a key player in the almshouse question; it was Eleanor who had complained about the overseer's management of the houses, she had formed part of the group that proposed the alternative scheme to the

[25] Usk Church papers, election pamphlet published by the chapel party, 13 May 1891.
[26] https://iawn.anglicancommunion.org/around-the-world/wales.aspx [accessed 18 May 2021].

one accepted by the ratepayers, and she also stood as a candidate in the subsequent election.

The leadership of the chapel party was initially in the hands of county Judge, Thomas Falconer, and county Magistrate, Col. George Relph Greenhow-Relph, both of whom were leading nonconformists who actively fought the closure of the nondenominational school. Both belonged to the upper-middle class and like Baker, neither man originated from Usk, which was not unusual as many of Usk's upper classes were incomers. Falconer had been born in Bath and educated at Edinburgh before being admitted to the bar at Lincoln's Inn in 1830. Having held colonial appointments in Canada and Australia, he moved to Usk as County judge of Glamorgan and Brecon in 1851.[27] While living in Usk, Falconer served as a trustee of the Roger Edwards Charity until 1866 when he resigned following a disagreement over the felling of a Walnut tree on the grounds of the Grammar school.[28]. Greenhow-Relph was born in Kendal where he was an ivory comb manufacturer prior to his move to Usk sometime between 1840 and 1845. It is not clear why he moved to the town but his aunt, Dorothy, was married to one of Usk's wealthiest inhabitants, Mr Henry Pocock of Beach Hill. Once living in Usk he became an active member of the community and of the wider county administration, serving as a magistrate and chairman of the Pontypool and Usk highways board. As demonstrated in the second chapter, Greenhow-Relph frequently challenged Usk's elite. During their time in Usk, neither he nor Falconer formed part of the corporation although the former did sit on the short-lived nuisance removal committee formed in 1857 and was elected to the local board in 1878. Although members of the county elite and leading members of the nonconformist party, their religious beliefs, affiliation with the liberals, and confrontational manner ensured they remained on the periphery of Usk's elite.

Neither man played a role in the almshouse question as Greenhow-Relph died in 1880 followed by Falconer in 1882. During this incident nonconformist leadership came in the shape of Independent Minister Denias Daw and Frank Jennings, the aforementioned working man who had been elected a Local Board member in 1887. Unlike their

[27] E. Walford, *The county families of the United Kingdom* (London, 1860), p. 217.
[28] *Illustrated Usk Observer and Raglan Herald*, 6 Jan. 1866, pp. 1-2.

predecessors they were of a lower socio-economic class. Jennings had been born in Usk while Daw had been born in Somerset in 1829 but migrated to Wales after 1841 and before his marriage in 1850 when he was listed as a painter and glazier. Rather than enjoying a certain degree of authority and social standing due to their wealth and position within the county elite as their predecessors had done, Daw and Jennings were from the classes that they represented. While Daw's position as a chapel minister afforded him a certain degree of influence, Jennings had emerged as a leader from within the ranks and had, as already alluded to, successfully challenged the Anglican elite's hegemony over the town by standing for election to the local board. The fact that Daw and Jennings were not middle class changed the nature of inter-denominational conflict within Usk. Rather than it being a disagreement between the elite over what they thought what was right for the wider community, the almshouse question saw Usk's poorer inhabitants challenge the urban elite themselves over issues that went beyond the church versus chapel divide.

These two case studies have been chosen as there is an adequate amount of surviving source material to allow an investigation into the causes, events and outcomes associated with these flashpoints. That being said, there is a limited amount of surviving material that can be used to fully explore the position of nonconformity within the urban community. Nonconformist places of worship were not compelled to keep records so there is little that indicates who belonged to which place of worship. It is only when an individual publicly challenged the status quo that their religious denomination can be identified. The popularity of nonconformity, however, with the Welsh lower classes allows one to suspect that individuals of a lower socio-economic background, especially those with a Welsh surname, were more likely to be nonconformist.

When the polling data for the 1891 election is examined, it is evident that those with a typically Welsh surname were more likely to vote in favour of the chapel party. Of the 16 people with the surname Jones, for example, only one voted for all four of the church candidates.[29] It should be noted though that this was not a hard and fast rule. Both Falconer and Greenhow-Relph, the leaders of the chapel party during the

[29] Usk Church papers, Usk almshouse scheme, poll for four representative trustees, 20 May 1891.

schooling predicament, were members of the upper-middle classes. The polling list from 1891 also shows that individuals whom one would have expected to have voted in favour of the chapel party based on their occupation supported the Anglican candidates. Examples are Harry and James Davies who were painters, Ann Lewis a milkwoman, and blacksmith, Richard Probert.[30] It was stated, however, at the open air meeting that 'if a poor man happened to work for the lords of this creation or a poor woman had a little scrubbing and so forth to do for them, and voted against them, by-and-by when Christmas came, their dinner would be of streaky bacon' suggesting that although individuals may have voted in favour of the Anglican candidates, they may not have done so willingly.[31] It is therefore necessary to find supporting evidence in order to determine which denomination an individual belonged to.

The local press is again an important source of useful material; however, the religious bias of the paper must be kept in mind. The *Illustrated Usk Observer and Raglan Herald* and the later *County Observer and Monmouthshire Central Advertiser* were sympathetic to the Anglican party as the editor, J. H. Clark, served as a church warden and was an advocate for the church party in 1891. However, during the school debate, Clark had been a manager of the nondenominational elementary school and had fought to keep it open, despite pressure from the elite and the Anglican church. His reports on that issue therefore present both sides of the argument as he clearly had sympathies with both parties. Other newspapers were more supportive of the nonconformist cause. *The Cardiff Times* and *The South Wales Daily News* were promoters of Welsh liberalism and therefore much more critical of the Anglican Church. It was these papers that published Judge Falconer's letters which were scathingly critical of Usk's urban elite.

The other collection of materials that are a valuable source of information is the assortment of papers belonging to the Priory Church of St Mary's. Although collected by a member of the Anglican church they provide an insight into the activities of both parties as they include materials produced by the chapel party which outline their argument and feelings over the issue. The collection also contains an undated

[30] *Ibid*.,
[31] Usk Church papers, newspaper cutting, no date.

newspaper article that records in considerable detail the speeches made at an open-air meeting on the eve of the election that was held on the steps of the Congregational chapel in Twyn Square. These speeches, and the other materials produced by the chapel party, were delivered and/or produced with the intention of rallying support and therefore are likely to have exaggerated the evils of the Anglican elite. However, at a time when almost all the surviving material was produced by said elite, they are the only sources to survive that were produced by those outside this core group and therefore provide a valuable insight into their thoughts and feelings at the time.

The growth of nonconformity and the changing nature of inter-denominational relations.

Before the case studies of internal conflict can be fully explored it is important to chart the relationship between Usk's Anglican and nonconformist congregations. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had seen the rapid growth of nonconformity within Wales and by the 1850s a number of significant shifts had occurred. The establishment and its church increasingly saw nonconformity as a threat to their position and as a breeding ground for radical protest. The established church was also redefining its position within Welsh society as it attempted to fight back against the rapid spread of dissent. At the same time nonconformity was undergoing its own transformation in its attitude towards politics, Anglicanism and its own identity. This section will chart the growth of nonconformity within Wales, Monmouthshire and Usk and then argue that many of the issues that resulted in the growth of nonconformity across Wales were also in play within Usk. Finally, the changing attitudes of both sides will be explored. By investigating the reasons why people within Usk converted to nonconformity and why the relationship between the two parties deteriorated, a picture of Usk's nonconformist population will emerge that shows a growing section of the Usk community that had been alienated by the established church and the Anglican elite and pushed to the periphery of public life within its own urban community.

Russell Davies has suggested that by 1870 'Welsh' and 'nonconformist' were regarded by many as almost synonymous terms, a reflection on the rapid and widespread growth

of dissent in Wales that began in the early eighteenth century.[32] The Welsh Methodist revival began in 1737 within the rural areas of south Wales. The subsequent mass migration from rural Wales into the new industrialised communities of the coalfield and the growth of other nonconformist denominations such as the Baptists and the Independents, meant that by 1851, it accounted for 68% of the 898,442 sittings recorded by the religious census.[33] The survival of eighteenth-century lists compiled by Dr John Evans between 1715 and 1718 and Josiah Thompson in 1772 and 1773, along with data derived from the 1851 religious census and the *Report of the commission on the church of England and other religious bodies in Wales and Monmouthshire* published in 1910, has made it possible to chart the growth of nonconformity in Wales. As demonstrated in table 4.1 below, growth was initially slow but by the end of the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth centuries there was a rapid increase that continued to climb as the century progressed.

Table 4.1. *Growth of Welsh nonconformity.*

	1715-18	**1772/3**	**1851**	**1905**
Number of nonconformist congregations/places of worship within Wales including Monmouthshire.	97	139	2770	4669

Source: M. R. Watts, *The dissenters. Vol. II. The expansion of evangelical nonconformity* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 25-26; C. E. Fryer, The numerical decline of dissent in England previous to the industrial revolution, *The American Journal of Theology*, 17, no.2, (1913), p. 239; *Report of the commission on the Church of England and other religious bodies in Wales and Monmouthshire* (London, 1910), p.22.

E. T. Davies refers to Monmouthshire as the 'home of Welsh protestant nonconformity' during the seventeenth century but argues that the eighteenth century saw nonconformity lose ground within the county, a consequence of early middle-class converts returning to the Established church.[34] The subsequent inward migration of rural workers to the industrial regions of the county resulted in the rapid growth of non-conformity so that by the time of the 1851 census the nonconformist denominations were dominant. Following the census, they continued to grow. At a meeting to celebrate the bi-centenary of the Welsh Congregational chapel at Penmain, Blackwood in 1891, it

[32] R. Davies, *Hope and heartbreak. A social history of Wales and the Welsh, 1776-1871* (Cardiff, 2005), p. 326.
[33] J. Davies, *A History of Wales* (London, 1993), p. 423.
[34] Davies, *Religion in the industrial revolution*, pp. 147-8.

was claimed that the number of independents in Monmouthshire had increased from 61 churches with 7,459 members and 11,186 hearers in 1861 to 78 churches in 1890 with 8,786 members and 14,515 hearers.[35] This growth reflects patterns seen within the Baptists, whose membership increased from 7,237 in 1857 to 18,203 people in 1914, and the Calvinist Methodists, whose membership increased from 2,199 in 1860 to 6,775 in 1914.[36]

Table 4.2. *Religious attendance in Monmouthshire as % of population, 1851.*

District	**Population**	**Church of England Attendance**	**Nonconformist Attendance**
Chepstow	19,057	20.4	12.7
Monmouth	27,379	23.1	18.1
Abergavenny	59,229	9.8	45.8
Pontypool	27,993	13.6	43.1
Newport	43,472	5.9	31.6
Monmouthshire	177,130	12.7	34.1

Source: Watts, *The dissenters. Vol. II*, pp. 712-713.

The regional differences within Monmouthshire are illustrated in table 4.2 above. It is evident that nonconformity was particularly popular in northern and western districts of Pontypool and Abergavenny. These areas, however, were considerably more industrialised and less anglicised than Monmouth and Chepstow in the south and east of the county. Variations also existed within these districts. Usk, being in the Pontypool district, was in an area where nonconformity was relatively high. One would possibly expect Usk, being a small market town, to have mirrored the patterns seen in the eastern and southern districts of the county where Anglican attendance remained comparatively higher. However, the commission report of 1910 indicated that in 1905 a larger percentage of Usk's population attended, either as communicants or as adherents, nonconformist places of worship than in Monmouth or Chepstow. It would appear, therefore, that Usk was somewhat unique within the county as it straddled the border

[35] *The Cardiff Times*, 3 Oct. 1891, p. 6.
[36] C. B. Turner, 'Church and Chapel', in C. Williams and S. R. Williams (eds.), *The Gwent County History. Vol. 4. Industrial Monmouthshire, 1780-1914* (Cardiff, 2011), p. 217.

between the anglicised regions of east and west Monmouthshire and the more industrial and characteristically Welsh regions of the coalfield.

Table 4.3. *Number of Communicants and Adherents as % of the population, 1906.*

	Number of Communicants and Adherents.	
	Anglican	Nonconformist
Usk	15	27.9
Monmouth	14.2	12.8
Chepstow	9.8	14

Source: *Report on the Church of England and other religious bodies in Wales and Monmouthshire* (London, 1910), p. 22.

Although there is a lack of nonconformist data from Usk, it is possible to chart the growth of nonconformity. The returns of the visit of Bishop John Ewer, Bishop of Llandaff between 1761 and 1769, state that in 1763 Usk was home to 40 dissenters of which 18 were papists and 22 were anabaptists and an 'unlicensed meeting house'.[37] By the time of the religious census in 1851, the number of nonconformists within Usk increased considerably. It should be acknowledged that using the religious census data can be problematic as it simply recorded those in attendance on a particular date, it therefore does not provide information regarding membership figures, nor does it account for worshippers who may have attended both morning and evening services. The census also does not identify where these individuals lived. While the surrounding parishes had their own Anglican churches, few had a nonconformist chapel and therefore it is likely that people travelled into Usk to worship, although it is impossible to know to what extent this was reflected in the numbers recorded by the census.

Despite these reasons for caution, it is evident that between 1763 and 1851 nonconformity established itself within the town, not just in terms of numbers and a growth in nonconformist congregations but with the construction of permanent, licensed chapels. An Independent chapel was built on the Twyn in 1769, which was followed by the construction of Wesleyan Methodist chapel in Maryport Street in 1817 and a new Baptist chapel in Old Market Street in 1842. The commission report of 1910

[37] J. R. Guy, (ed.), T*he Diocese of Llandaff in 1763. The primary visitation of Bishop Ewer* (Cardiff, 1991), p. 158.

implied that nonconformity remained a significant presence within the Usk community. Due to the issues with the 1851 census, it is difficult to compare the two sets of data, but it is evident that by the end of the century Usk's nonconformist congregations considerably outnumbered its Anglican one, though the latter remained the largest single denomination.

Table 4.4. *Religious census results for Usk, 1851.*

Denomination	**Sittings**	**Attendance**	
		Morning	Afternoon/Evening
Anglican	750	250 + 70 scholars	550
Roman Catholic	No number given	130	160
Baptist	270	61 + 12 scholars	96 + 12 scholars
Independent	135 (inc. 20 standing)	45 + 20 scholars	50 + 20 scholars
Wesleyan Methodist	200	45	70

Source: I. G. Jones and D. Williams, *The religious Census of 1851. A calendar of the returns relating to Wales. Vol. I, south Wales* (Cardiff, 1976), pp. 86-87.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, Usk's lower classes had cause to feel increasingly alienated from the Anglican church. The appointment of non-Welsh bishops and clergy meant that their tenures were short and that they were often absent leaving the business of the parish to lesser members of the church. The Bishop of Llandaff returns for 1763 show that Usk's incumbent vicar, the Rev. Lucas, had gone 'to Ireland as Chaplain to a regiment' the year previously leaving the curate, Evan Thomas, to administer to the parish in his absence.[38] The appointment of non-Welsh clergy also meant that services were increasingly delivered in English which would have further alienated Usk's Welsh speaking inhabitants.

It is impossible to determine the extent to which Welsh was spoken in Usk during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Clark states that the last service in Welsh was delivered at St Mary's in 1750 but Pryce suggests that the Vale of Usk constituted a

[38] Guy, *The Diocese of Llandaff*, p. 159.

'bilingual zone' in 1771 where 'Welsh and English enjoyed roughly equal currency'.[39] This is a notion reinforced by William Coxe who observed that 'the natives of the midland parts are accustomed to both languages'.[40] Using the language in which an Anglican service was delivered in order to determine patterns of language use can be problematic. Not only were there very few Welsh-speaking clergymen, but the Anglican church actively encouraged the use of English. Its use, therefore, does not mean that the Welsh language had disappeared from the town.

Unfortunately, there is scant evidence of Welsh being spoken in Usk during the nineteenth century, a reflection of the fact that most of the surviving source material was produced by Usk's English-speaking elite. It is evident, however, that by the end of the century that there was a small bilingual community in Usk. The census returns for 1891 indicate that there were 13 bilingual inhabitants in the town while *The Report of the Commission on the Church of England and other Religious bodies in Wales and Monmouthshire* indicated the presence of one monoglot Welsh speaker and 35 bilingual people in 1906.[41] This data indicates that it is probable that Usk was home to a monoglot Welsh or bilingual community, albeit diminishing, during the nineteenth century who may have felt that their religious needs were neglected by a denomination that was unable to communicate with them in their native language.

Table 4.5. *Size of Anglican and nonconformist congregations in Usk in 1906.*

	Church of England	**Nonconformist**
Accommodation	630	940
Communicants	298	208
Adherents not including communicants	-	343
Sunday Scholars and teachers	197	251

Source: *Report on the Church of England and other religious bodies in Wales and Monmouthshire* (London, 1910), p. 22.

This was compounded by a lack of affordable space within the parish church of St Mary's. At the time of the census in 1851, St Mary's provided seating for 750 people,

[39] Pryce, 'Language shifts in Gwent', pp. 51-2.
[40] William Coxe, *An historical tour of Monmouthshire. Vol. 1* (London, 1801), p. 2.
[41] Census returns of England and Wales 1891, http://www.ancestry.co.uk [accessed 23.03.22]; *Report on the Church of England and other religious bodies in Wales and Monmouthshire* (London, 1910), p. 174.

approximately 51.6 % of the population. This, however, was after the carried out in 1844 when 344 additional seats were added. This means that prior to 1844 it only provided accommodation for 30% of the population.[42] Clark states that 300 of the new additional seats were declared free which indicates that there had been a shortage of affordable space for those at the lower end of the socio-economic scale. Consequently, the Anglican Church was seen as an establishment that accommodated and prioritised the religious needs of the wealthy elite which resulted in it becoming inextricably linked with the anglicised establishment, further enhancing feelings of alienation amongst sections of Usk society.

Another factor that alienated inhabitants from the Anglican church was the close relationship between the clergy and the local gentry. This association is evident within Usk during the opening half of the decade when the parish vicar, Rev. Thomas Addams Williams was a member of the county elite with ties to the house of Beaufort. Such close ties to the gentry and English aristocracy meant that the church was seen as being an integral part of the establishment, a fact that nonconformists heightened by portraying the clergy as the 'gentry in vestments' and as men who were more interested in the cellar, hunt and table than the church, salvation or the sacraments.[43] The perception of the clergy as members of the ruling classes was further enhanced by the civic role the clergy often took within local government which saw them serving within corporations, on turnpike trust committees and sitting as county magistrates. In addition to being the vicar of St Mary's, Thomas Addams Williams was also a county magistrate and a burgess of Usk who sat as portreeve in 1822, an appointment believed to have been orchestrated by the Duke of Beaufort.[44]

The association with the establishment coupled with the shortage of affordable seating and the predominance of the English language left Usk's working- and lower middle classes alienated from the established church and resulted in the growth of nonconformity within Usk. It is important to understand the reasons for this growth in order to comprehend the tensions behind the examples of conflict that will be explored in this chapter. The Anglican church's failure to accommodate its working and lower-

[42] J. H. Clark, *Reminiscences of Monmouthshire* (Usk, 1908), p. 38.
[43] Davies, *Hope and heartbreak*, p. 325.
[44] *Vida supre*, pp. 55-6.

middle class, Welsh parishioners helped push them toward dissent. Nonconformity provided an adequate amount of accessible accommodation. Although it is not known whether Usk's nonconformist chapels delivered their services in Welsh, Usk's early Baptist ministers had close links with areas such as Pontypool and the Blaina Gwent region where Welsh was widely spoken and it is therefore probable that they were Welsh speakers.[45] Nonconformity also provided a community for members of Usk's society who increasingly saw themselves as 'outsiders, despised and discriminated against by the establishment' while its ministers, often men of a similar economic and cultural background, provided them with an alternative form of leadership which understood the feelings of frustration and alienation experienced by its congregations.[46]

An absence of evidence suggests that the two parties co-existed relatively peacefully during the first half of the nineteenth century. Although Usk did not have its own newspaper during this period, other local newspapers such as the *Monmouthshire Merlin*, the *Cambrian* and The *Bristol Mercury* were known to report on controversial events in Usk. That there is no comment on the presence of religious strife, therefore, suggests there was little at this time. Inter-denominational relations were certainly amicable enough that they could establish a Lancastrian school in 1811 as the founding subscribers included an eminent Quaker, an Independent and a Unitarian as well as a number of clergymen.[47] It is also apparent that the two were able to work together within the corporation as at least two nonconformists, John Pyrke and Evan Jones, sat as portreeve with the latter holding office on more than one occasion. This shows that their religious denomination did not prevent them from holding office nor did it impact their relationship with their peers as they would have been nominated and elected by their fellow burgesses. However, the mid-nineteenth century saw a number of developments that resulted in a shift in attitude on both sides of the religious divide and brought the two parties into conflict.

The outbreaks of violent protest across South Wales during the 1830s and 1840s were attributed to the growth of dissent, an association that was intensified by the publication

[45] Rev. N. D. Burge, *The history of Usk Baptist church. Early beginnings – 1995* (Cwmbran, 1995), pp. 8-10.
[46] H. McLeod, *Class and religion in the late Victorian city* (London, 1974), p. 177.
[47] D. R. Lewis, *Early Victorian Usk* (Cardiff, 1982), p. 72.

of the *Blue Books*. These served as an indictment of 'Welsh backwardness, ignorance, squalor, isolation, poverty and incompetence', all of which were blamed on the Welsh language and the popularity of nonconformity.[48] This report, coupled with the outbreaks of violence and the results of the religious census of 1851, resulted in a growing fear of dissent. At the same time the Anglican church within south Wales had started to experience its own revival and the appointment of Dr Alfred Ollivant as Bishop of Llandaff in 1849 saw it assume a more aggressive approach to its survival. It was within this environment that Rev. Baker was appointed the new vicar of St Mary's, Usk and his attempts to establish a National School in Usk soon after his arrival during the 1850s adhered to this new approach. The National Society for promoting the education of the poor in the principles of the Established Church had been founded in 1811 and by the mid-century it was accepted that wherever a new church was built, a school was sure to follow.[49] By establishing a National School Baker was clearly engaging with principles of the revival and public campaign against the nondenominational school indicates that he believed it was his responsibility to safeguard the spiritual and moral welfare of his parish by ensuring it received an Anglican education.

The *Blue Books* united the nonconformist denominations against a common enemy and resulted in their increasing politicisation. This was coupled with the adoption and promotion of middle-class values such as hard work, fiscal investment and engagement in public life. The growth of Usk as a retail, agricultural and judicial centre saw the growth of an emboldened lower middle-class of smaller shopkeepers and tradesmen. Although not substantial, an increase in wealth and changes to the law meant a growing number qualified as ratepayers allowing them to exercise a greater degree of political agency, for as ratepayers and property owners they too could partake in local politics. These developments resulted in members of the nonconformist party start to demand a presence within the sphere of local politics which brought them into conflict with the Anglican upper-middle classes who feared their motives.

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[48] P. Morgan, '*The gwerin of Wales - myth and reality',* in I. Hume, W. T. R. Pryce and E. Jones (eds.), *The Welsh and their country: selected readings in the social sciences* (Llandysul, 1986), p. 143.
[49] I. G. Jones, 'Ecclesiastical Economy: aspects of church building in Victorian Wales', in R. R. Davies, R. A. Griffiths, I. G Jones and K. O. Morgan (eds.), Welsh society and nationhood: historical essays presented to Glanmor Williams, (Cardiff, 1984), p. 219.

Church versus chapel.

The sharpening division between established church and nonconformity led to rising tensions within the Usk community which spilled into the public sphere. This section will explore the case studies to show that although religion played a role, at the heart of both disagreements was a palpable and increasing frustration with the actions of the Anglican leadership and a predominantly Anglican elite who were desperate to secure and maintain their influence over the urban community.

Religion provided the dividing line between parties in both case studies. Baker's suggestion that the nondenominational school amalgamate with his meant that children would be taught the bible, bible history and the church catechism 'in accordance with the principles and doctrines of the Church of England' and was perceived as an attack on nonconformity.[50] Falconer and, to a lesser extent, Greenhow-Relph, repeatedly emphasised that this was a 'dangerous policy…of enforcing church ascendancy against dissenters' rather than 'recognising and respecting different religious opinions'.[51]

Religious differences played a much smaller role in the almshouse question but remained a factor in the dispute. The Chapel party candidates, F. Jennings, J. J. Edwards, J. O. Nicholas and T. J. Smith were nonconformists nominated by the Congregational Minister, Denias Daw, while the other four candidates all belonged to the Anglican church. As a result, the opposing sides were referred to as the church and chapel parties. The chapel party seemed to want to distance itself from religion for at the open-air meeting held on the eve of the election it was stated that the challenge was not about 'a question of church or chapel, radical or Tory' but about doing what was right for the town of Usk.[52] However, the role of religion cannot be ignored. The conflict was instigated by Deaconess Eleanor who raised concerns over the management of the almshouses by the nonconformists and the behaviour of some of the inhabitants. That this was perceived to be an attack on Usk's nonconformist community is evident in a pre-election pamphlet in which it was pointed out that the Deaconess had not 'worried Mr Voyce', the incoming Anglican, overseer, in the same way as she had

[50] *Illustrated Usk Observer and Raglan Herald*, 26 Jan. 1861, p. 1.
[51] *County Observer and Monmouthshire Central Advertiser*, 8 Jul. 1871, p. 5.
[52] Usk Church papers, newspaper cutting, no date.

the previous, nonconformist, overseers.[53] The women Deaconess Eleanor accused of bad behaviour were also likely to have been chapel goers for it was pointed out in a different election pamphlet, published by the Anglican party, that the majority of those in the almshouse were nonconformists.

While religion played a role, at the heart of both disagreements was a palpable and increasing frustration with the actions of the Anglican leadership that was supported by a predominantly Anglican elite rather than an issue of theological difference. Denias Daw, the Congregational Minister, accused the 'elders' of the church of 'dirty work', of interfering in matters that did not concern them and of intentionally refusing to put the new scheme in front of the ratepayers. Similar indignation was expressed during the debate over schooling where the nonconformist and liberal press accused Baker of 'episcopal intolerance' and claimed that 'clerical instigation' had brought about the closure of the nondenominational school.[54] That the Anglican leadership was responsible for the closure of the school was clearly the view of the Usk's nonconformist community who, according to the *County Observer*, 'levied' a considerable amount of abuse 'on the head of Rev. Baker'.[55]

These examples of conflict highlight the relationship between the Anglican leadership and the urban elite which allowed the former, in this case Baker, to use his position to ensure he achieved his aims. This is particularly apparent with the closure of the elementary school as Baker was able to put pressure on the Roger Edwards Charity, which had helped fund the nondenominational school since 1843, to favour his school over the pre-existing elementary school, stating at a vestry meeting that the trustees 'would consider that the church had the first claim upon them'.[56] Considering the religious affiliation of the trustees, six of whom in 1868 were members of the clergy, it seems unlikely that it would have taken much pressure from Baker to ensure their co-operation.[57] Reports in the local press show that the Charity did little to remain impartial over the school issue. In December 1870 the trustees resolved to 'entertain' the suggestion to 'give up the present elementary schools to the town of Usk' which

[53] *Ibid.*, election pamphlet published by the chapel party, 13 May 1891.
[54] *The Cardiff Times*, 15 Jul. 1875, p. 5; *South Wales Daily News*, 31 Jul. 1875, p. 5.
[55] *County Observer and Monmouthshire Central Advertiser*, 5 Jun. 1875, p. 4.
[56] *Ibid.*, 17 Dec. 1870, p. 5.
[57] Clark, *Past and present*, p. vii.

would have required the ratepayers to provide the funding necessary to maintain the school. This was followed with notice to 'deliver up the school buildings' by the end of the 1871 as at this time it was believed they owned the land on which the school was built.[58] Although the managers of the elementary school managed to renegotiate the lease for the school room, in 1874, they were forced to let the master and mistress of the school go as they could no longer afford their pay. This was because the trustees were giving an increasing amount to the National school. In 1873 it received an income in excess of £20 while the elementary school received nothing.[59]

A shared Anglican belief also allowed the church to mobilise more powerful sources of support, namely the Duke of Beaufort. As already noted, Beaufort forced the school to close in 1875 when he reclaimed the land on which the school building was built. There is no evidence of any collusion between Baker and the duke, however, considering that Beaufort was impropriator of St Mary's, it is feasible that he was aware that his actions would force the school's closure. This is further reinforced by the fact that he then leased the land to Baker and the managers of the National school. In 1875 an article in *The South Wales Daily News*, one of the 'chief organs for Welsh liberal politics' reported on the closure of the school, claiming that Beaufort's actions had resulted in the 'extinction' of the school and that it was intended to ensure that 'dissent will thus be stamped out in Usk'.[60] Provocative though these comments are, they demonstrate how the Church was able to use its affiliation with the establishment to further enhance its own influence. At the same time though, it was a mutually beneficial relationship as the elite, by supporting the Anglican Church in their attacks on nonconformity, were able to further extend and secure their own authority.

As Appendix 1 demonstrates, many of Usk's most prominent men belonged to the Anglican church. Usk's longest serving portreeve, J. H. Clark, served as churchwarden and the local board's first chairman, Alexander Waddington, lent a sizeable amount of money to the church to fund its renovations in the 1840s. Although the lack of evidence makes it difficult, cross referencing newspaper articles, church records and Clark's *Past*

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[58] *County Observer and Monmouthshire Central Advertiser*, 10 Dec. 1870, p. 5 and 21 Jan. 1871, p. 4.
[59] *Ibid.*, 30 Sep. 1871, p. 5, 7 Mar. 1874, p. 5 and 18 Jan. 1873, p. 4.
[60] *South Wales Daily News*, 31 Jul. 1875, p. 5; *The Merthyr Telegraph and General Advertiser for the Iron Districts of South Wales*, 6 Aug. 1875, p. 3.

and Present, it is possible to identify that of the 16 men who sat as portreeve between 1832 and 1886, at least 10 can be confirmed as being Anglican. The same can be said of the local board. Although it is only possible to confirm that 8 of the 12 inaugural members were Anglican, it is evident that all 12 subscribed to the National school in 1878.[61] By this time, the National school was the only elementary school in Usk and, therefore, they may have deemed it their duty as local board members to support it. The names of prominent nonconformists such as Judge Falconer and Greenhow-Relph, who were still resident in Usk, are not on the list suggesting that those that did subscribe were members of the Anglican church.

The Anglican Church's appropriation of the elementary school enabled the elite to further extend its influence over education and it is evident that they had similar intentions by introducing a new scheme for the management of the almshouses. Prior to 1891, the almshouses had been managed by the overseers, who, despite forming part of the vestry, were not necessarily Anglican nor members of the elite. The scheme proposed by the Vicar, however, would have seen himself, the two churchwardens and the two overseers sit as trustees and they would appoint a further six.[62] However, this would have meant that even if the overseers had been nonconformist, the Anglican party would have had the majority and have been able to secure the appointment of their peers as trustees. Baker's suggestion was not adopted; however, the new scheme still allowed for the Anglican elite to dominate the charity if their candidates were elected as representative trustees. The new board consisted of nine people. Two were ex-officio trustees, the Vicar and the Chairman of the local board, and three co-optative trustees, J. H. Clark, Charles Voyce, and Edwin Parry. Of these five, only one, Parry, was a nonconformist and from outside the elite. The final four were to be elected by the parishioners and was why the election was so hotly contested as the victorious party would have a majority and therefore be able to influence how the almshouses were managed.

These two case studies are not the only examples of how the elite tried to secure and extend their authority during the second half of the nineteenth century for they were

[61] *County Observer and Monmouthshire Central Advertiser*, 16 Feb. 1878, p. 1.
[62] Clark, *Past and present*, p. 146.

resistant to changes that could have weakened their hold over the different informal bodies of urban governance, especially the Roger Edwards Charity. In 1862 when the Charity Commission first visited the town to devise a scheme for the management of the elementary school it was suggested that the number of trustees for the Roger Edwards Charity should be increased and not be self-elected.[63] Although it was agreed to increase the number of trustees to fourteen, they were to be selected by the existing trustees and this number was later reduced to nine.[64] An article in the *Western Mail* in 1870 stated that 'there was a strong feeling in the town that the board has a tendency to become cliquish and… that the commercial class was not represented in it'.[65] According to this article, two positions had recently become vacant and although the Charity Commission had recommended that 'an endeavour should be made to meet the wishes of the townspeople who had recommended a number of possible candidates, the trustees stuck with their own nominations arguing that they 'would elect a suitable shopkeeper if they could find one' but 'that they had on this occasion been actuated with finding the best men'.[66] The board of trustees clearly intended to remain a self-electing organisation and was not willing to co-opt from the lower-middle classes, ensuring management of the charity remained the preserve of the Anglican elite.

It is also evident that the charity became increasingly detached from the wider community. A later visit of the Charity Commission in 1878, this time in response to complaints made against the trustees regarding their management of the Grammar school, was criticized for being held in private. According to a letter published by the *South Wales Daily News*, five public bodies met with the commission which were the Vicar and the trustees, the portreeve and persons 'called burgesses', the Vicar and parochial officers, the Vicar and persons connected to the National School and finally the portreeve and members of 'our unhappy and unskilled' local board. These individuals were all members of the Established church and of the urban elite and therefore no-one representing the wider population was in attendance as 'all was to be snug, quiet and one sided'.[67] This echoed Clark's account that described how

[63] *Illustrated Usk Observer and Raglan Herald*, 26 Jan. 1861, p. 1.
[64] Clark, *Past and present*, p. x.
[65] *Western Mail*, 14 May 1870, p. 3.
[66] *Ibid*.
[67] *South Wales Daily News*, 30 Jan. 1880, p. 2.

Greenhow-Relph had attempted to attend the meeting only to be told that it was a private meeting and asked to leave.[68]

At the open-air meeting held on the eve of the almshouse election in 1891, Daw bemoaned the fact that the most recent meeting with Charity Commissioner had been held at the Three Salmons at a time 'when working people were at their work' and that the elite 'knowing the working people could not be there, behind their backs and without their knowledge, took the vote of the meeting, and tried to carry out those things against them'.[69] Daw, a leading member of the chapel party, would have wanted to portray the opposition in such a way that would enrage his audience in order to secure their vote. It indicates, however, that the elite were making decisions that would impact the wider community without engaging the smaller ratepayers and lower classes in the process. This appears to have been an ongoing trend. At a vestry meeting in 1877 that was held to elect a parish overseer, it was argued by nonconformists in attendance that the meeting had not been legally called as notices had not been posted on the chapel doors but only on those of the church suggesting that conscious efforts had been made to keep nonconformists out of the process and exercise of parochial government.[70]

Attempts to keep local government the preserve of the elite stemmed from a desire to maintain control over parochial rates. At a public meeting of inhabitants in 1870 that was held to discuss whether Usk should establish a school board, it was made clear that the town should 'provide themselves with the requisite school accommodation and so avoid a levy of a rate'. Waddington, the portreeve and chairman of the meeting, argued that if a compulsory system was adopted, the rates which were 'sufficiently heavy already' would be 'considerably increased'.[71] This was a sentiment echoed by another principal inhabitant, Colonel McDonnell, who stated that an increase in rates would be 'a serious matter … as he felt they were burdened enough already'.[72] Rev. Baker was able to use this fear of increasing rates to his advantage by arguing that if the schools were amalgamated under the National system, the new institution would qualify for a

[68] Clark, *Past and present*, p. 72.
[69] Usk Church papers, newspaper cutting, no date.
[70] *South Wales Daily News,* 24 Jan. 1877, p. 6.
[71] *County Observer and Monmouthshire Central Advertiser*, 3 Dec. 1870, p. 4.
[72] *Ibid*. p. 5.

Diocesan grant that would further help to keep rates low.[73] The threat of an increased rate saw the ratepayers choose to adopt a voluntary system in order to avoid the cost of establishing a school board. As alluded to in chapter two, the issue of rates was of great concern to the elite which is evident in the fact that the increasing poor rate had seen them petition the Poor Law Board for Usk to be separated from the Pontypool poor law union in 1855.[74]

One of the primary reasons used to promote the idea of establishing the local board in 1872 was that it would allow the ratepayers 'power to spend [their] own money' and that by being 'judicious' in their selection of board members the ratepayers would be able to reduce their rates.[75] As noted above, a desire to keep rates low was why the elite, as trustees of the Roger Edwards Charity, supported Baker's school. Although the issue of rates was perhaps not as pressing during the almshouse episode as it had been previously, a newspaper article from 1887 indicates they were an underlying concern. It stated that the income of the charity was paid 'to the poor law authority and [went] towards reducing the rates' while the overseer's scheme would see the money go 'towards repairs of the almshouses and the surplus divided between the inmates.[76] Therefore the overseer's scheme would have resulted in an increase in rates as the poor rate would have no longer been supplemented by the income of the almshouse charity.

For the elite, it was the control of rates rather than a desire to exclude nonconformists from local government that was behind their attempts to strengthen their hold on the urban community. The religious rift therefore represented a socio-economic divide within the community. As rates were assessed on the value of property, the larger ratepayers were more likely to be Anglican while the smaller ratepayers tended to be nonconformists. The socio-economic differences between the two also meant that there were a larger number of Anglican ratepayers, a fact pointed out in a letter published in the *Western Mail* in 1880 that stated that there were only 30 nonconformist ratepayers living within Usk. [77] As they contributed greater amounts of money to the rates, the Anglican ratepayers felt they deserved the right to determine how the parish rates were

[73] *Ibid*. p. 4.
[74] GA. D1651.31. Minute book of vestry and parish meetings, 27 Sep. 1855.
[75] Clark, *Past and present*, p. 128.
[76] *South Wales Daily News*, 10 Dec. 1887, p. 3.
[77] *The Western Mail*, 23 Dec. 1880, p. 4.

spent, a point made in the letter referred to above which states that as they constituted the greatest number of ratepayers the 'wishes and feelings of churchmen are entitled to some consideration'.

The elite feared that poorer ratepayers would not have the same attitudes towards parochial spending. In a meeting of ratepayers held to select suitable candidates to stand for the local board in the election of 1877, the chairman opened by stating that it was 'for the ratepayers to elect men who would endeavour to lessen the taxes and work for the welfare of the parish'. One individual, William Hiley, who was described as 'a shrewd man, an extensive ratepayer and employer of labour' who 'would no doubt endeavour to lower the rates', was therefore accepted as suitable.[78] Hiley was a nonconformist so the fact that he was deemed acceptable demonstrates that the elite did not necessarily try to exclude nonconformists from positions of authority due to differences in religion. Instead, it was a fear that an individual from a lower socio-economic background who paid less in rates would not share their concerns. As Hiley was a higher ratepayer, it was believed that he would support their efforts to keep rates low. The fact that the elite were driven by their desire to control rates and parochial spending because they were the largest contributors indicates that the fundamental issue in both case studies was one of class. The elite did not want their lower-middle and working-class neighbours having a say in how their money was spent for they feared that smaller ratepayers would increase the rates in order to benefit their own communities.

These moments of conflict between the Anglican elite and the nonconformist, lower-middle and working classes demonstrate that disagreements over religious doctrine played little to no part. Although it provided an internal dividing line, this reflected wider social patterns that separated an urban elite that was predominantly Anglican from the lower classes amongst whom nonconformity was prevalent. Rising frustrations with the Anglican hegemony over the bodies of urban governance and the continued exclusion of nonconformists brought those previously on the periphery into the public sphere as they fought to have their voices heard and to engage in the process of local government.

[78] *South Wales Daily News*, 6 Apr. 1877, p. 3.

What about the Catholics?

Little has been said about Usk's Roman Catholic community during this thesis. This is because a shortage of source material makes it is very difficult to assess the role played by Usk's Catholic inhabitants within the wider urban community and during the Church versus Chapel disputes explored in this chapter. What has survived however suggests that the community was divided along socio-economic lines, while the lack of any perceived attack on their religious beliefs meant that they did not form a united whole that challenged the hegemony of the Anglican elite.

Very little is known about Usk's Catholic community. The results of the religious census, shown in table 4.4, indicated that the Catholic church had a sizable congregation by 1851. This is supported by newspaper reports of social events that were well attended and services where 'upwards of forty candidates were presented for confirmation'.[79] It is likely, however, that these statistics included worshippers from the surrounding areas and therefore the attendance figures are unlikely to reflect the number of Catholics who lived in Usk. The 1850s was also a period that would have seen an increased number of Irish labourers living in Usk who were employed to work on the new railway which would have inflated the data reported by the census. Those Catholics that did live in Usk appeared to do so relatively peacefully as there is little evidence of anti-Catholic sentiment within the town. Although there are accounts of fights involving Irish navvies these appear to have been fuelled by alcohol rather than any anti-Catholic feeling.[80]

As seen with nonconformist adherents, it is hard to identify Roman Catholic members of the community. There is only one individual who appears in the surviving source material who can be identified as a Roman Catholic, Francis McDonnell, a lawyer, who donated land for the construction of the Catholic church in 1847. Despite his religious beliefs, McDonnell was sworn in as a burgess in 1820 and served as Portreeve in 1833.[81] This demonstrates that being Catholic did not preclude him from public office despite the prevalence of anti-Catholic sentiment in Britain during that time. Nor did it

[79] *Cardiff Times*, 1 Jan 1876, P. 8; *Weekly Mail*, 24 May 1884, p. 102.
[80] *The Illustrated Usk Observer and Raglan Herald*, 29 Dec. 1855, p. 1.
[81] Clark, *Past and Present*, p. 93 and 95.

exclude him from being active within the Anglican vestry. In 1825 he sat on the committee established to oversee the construction of the new almshouses whilst a seating plan for St Mary's shows that he had an allocated pew suggesting he attended Anglican services of worship.[82] These examples suggest that McDonnell may have practised occasional conformity in order to assume a public life. The dearth of source material means it is not possible to determine whether other Catholics were able to join the urban elite or whether McDonnell was the exception. McDonnell was one of Usk's wealthiest individuals and therefore a prominent member of the community, a position that was enhanced by the fact that he was also a member of the county elite, sitting as a county magistrate while he and his family were known to attend a variety of county events alongside other members of the Monmouthshire gentry.[83]. During the early modern period, there had been a strong Catholic presence in Monmouthshire, especially in and around Abergavenny which may have meant that the region was more tolerant of Catholics than elsewhere. It seems more likely, however, that McDonnell's wealth meant that the establishment, headed by the Duke of Beaufort, trusted him to vote in favour of the Conservative cause and therefore bestowed upon him the privileges that allowed him to become a member of Usk's urban elite and that of the wider county.

Francis McDonnell was from the higher echelons of Usk society as was his son, Col. Francis McDonnell, a county magistrate who sat as chairman of the Usk Petty Sessional division and as Usk's representative on Monmouthshire County Council.[84] In contrast to the McDonnells, the census returns show that Usk was home to a small community of Irish families, the majority of which lived in Usk's poorest areas, the Tan House and Walcheren.[85] This information suggests that Usk's Catholic congregation was from the two ends of the socio-economic spectrum, from the urban elite and the working class poor with no evidence of those from the middling sort. The results for the almshouse election, which are shown below in table 4.6, show that of the 31 Catholics who could vote, 8 polled in favour of the Church party, 9 in favour of the Chapel party, 2 split their votes while 12 abstained from voting altogether.[86] Using the patterns seen in the voting

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[82] *Ibid.*, p. 130; NLW, MS 18549B, Notes on Usk Church, Iltyd Nichol (1814-1867).
[83] Monmouthshire Merlin, 28 Oct. 1848, p. 3; *Ibid., 6 Oct. 1849, p. 3.*
[84] *County Observer and Monmouthshire County Advertiser*, 12 Mar. 1904, p. 4.
[85] K. Schürer and E. Higgs, *Integrated census microdata (I-CeM); 1851-1911* [computer file]. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive [distributor], April 2014. SN: 7481, http://dx.doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-7481-1
[86] Usk Church papers, Usk almshouse scheme, poll for four representative trustees, 20 May 1891.

habits of the wider community, that wealthier ratepayers were more likely to support the Anglican elite while poorer adherents voted in favour of the nonconformists, these results support the suggestion that the Roman Catholic community came from opposite ends of the socio-economic spectrum. Except for the younger McDonnell and the Catholic priest, both of whom voted for the Church party, the Catholic ratepayers cannot be identified. Cross-referencing the election results with the census of 1891 indicates that of the 11 Irish heads of household listed on the census, 4 voted in favour of the Chapel party, 4 abstained, 1 split their vote, 2 voted for the Church party. Assuming that these ratepayers were all Catholic, however, they only constituted a third of the Roman Catholics eligible to vote, leaving another 20 unidentified.

Table 4.6. Analysis of voting, Usk almshouse election, 1891.

Religious Nomination	**Vote for Anglican candidates**	**Split**	**Votes for nonconformist candidates**	**Abstained**	**Total**
Church	69	21	51	63	204
Roman Catholic	8	2	9	12	31
Wesleyan	0	3	8	1	12
Independent	0	0	19	4	23
Baptist	0	1	29	4	34

Source: Usk Church papers, Usk almshouse scheme, poll for four representative trustees, 20 May 1891.

The inability to identify who was Catholic makes it very hard to determine where they fit into the discussions on Usk's urban elite and its wider middle classes. The evidence that does survive indicates that the experience of some mirrored that of their nonconformist counterparts. Although the McDonnells were able to infiltrate the elite and hold public office, as the century progressed and the bodies of urban governance within Usk came under increasing pressure, the role played by non-Anglican inhabitants declined. The difference between the two is that while the nonconformists increasingly challenged the urban elite, there is little evidence to suggest the Catholics followed suit. For example, while discussions over schooling and the almshouses were perceived as attacks on nonconformity, there is nothing to suggest that the Catholic

community and their religious beliefs were ever threatened by the elite in the same way and, as the voting patterns of the almshouse election discussed above show, the actions of the elite did not unify the Catholic community in the same way as they did the nonconformist congregations.

As the Catholic community did not feel under threat no leader emerged. The schooling debate and the almshouse election had seen individuals step forward to defend the nonconformist community and it was these men who unified the community and led the campaigns against the urban elite. Natural leaders such as the priest or leading members of the congregation had no reason to feel aggrieved by the actions of the Anglican elite. Other individuals, such as Col. McDonnell, who was probably the wealthiest Catholic in Usk, enjoyed a position across the county that awarded him an elevated status within the town. There is no evidence that he was interested in sitting as a member of the local board while his occasional attendance at public meetings indicate that he shared the concerns of the other principal ratepayers. He, therefore, would have had little to gain by challenging the hegemony of the elite. Without support from these individuals, poorer members that shared the same frustrations as their nonconformist neighbours were unable to disrupt the status quo resulting in limited conflict between the Anglican and Catholic churches.

A woman's place.

The infiltration of the public sphere by Usk's female inhabitants is harder to chart. While their nonconformist male neighbours were able to challenge the status quo publicly and through the formal channels of local government, there is little evidence that women within Usk were looking to play a greater role within the community. By scrutinising contemporary newspaper articles and the work of J. H. Clark, however, it is evident that by the end of the nineteenth century women were contributing to the life of the town. As ratepayers they were able to engage in issues regarding the government and administration of the town, while the philanthropic work of Usk's middle-class women saw them carve out roles for themselves within the spheres of poverty, education and religion.

A focus on women's history, has been slower to develop in Wales than in England. Russell Davies describes the history of Wales as 'the history of one half of society' with women having been somewhat 'excluded'.[87] In the introduction to *Our Mother's Land*, Angela John stated that while the history of the Welsh people had been 'camouflaged' in British history, the history of Welsh women had been 'rendered inconspicuous within their own … history'.[88] This is due to the focus on the highly gendered experience of Wales' industrial history. As a result, little has been done to explore the experience of women within the urban settlements of nineteenth-century Wales.[89] It is, therefore, necessary to look at the research carried out on women outside of Wales to provide a framework in which to understand the role of women within Usk.

Since the late 1970s, historians have demonstrated that middle-class women, by engaging in philanthropic work, were able to infiltrate the public sphere resulting in their election onto school boards in 1870; the first election of female poor law guardians in 1875; and the opening up of parish and district councils to female candidates in 1894.[90] Since the turn of the millennium, historians have furthered these arguments by demonstrating that through their involvement in philanthropic activities, women could lay claim to the rights of citizenship. These studies, however, tend to portray women as fulfilling inferior roles and therefore fail to explore the extent of female agency in civic life. Patricia Hollis' book, *Ladies Elect*, was the first to focus on the role of women within local politics rather than portraying the politically active woman as an 'isolated, idiosyncratic player on a male stage'.[91] Hollis argued that as a consequence of developments in local government and in the women's movement during the 1860s, women were able to sit on vestries, school and poor law boards and parish, rural and urban councils by the late 1890s.[92]

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[87] R. Davies, *Hope and heartbreak*, p. 19.
[88] *Ibid*, p. 9.
[89] For examples of research that has been done see B. Jenkins, ''Queen of the Bristol channel ports': the intersection of gender and civic identity in Cardiff, c. 1880-1914', *Women's history Review*, 23, no. 6 (2014), pp. 903-921; D. Young, 'The townswomen of Wales: single women, work and service, c. 1300-c.1550', in H. Fulton (ed.), *Urban culture in medieval Wales* (Cardiff, 2012), pp. 163-82; J. Sandells, 'Gwenllian Morgan - Wales' first lady mayor', *Llafur. Journal of Welsh people's history*, 11, no. 1 (2012), pp. 15-32.
[90] Anne Summers, 'A home from home: women's philanthropic work in the nineteenth century', in Sandra Burman (ed.), *Fit work for Women* (London, 1979); F. C. Prochaska, *Women and philanthropy in nineteenth-century England* (Oxford, 1980); K. Gleadle, *British women* (Basingstoke, 2001).
[91] J. Roebuck [review], 'Ladies Elect: Women in English local government by Patricia Hollis' *The American Historical Review*, 94, no. 5 (1989), pp. 1382-3.
[92] P. Hollis, *Ladies elect. Women in English local government 1865-1914* (Oxford, 1987), p. 2.

The existing historiography, while providing a useful framework, however, is almost entirely based on the female infiltration of the public or civic sphere within larger towns and cities. Towns such as Leeds, Bristol and Birmingham were able to provide more opportunities for women to move beyond the domestic sphere than smaller towns could. Large working-class populations would have resulted in multiple charitable causes for them to become involved in as issues associated with prostitution, poverty, drunkenness, and ungodliness were much more widespread in larger towns. These towns also had a large number of middle-class female inhabitants with the time and the money to establish and run charitable organisations and to dispense charity to those less fortunate. These factors would have resulted in a stronger philanthropic tradition than that found within smaller towns where there may have only been a handful of charitable organisations and a limited number of women able to commit themselves to helping the poor. Larger towns with multiple school boards, hospitals and convalescent homes also provided a greater number of avenues through which middle-class women could engage with local government. Within smaller towns, these simply did not exist as there were fewer organisations and bodies of local government that the existing male elite continued to dominate.

The absence of studies that explore the role of women within smaller nineteenth-century towns means it is necessary to consider research that addresses their positions in eighteenth-century towns to establish whether they were able to play a role in the unreformed system. Rosemary Sweet has demonstrated how women were able to partake in civic life as participants in ceremonial events, guests at corporation dinners or as financial investors in schemes of public improvement. She suggests that women, as wives, sisters and mothers of the urban elite, were able to exercise a certain degree of informal political power through their ability to influence voting and the allocation of corporation patronage.[93] Although Sweet's research is based on the larger provincial towns of Norfolk, Bristol and Newcastle, her observations are particularly useful as they indicate how it was possible for women to operate within the public sphere away from the field of charity. This is something to keep in mind when considering women in

[93] R. Sweet, 'Women in civic life', in R. Sweet and P. Lane (eds.), *Women and urban life in eighteenth-century England. 'On the Town'* (Aldershot, 2003), p. 34.

Usk and how they interacted with the civic sphere as it demonstrates that there was more than one way for female inhabitants to partake in the public life of their town.

Within Usk the majority of the surviving material was written and consumed by its male, upper- and middle-class inhabitants. It was also predominantly about their actions. There is very little, if any, mention of female inhabitants in the records of the corporation or the local board except for when they were deemed to be in breach of town rules. The press provides some accounts, but these tend to appear when their paths crossed with those of the elite, or their actions resulted in them appearing in front of the magistrates. References to female inhabitants are scarce. When they do occur, women are seldom mentioned by name as reports often referred to them collectively as 'the Ladies'. If an individual woman was mentioned, she was frequently described in terms of her male relatives. When Mrs Gustard died in 1899 the *Illustrated Usk Observer and Raglan Herald* commented that she had been wife to Mr. H. Gustard, Clerk of the Peace for the county of Monmouth and Clerk to the Monmouthshire County Council; that she was the daughter of Mr. Edmund Rutler Edwards a solicitor from Pontypool and the former Under-sheriff for the county and sister of the 'late Mr. Martin Edwards, who succeeded his father as under-sheriff'.[94] No mention was made of Mrs Gustard's numerous and varied contributions to Usk society. A search through newspaper reports show that Mrs Gustard was an active member of the community. She often helped decorate the Church for important occasions such as Christmas and Harvest festival; she attended sports events, school fundraisers and political meetings; she hosted the Church of England school annual treat, sang, and played the pianoforte 'with great taste, precision and rapid execution' at the Penny Readings and donated and distributed food and clothing to 'needy families'.[95]

Similarly, birth announcements identified the wife using her husband's name and proclamations of marriage always named the bride's father. While this was symptomatic of societal attitudes, in that their identity was subsumed within that of their husband or nearest male relatives, it is also indicative that these papers were written for a male readership, which was perceived to only be interested in the activities

[94] *County Observer and Monmouth Central Advisor*, 21 Jan. 1899, p. 5.
[95] *Ibid*., 28 Dec. 1878, p. 5; 15 Oct. 1881, p. 4; 28 Aug. 1869, p. 4; 26 Aug. 1876, p. 4; 2 Nov. 1872, p. 5; 18 Nov. 1876, p. 4; 27 Jul. 1869, p. 5; 8 Feb. 1868, p. 5; 22 Feb. 1868, p. 4; 19 Feb. 1881, p. 4.

of their male peers. Iltyd Nichol's pocketbook provides an isolated and indirect insight into the social lives of his daughters as he records the balls, dinners and parties that they attended. However, as unmarried members of one of Usk's wealthiest families and part of the wider county elite, these women were not representative of the female population of Usk and therefore this source of information does little to shed light on the lives of those from a less privileged background.

Table 4.7. *Social class of female residents over the age of 16, 1851.*

Class	**1851**
Professional and intermediate	130
Skilled	150
Partly skilled	133
Unskilled	35

Source: K. Schürer and E. Higgs, *Integrated census microdata (I-CeM); 1851-1911* [computer file]. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive [distributor], April 2014. SN: 7481, http://dx.doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-7481-1

Before examining the ways in which middle class women contributed to the urban community through their philanthropic efforts, it is necessary to compile a picture of Usk's female population which is possible using the census data. In contrast to the nonconformist residents, Usk's female inhabitants are much easier to identify. In 1851 Usk's population was equally split between the sexes with 689 females and 681 males.[96] As this chapter is concerned with the actions and contributions of Usk's female inhabitants, those under the age of 16 have been removed as have those who were visiting on the day of the census which leaves 448 women who were inhabitants of Usk. Using the same class data employed to identify the working-class population it is possible to determine the class divisions within the female population. A class indicator was only given to women who were employed so in 1851 only 127 women were graded. It has therefore been necessary to allocate indicators depending on the class indicator given to the head of the household which enables the classification of most women over the age of 16.[97]

[96] These population figures are from the census but differ from the published figures as the prison population has not been included.
[97] It was not possible to allocate a class indicator to 35 women due to there being no occupation listed for the head of household or as the woman in question had been recorded as being a widow, a single woman, an annuitant etc that does not indicate their possible class.

Despite the issues outlined previously regarding the use of these indicators, the figures show that Usk's female population was primarily working class, with 71% skilled, partly skilled or unskilled leaving only 29% considered upper- or middle- class. This number may not seem unusual as most towns had substantially larger working-class populations, however, within a small town such as Usk this constituted only 130 women, 42 of which had occupations that would have taken up much of their time, leaving only a handful of 'leisured' women with the time and inclination to involve themselves in charitable activities within the Usk community.

Table 4.8. *Women enumerated as head of household between 1851 and 1901.*

Census Year	**1851**	**1861**	**1871**	**1881**	**1891**	**1901**
Number	55	62	-	81	82	86

Source: K. Schürer and E. Higgs, *Integrated census microdata (I-CeM); 1851-1911* [computer file]. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive [distributor], April 2014. SN: 7481, http://dx.doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-7481-1

The census data shown in table 4.8 shows that the number of female heads of household increased as the century progressed. This would have resulted in a growing number of female ratepayers. Not only did this mean that a greater number of women were contributing financially to the town through the payment of rates but also that more women were able to engage in parish and local government elections. As Usk had not been reformed by the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835, Usk's female ratepayers were permitted to vote in parish elections. Unfortunately, there is little evidence to show how far female ratepayers exercised this right. Reports of parish meetings in the press simply commented on the size of the crowd rather than on whether there were any female residents in attendance and the publication of local board election results gave only the outcome rather than documenting who voted and how. The poll for the four representative trustees for the almshouse charity shows that in 1891, 70 women were qualified to vote in the election. However, it is evident that just over a third of women did not exercise this right.[98]

[98] Usk Church papers, Usk Almshouse scheme, poll for four representative trustees, 20 May 1891.

The results imply that they were away from home on the day of the election and therefore unable to cast their votes, but it cannot be known whether they were indeed away or whether they chose to abstain from exercising their right. The run up to the election saw a number of boisterous open-air meetings and the distribution of scathing election pamphlets in which the only female candidate, Deaconess Eleanor, received a considerable tirade of vitriolic comments from her opponents.[99] A letter to Deaconess Eleanor at the time expresses concern at the manner in which she had been 'attacked and insulted by certain persons in the town' over the matter of the 'almshouse charity and otherwise'.[100] While the letter suggests this abuse involved the printing and circulation of slander and false representations, it is unknown how far her gender was used against her although it is almost certain that it would have featured prominently. It could be that the tone of the pre-election campaigning and the abuse handed out by the opposing sides put many women off voting. The *County Observer and Monmouthshire Central Advertiser* deplored 'the number of those who from fear abstained from polling' but acknowledged that 'it requires some courage to face the abuse of such gentlemen as harangue on the Tywn square' in reference to the open-air meeting that had been held previously.[101] It is likely that this report was written J. H. Clark, who would have been extremely critical of the other side. However, it gives credence to the notion that some female ratepayers may have abstained for fear of intimidation and possible repercussions from the wider community.

Although a significant number of women may have chosen not to exercise their right to vote, there is evidence of them engaging in local government through other channels. A letter to the corporation requesting they convene a meeting to discuss the 'desirability of purchasing a fire engine' for the town includes the names of three female inhabitants, Hannah Barnard Davies, Mary George and Sarah Macfarlane. [102] While Hannah Davies was the unmarried daughter of Rev. James Barnard Davies, a county magistrate and former portreeve of Usk who died in 1846, Mary George and Sarah Macfarlane were proprietors of the Nag's Head and the Three Salmons respectively. All three, as homeowners and therefore as ratepayers, had a vested interest in the administration of

[99] *Ibid*., election pamphlet published by the chapel party, 13 May 1891.
[100] *Ibid*., letter from Rev. Baker to Deaconess Eleanor, 13 Jun. 1891.
[101] *Ibid*., newspaper cutting from the *County Observer and Monmouth Central Advertiser*, 22 May 1891, no page number.
[102] *County Observer and Monmouth Central Advertiser*, 14 May 1870, p. 4.

the town. Although there is no reference to them attending or making any contribution to the subsequent meeting, the fact that they signed the letter indicates that female ratepayers were not afraid to exercise their rights.

By signing this petition these women clearly felt entitled to demand action from local government bodies; they were not just inactive observers. Both Hannah and Sarah were amongst four female ratepayers who voted in favour of the town adopting the Local Government Act and establishing a local board.[103] Not only does this demonstrate their involvement in local government but it also suggests that these women understood the developments that were occurring in local government legislation and took the opportunity to express an opinion on what they thought would be right for the wider community. One of the key factors for the establishment of a local board was the belief that the Highway board had failed to adequately maintain Usk's roads and sewers. By supporting such efforts, the female ratepayers demonstrated a desire to see improvement and therefore an element of civic pride. It is unlikely that these women were pressured to vote a certain why by male relatives. Hannah's will indicated that she only had two nieces while Mary ran the Nag's Head following her husband's death in 1866 until her own in 1878 at which time the estate passed to her daughter.[104] It would therefore seem that their decision was based on their own judgements.

While some women were able to engage in local government by right of being a ratepayer, for other women it was their philanthropic endeavours that brought them into the public sphere. There are, however, few surviving sources through which the charitable efforts of Usk's middle class women can be reconstructed. The Roger Edwards and Almshouse Charities were Usk's only official charitable bodies, and both these were dominated by the same group of leading male citizens so there is little mention of female involvement. Lesley Hulonce, however, made an interesting point in her article on prostitution in Victorian Swansea. She used Cwmdonkin Shelter, a rescue home for 'the reclamation of the fallen women of Swansea' as an example of how women were able to play a role within the public sphere. Although it was a ladies' sub-committee that was responsible for policy making and the practical running off the

[103] *Ibid.*, 15 Jun. 1872, p. 5.
[104] *County Observer and Monmouth Central Advertiser*, 7 Dec. 1878, p. 4.

Shelter, they were not mentioned by the local press who reported on the first Annual General Meeting of the shelter in some detail. Instead, it was the male members of the general committee who were named while their female counterparts and the Ladies' Committee was referred to as 'ladies who take a warm interest in the cause'.[105] By using other sources, Hulonce was able to show that women were playing a more significant role than the press indicated. A report on a meeting of the Elementary school managers published in 1864 records how thanks were given to the 'lady visitors'.[106] No further information is given, nor does it appear that they were in attendance, but this comment gives weight to Hulonces' argument and suggests that the limited visibility of women in Usk's local press may not be a true representation of their actual involvement.

Female philanthropic activities can often be detected through obituary notices that were becoming more widespread as the provincial press expanded, however, given that philanthropic work was a class and gender 'expectation of middle-class women' such articles were bound to give a complimentary account of the departed and were full of formulaic comments on the virtues of female charity.[107] This is borne out in the obituaries that were published on the deaths of Usk's most respectable female inhabitants in the second half of the nineteenth century. On 25 October 1862, the *Illustrated Usk Observer and Raglan Herald* reported the death of Mrs Pocock, wife of Henry Pocock, a county magistrate, who had passed away in 1841. According to the article Mrs Pocock was a 'most estimable lady' who lived 'in the hearts' of the people of Usk. The obituarist wrote that 'to her own class she was a most agreeable and cheerful companion; to the tradesmen of the town, she was a kind and considerate friend; to the poor she was a sympathizing and generous benefactor; and to her servants she was a liberal and most indulgent mistress'.[108]

Mrs Pocock was not the only upper middle-class female inhabitant to be praised for her charity. The *Illustrated Usk Observer and raglan Herald* lamented the death of Mrs Reece by claiming the 'no lady could take a more lively interest in all that concerned

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[105] *Ibid*.
[106] *Ibid.*, 2 Jan. 1864, p. 4.
[107] L. Hulonce, '"A social Frankenstein in our midst:" Inciting interpretations of prostitution in late nineteenth-century Swansea', *Llafur. Journal of Welsh people's history*, 9, no. 4 (2007), p. 58.
[108] *Illustrated Usk Observer and Raglan Herald*, 25 Oct. 1862, p. 8.

the welfare of the inhabitants than she did' and that 'the poor [would] miss her charity'.[109] The *Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian*, on announcing the death of Miss Frances Williams described how 'the energies of her mind… had ever been directed to alleviate the distresses of the poor and destitute' while *The Cardiff Times* described Mrs Relph as 'greatly respected' and that 'her liberality to the poor will be greatly missed' on her death in 1885.[110] These women were leading members of Usk's upper middle-class. While Miss Francis was the daughter of the Vicar of Llanbadoc, Mrs. Reece, Pocock and Relph had been married to leading members of Usk's urban elite.

Any specific details on the assistance provided to those less fortunate than themselves, however, is conspicuously absent in these obituaries so it is difficult to determine from these sources alone what female altruism existed within Usk. It is therefore necessary to look for other indicators of female philanthropy in order to determine the extent to which middle-class women were contributing to the welfare of the wider community. Fortunately, Mrs Pocock's will has survived but although she left money to her bailiff, domestic servants and gardener, there were no financial gifts to the poor or wider Usk community.[111]

The National Library of Wales has a large, digitalised collection of wills up to 1858.[112] A survey of these indicates that there are 32 wills in this collection that were made by women living in Usk between 1800 and 1858. With one exception, none of these women bequeathed money to a charitable cause, local or otherwise. These wills are not representative of the wider female population as the names indicate that they were made by the wives, daughters, or sisters of Usk's leading male inhabitants. The fact that so few left money to those less fortunate than themselves demonstrates that while they may have been happy to support charitable endeavours while alive, in death it was family members who were favoured. This suggests that their involvement in charitable endeavours may not have been as altruistic as they first appear. Rather than being driven by a desire to help the wider urban community, their support of local charities

[109] *Ibid.*, 25 Aug. 1866, p. 8
[110] *The Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian*, 20 Nov. 1858, p. 8; *The Cardiff Times*, 17 Oct. 1885, p. 8.
[111] GA, Misc. Mss. 108. Will of D. Pocock, 1854.
[112] NLW, Wills and Probate Records, https://www.library.wales/discover/library-resources/wills [accessed 14.04.22].

was underpinned by a concern for their own public image and a desire to conform to what was expected of them as the wives of Usk's urban elite.

The only will in which money was gifted to the wider Usk community was that of Hannah Barnard Davies who left a sizeable sum for 'the poor of the parish Usk or in aid of the schools therein'.[113] This was one of two charities established by women in Usk. The other was established by Mrs. Jane McGowan who also bequeathed money in her will to support Usk's poorer inhabitants. This will is not amongst those digitalised by the National Library of Wales but Clark describes how McGowan, a former proprietor of the Three Salmons, bequeathed £3,000 to the Vicar and churchwardens of Usk 'upon trust for twelve women of respectable manner among them for maintenance and support during life'.[114] Although little is known about her husband it seems that she was independently wealthy. A newspaper article describing her husband's funeral, a year after her own death in 1877, states that she had left the 'interest of her property after her husband's death' suggesting that it was her money rather than her husband's.[115] While these legacies are exceptional within Usk, it indicates that female members of Usk's middle class cared about the welfare of the town's poor and that allusions to their charity work was not just a form of flattering the departed.

Although there were only a limited number of charitable organisations in Usk, women were able to carry out their philanthropic endeavours either by setting up and running their own activities or by supporting the philanthropic work of their male counterparts. In 1859 the *Illustrated Usk Observer and Raglan Herald* reported that the ladies of the town had started up a clothing club 'for the purpose of encouraging the labouring poor who reside within the borough of Usk, to lay a sum weekly towards providing clothing for the winter'.[116] This was held in a room in the Old Post Office, donated by Mrs Matthews and was open to all denominations. The 'ladies' responsible for establishing this club are not named in the article but examination of a list of subscribers printed in December of that year indicate that that the majority of contributors (67%) were female which demonstrates that it was a female driven operation. The list only contains the

[113] *Ibid*., LL183-35; Clark, *Past and present*, p. xxxvii.
[114] Clark, *Past and present*, p. 158.
[115] *County Observer and Monmouthshire Central Advertiser*, 2 Nov. 1878, p. 5.
[116] *Illustrated Usk Observer and Raglan Herald*, 3 Dec. 1859, p. 1.

titles, surnames and addresses of those who subscribed so it is almost impossible to determine the class these women were primarily from. However, the inclusion of some recognisable names shows that some of Usk's most esteemed women were involved. Alongside Mrs. Pocock, Mrs. Reece and Mrs. Relph, who were amongst the most generous subscribers, there was Miss Nicholl, daughter of Iltyd Nicholl, Miss Shephard whose father had been portreeve seven times and Hannah Barnard Davies, who, as discussed above, would later leave money to Usk's poor in her will.[117]

In addition to being an example of female driven philanthropy, the clothing club also demonstrates that women from both church and chapel were able to work together despite a difference in religious affiliation. Although the majority of women involved were members of St Mary's, a reflection of the Anglican nature of Usk's urban elite, the involvement of Col. Greenhow-Relph's wife shows that her religious denomination did not preclude her from such philanthropic activities. This ability to cooperate is also evident in 1881 at a Fete held in the castle in order to raise funds for the Usk Volunteer Corps. The article expresses the gratitude of the committee to 27 ladies whose 'kind assistance was rendered at the tea tables'.[118] It is difficult to determine which denomination each woman belonged to but the list includes a Mrs Jennings. Although it is impossible to be certain that she was the wife of Frank Jennings, it is highly likely that she was related to him. The appearance of her name, therefore, alongside Eleanor Carbonell's and other women associated with the church demonstrates that while their husbands may have been duelling it out within the public sphere, these women were able to put their religious differences aside for the benefit of the wider community.

Another, later, example of female driven philanthropy is the Usk temperance society which was established in 1876. Although it was started by her father, Eleanor Carbonell played a significant role in its establishment and following her father's death, it appears that she assumed responsibility for the running of it. At a meeting of the society in 1877 the chairman described her as the 'chief promoter' and called for a 'kentish fire for the lady'.[119] This is quite unusual as he names her rather than just asking those present to toast or to express their thanks 'to the ladies' which was the norm. Carbonell attended

[117] *Ibid.*, 3 Dec. 1859, p. 1.
[118] *County Observer and Monmouthshire Central Advertiser*, 20 Aug. 1881, p. 4.
[119] *Ibid.*, 13 Jan. 1877, p. 4.

meetings that were supposedly for male members only, at which she frequently addressed the society, fulfilled the role of secretary and was known to take the chair when needed.[120]

Hollis has argued that 'women came into local government from the world of philanthropy' but for the women of Usk, the nineteenth century was a period where their role within the public sphere of small-town life remained restricted to their philanthropic endeavours.[121] It was more difficult for women to access the public domain of small towns due to the limited number of opportunities available to them. Larger towns and cities provided a variety of different charities, voluntary societies and school boards through which women could gain access to the public sphere of their urban settlement. Sylvia Pinches, in her review of women in eighteenth-century Birmingham, acknowledged that the number of charities differed due to a settlement's 'particular economic and social structure' and suggested that it was not just limited finances that prevented a town from developing a stronger charitable tradition. She argued that the absence of a corporation, a resident aristocracy and the lack of an administrative or social regional role could also contribute to the number of charities available for women to engage with.[122]

These observations help explain the limited amount of charitable activity within Usk. As noted, Usk's corporation did not have the finances to support any philanthropic endeavours; Usk played a limited regional role beyond being a judicial centre and Usk's wealthiest residents preferred to donate to existing good causes rather than establish their own. Even the Duke of Beaufort, despite his position as lord of the borough, invested very little in the community of Usk with the exception of the occasional donation to the school or the church. Consequently, there were no charity hospitals or schools founded with aristocratic patronage. As a result, Usk only had a small number of charities that were managed by Usk's urban elite who, as shown, fiercely defended their position within these organisations. Even the charities established by women were administered by male members of the vestry. It was, therefore, very difficult for women

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[120] *Ibid.*, 9 Dec. 1876, p. 4; *Ibid.*, 8 Jun. 1878, p. 4; *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 31 Mar. 1882, p. 5.
[121] Hollis, *Ladies elect*, p. 10.
[122] S. Pinches, 'Women as objects and agents of charity in eighteenth-century Birmingham', in Sweet, R. and Lane, P. (eds.), *Women and urban life in eighteenth-century England. 'On the Town'* (Aldershot, 2003), p. 83.

to play a significant role within these charities or to use them as a means of entering local government.

The exception was Deaconess Eleanor for she was the only female to play a formal role in the management and administration of one of Usk's bodies of urban governance. She was a manager of the elementary school between 1877-1882 and again from 1891 and the school minute book and finance committee minute book show that she took an active role in forming sub-committees to manage the government grant, wrote correspondence, and sat on the finance committee.[123] Following her ordination as Deaconess in 1884, Eleanor joined the vestry where she seconded nominations, audited accounts and took an active role in vestry meetings.[124] She also generously donated to church funds giving £20 in 1898 towards the cost of reroofing the vestry and for 'urgent repairs'.[125] The events surrounding the almshouse election demonstrate how active she was within the vestry. According to Clark and the pamphlets published by the chapel party, Eleanor was responsible for raising the complaints regarding the condition of the houses and drew attention to those inmates who were breaking the rules.[126] It was Eleanor who had liaised with the Charity Commission prior to their visit in 1888 and it was her refusal to disclose the details of these conversations publicly that helped fuel the nonconformist belief that the church was being duplicitous in its actions over the adoption of a new scheme. It was this involvement along with her other philanthropic endeavours that resulted in her standing in the election.

While the involvement of Eleanor demonstrates that it was possible for women to play a role within the public sphere of a small town, there were a number of factors including her class, her marital status and her religious position that worked in her favour and as a result she occupied a unique position amongst Usk's female inhabitants. As one of Usk's wealthier inhabitants and the daughter of a prominent albeit deceased member of the urban elite, there can be little doubt that Deaconess Eleanor was helped by her social status. As a homeowner, Eleanor would have paid a significant amount in

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[123] GA, CEB.64.26. Records of Usk National School, managers of Usk general minute book, 1870-1895; GA. CEB.64.27. *Ibid*., managers of Usk school finance committee minute book, 1887-1903.
[124] GA. D/Pa.104.26. Records of the parish of Usk, vestry minutes, including church warden accounts, 5 Apr. 1888, 6 Apr. 1893 and 24 May 1899.
[125] *Ibid*., 11 Apr. 1898.
[126] Clark, *Past and present*, pp. 152-4; Usk church papers, election pamphlet published by the chapel party, 13 May 1891.

rates and therefore the elite felt that she could be depended on to support their interests. Eleanor was also a spinster, and it would have seemed more acceptable for her to be operating in the public sphere than had she been married due to the societal expectations of what married women could and should do, especially those of her class. Finally, her standing within the church should not be ignored for while her class and marital status may have helped her, there can be little doubt that it was her association with St Mary's that made it possible for her to play a more significant role than her female contemporaries. A committed member of the congregation, she did much to support the church's teaching through her association with the temperance society and National school.

Eleanor was not, however, the only woman to show an interest in the almshouses and the welfare of the poorer inhabitants. Clark's account of the meeting with the charity commissioner prior to the election indicates that other women were in attendance, one of whom, Mrs Phillips, was described as a district visitor who spoke at the meeting about the condition of the almshouses.[127] As a member of the vestry, Eleanor had already been actively and visibly involved with the almshouses which, made it easier for her male peers to nominate and second her as a representative trustee. However, she was not representative of women within the wider urban community. For other female inhabitants, reports in the local press indicate that their role was primarily restricted to that of fundraiser either as subscribers, or by organizing and presiding over fundraising events themselves. A newspaper article advertising the opening of the Infants school in 1872 states that a 'Ladies committee intends to superintend' the Girl's school, implying that other women also played an informal role in the day to day running of the school but no further details appear.[128] This indicates that while Eleanor Carbonell's actions may have made headline news, the activities of most women were not reported in the local press nor are they reflected in the surviving source material and therefore their contribution remains undocumented.

[127] Clark, *Past and present*, p. 153.
[128] *County Organiser and Monmouth Central Advertiser*, 7 Sep. 1872, p. 1.

Conclusion.

This chapter has widened the focus of this study to address the nature and role of the wider urban community to discover how they reacted to the changing role of the urban elite. By the end of the period in question the hegemony of the urban elite came under increasing attack from the nonconformist, lower-middle- and working-class community while female inhabitants had started to use their philanthropic activities within the spheres of religion, education and the welfare of the poor to infiltrate the public sphere.

The mid-nineteenth century saw a shift in the attitudes of both Anglican and nonconformist congregations which resulted in a growing divide within Usk's urban community. The second half of the nineteenth century saw the two come into conflict over matters that were of great concern to the lower-middle and working classes, the education of their children and their access to poor relief. The church versus chapel dimension, while found within towns and cities across Britain, was of particular significance within Welsh towns where the divide often defined further divisions between class and to some extent, national identity. Nonconformity and chapel culture become integral to Welsh identity during the nineteenth century. While some towns saw their nonconformist inhabitants infiltrate the bodies of urban governance sooner, the control the urban elite had established within Usk meant they were able to hold on to their positions for longer.

This chapter has brought a number of questions to the fore, namely the extent to which Usk was an exception. As shown, it straddled a divide within the county between the industrialised and predominantly Welsh northern and western districts and the more agricultural and Anglicised regions to the south and east of Monmouthshire. This meant that Usk had a proportionally larger nonconformist population than towns such as Monmouth and Chepstow yet a stronger Anglican congregation than was to be found in towns such as Newport and Pontypool. The added dimension of strong personalities and the fact that the elite were fighting to hold on to their position while centrally introduced reforms seemed to disassemble Usk's urban credentials may have made Usk the most quarrelsome place in Monmouthshire, but also perhaps unique amongst Wales' plethora of small towns.

Finally, it was shown that by the end of the century women were exercising their rights as ratepayers by attending public meetings, voting in community elections and petitioning for change. Through their philanthropic contributions they were also able to infiltrate the public sphere as demonstrated by Deaconess Eleanor who became a leading figure within the Anglican elite. It is important, however, not to exaggerate Eleanor's role for although she was active within the religious, educational and philanthropic spheres of town life, she was in an extraordinary position due to her class, marital status and her position within the church. Despite her successes, she never managed to assume a position within the bodies of local government. By the closing decades of the century, the Vestry had very little responsibility beyond the church and Eleanor was never put forward as a candidate for the local board or nominated as a trustee of the Roger Edwards Charity. Those remained the domain of Usk's male elite. While such roles may have fallen beyond the remit of a deaconess, it perhaps indicates that while the Anglican elite were happy to permit Eleanor to involve herself with matters pertaining to children and the poor, politics and government remained a man's job.

Conclusion

During the second week of May 1899, the new Duke of Beaufort sold his Monmouthshire estates, thereby ending his relationship with the town of Usk. By this time, he had already sold off much of his land within the town; what remained was divided into lots and auctioned off to the highest bidder. Individual properties and plots of land were sold to existing tenants and local residents, the castle and accompanying land was sold to the Addams-Williams family and the town hall 'together with Tywn square and the market tolls and dues' were sold to Mr J. Straker of Abergavenny for £560.[1] Usk Urban District Council attempted to purchase the last lot but had been unable to outbid Straker.[2] Newspaper reports show that Straker offered the Town Hall to the Council twice, once in 1906 and again in 1909 but the council's limited finances made it impossible for them to take him up on his offer. On the first occasion the Council felt that the hall was 'old and dilapidated' and would soon 'require a large outlay to put it in proper repair'. This along with the interest that would have to be paid on the loan needed to purchase it meant the Council did not make an offer to Straker.[3] In 1909, when Straker again offered the Council an opportunity to purchase the hall, they replied 'thanking him for the offer, but stating that the council were not in a position to entertain it'.[4] In the same article it is reported that a resolution was passed that the Council was of the 'opinion that the new regulations with regard to the staffing of elementary schools will mean an increased burden on the ratepayers, and that…no new burden should be imposed unless extra assistance is given from the Imperial exchequer'.[5]

Despite the ongoing financial restraints there was reason for Usk to feel confident as the twentieth century dawned. Its autonomy from the county, right to self-government and urban credentials appeared secure. The elite was no longer restricted by the wishes of the Duke of Beaufort and in 1901 the new Council finally established a marketplace which removed the pens and animals that had obstructed and polluted the Twyn and surrounding streets for so long. Usk had managed to transition from being an

[1] *South Wales Echo*, 12 May 1899, p. 3.
[2] *County Observer and Monmouthshire Advertiser*, 13 May 1899, p. 5.
[3] *Evening Express*, 17 May 1906, p. 2.
[4] *Abergavenny Chronicle*, 14 May 1909, p. 8.
[5] *Ibid*.

‘antiquated’ town that exhibited ‘the appearance of having been sacked, and recently quitted by an enemy’ to one that contained public buildings and private housing that reflected modern architectural styles, widened streets and footpaths and amenities such as clean water and adequate drainage.[6]

This thesis set out to explore this process of transition to fill the gap in the current historiography that omits the experience of small towns. Industrialisation, increasing economic complexity and significant social developments saw Britain transform from being a rural society to a predominantly urban one. Although the focus of some urban historians has more recently shifted to look at the fortunes of small towns, the historiography remains limited. It is dominated by studies of eighteenth-century small towns and the overriding narrative is one of growth or decline. Nineteenth-century urban studies have been shaped by the Municipal Corporations Act which appears to have determined which settlements should be considered towns and focused the attention of urban historians. Those that were not reformed have been disregarded as failed towns or as mere villages and have therefore not warranted study from those interested in the urban. This study has employed Usk as a case study to demonstrate that these smaller towns deserve investigation. Although overlooked by the Municipal Corporations Act, it was not a passive entity that simply accepted its fate but an active protagonist that was determined to hold on to its urban status by adapting to the changes and expectations of nineteenth century urbanity.

In addition to investigating the experience of Usk, this thesis has also drawn attention to Welsh towns which are under-researched within a field of scholarship that remains focused on English urbanisation. The existing historiography is dominated by English examples, which considering the chronology and rate of urbanisation in England is understandable. However, just because England was the first country to become predominantly urbanised does not mean that the patterns and models identified by historians are of use to those wanting to understand non-English towns. Recent research by Scottish and Irish historians has demonstrated that the process often differed within these countries. This growing body of scholarship demonstrates that more research on Welsh urbanisation is needed to obtain a true picture of the process within Britain.

[6] W. Coxe, *An historical tour in Monmouthshire* (London, 1801), p. 125.

Those historians that claim to address Wales tend to do so by picking examples and case-studies that coincide with patterns identified east of the Anglo-Welsh border. While it is accepted that Wales has been politically and geographically integrated with England for longer than Scotland and Ireland, the assumption that the process of urbanisation was the same, just delayed, fails to acknowledge the distinctive political, economic, and social factors that impacted and shaped Welsh urbanisation. Studies that have addressed Welsh urbanity focus on towns such as Swansea, Merthyr and Cardiff which were transformed by industrialisation and are, arguably, easier to fit into English models of urbanisation. Although it is not argued that Usk is representative of all Welsh towns, exploration of its development during the nineteenth century, highlights the fact that smaller, non-industrial market towns were also experiencing a process of transformation as their urban elites responded and adapted to changes in local government, economic function and the expectations of modern urbanity.

Review of research questions.

This thesis has posed a number of key research questions in order to address the gaps identified in the existing historiography. First, it sought to understand the ways in which the broader political, economic and social changes that reshaped urban Britain impacted a small town. This was achieved by looking at the areas of local government, urban improvement, development of leisure and internal relationships within the Usk community to identify the ways that wider changes manifested themselves within Usk. Second, it aimed to identify the specific challenges faced by small towns. The third and fourth questions were primarily concerned with the reactions of small-town urban elites, the ways in which they responded and adapted to wider urban change and how they overcame the small-town challenges identified by the previous research question. At the same time, the extent to which the urban elite were able to reinforce their position within the urban community at a time when centrally introduced reforms were reallocating their traditional responsibilities and redefining their membership was also evaluated. The final question, and arguably the most important one, was whether it was possible for small towns to maintain their urban status despite the changing definition of what it meant to be urban.

In addition to these, a second set of research questions addressed the nature and the process of urban development within Wales. First, did Welsh towns follow the same process of urbanisation as their English counterparts and can patterns and models employed to explain English urbanisation, specifically the dual processes of urban improvement and the development of urban culture and leisure, be applied to Wales? Second, what was the nature of the problems Welsh towns experienced and how far did these hinder its urban development? Finally, is an alternative definition of urban needed when considering Welsh towns? While it is not possible to answer all these questions fully within the limits of a doctoral thesis, it is hoped that posing the questions may itself encourage a different approach to the study of Welsh towns, one that is not defensive or determined to make them fit the English model, but one that can stimulate a conversation about the true nature of Welsh urbanisation.

Main findings.

This thesis has shown that a small town like Usk was significantly impacted by the broader political, economic and social changes that reshaped urban life in the nineteenth century. Although centrally introduced reforms such as the Reform Act and Municipal Corporations Act may initially appear to have had a limited impact, in towns such as Usk they resulted in significant changes which although not immediate, were long-lasting. Historians have already questioned how successful the Reform Act was in disrupting aristocratic hegemony. This corroborates this interpretation, in that the act did little to change the size, composition and voting habits of Usk's electorate resulting in Beaufort maintaining his position of influence. However, by looking at the implications of the act over the subsequent 50 years, it is evident that it brought about a significant shift in the relationship between Beaufort and Usk. The removal of his right to determine who could vote, meant that Beaufort's interest in the town became less political and increasingly economic. This resulted in two significant changes. First, he ceased to nominate new burgesses resulting in the decline of the corporation. Second, it saw a change in the approach to borough lordship. While the Beauforts had previously given land and granted tenancies to individuals in order to appease the electorate, this occurred very rarely after 1832. Analysis of correspondence between the duke's agent and the corporation showed that the former declined a number of requests from the corporation that would enable them to bolster their income and implement

improvements to the urban fabric of the town. The Reform Act also had a significant impact on the urban elite of Usk. Changes to the franchise, the subsequent withdrawal of Usk's wealthiest inhabitants and a growth in the number of institutions meant that middle class inhabitants became more active in the government and administration of the town. At the same time, the qualifications introduced by the act restricted the franchise to Usk's wealthiest inhabitants. Although authority had always resided predominantly in the hands of resident gentlemen, solicitors and members of the clergy, membership of the corporation and therefore the right to vote, had formerly been accessible and enjoyed by the lower-middle and labouring classes. This changed following 1832 serving to further concentrate power in the hands of Usk's predominantly Anglican and conservative elite.

This thesis has demonstrated that the failure of the Municipal Corporation Act to reform Usk's charter also had a long-term impact on Usk. By not granting Usk municipal status, it left it without an alternative form of local government while subsequent reforms reallocated corporate and parochial responsibilities. The corporation shrank and became increasingly impotent, the portreeve lost his magisterial authority, the court leet became increasingly redundant while the vestry lost its control over poor relief, the highways and the construction and maintenance of town drains and sewers. The loss of these traditional responsibilities resulted in the decline of the existing bodies of governance making it increasingly vulnerable to the county administration, resulting in a loss of autonomy.

The economic changes brought by the industrialisation of the south Wales coalfield had a significant impact on Usk. The growth of Newport saw it supplant the traditional centres of Monmouth and Abergavenny resulting in a shift in the balance of power within the county as Newport, despite not being the county town, became Monmouthshire's economic centre and its premier town. Newport and Pontypool became important retail centres which prevented Usk from capitalising on its central location and developing into a more prominent commercial centre. Usk's role as a market town, however, did not remain undeveloped. In addition to continuing to provide a variety of agricultural services that catered to the needs of the surrounding countryside, Usk developed its role as a local retail centre which is evident in its ability to support a larger number and increasing variety of businesses. Finally, a rise in crime

and the accompanying increase in the business of the quarter sessions was shown to have had repercussions on the town as it promoted the growth of the town's legal profession and its hospitality industry, underpinning the growth of Usk's middle class

The urban community of Usk was also transformed over the course of the nineteenth century. While the middle classes were bolstered by an increase in the number of lawyers and clerks residing within the town, the growth of the retail sector saw the emergence of an increasingly vocal lower-middle class which, as demonstrated in chapter four, challenged the hegemony of the upper-middle classes. The growth of the lower-middle class and in nonconformity resulted in significant division within the urban community over schooling and charity. There has been little research into the impact of the growth of nonconformity within Welsh towns and the current narrative tends to simply accept that nonconformists became increasingly active in urban politics without considering the reaction of the traditional elite.[7] This thesis found that growing visibility of the nonconformist, lower- middle and working classes worried the urban elite who pushed back against the intrusion, unwilling to surrender their positions within the urban community.

Small towns were faced with a set of specific challenges: notably, a lack of finances provided an almost insurmountable obstacle to urban development. Unlike larger towns where rates could be levied under town improvement commissions or by the municipal council, the public bodies of small towns had very few avenues available to them in order to raise the capital needed to fund improvement schemes and implement change. When looking at attempts made by the urban elite to enact change, it was evident that the ratepayers were often very reluctant to support schemes they deemed expensive and unnecessary. Small towns also did not have a surplus of prosperous upper and middle-class residents that could help finance change. While larger towns were able to appeal to the philanthropic inclinations of affluent residents to build hospitals or establish subscription schemes to fund the construction of schools and libraries, those avenues of income were not options within a town as small as Usk. This was further aggravated by the changing attitudes of the Duke of Beaufort. While the 6th duke had allowed the

[7] J. Light, 'The middle classes as urban elites in nineteenth-century south Wales', *Welsh History Review*, 24, no. 3 (2009).

corporation to enclose and let parcels of wasteland for the benefit of the town, his successor did not, which hindered the ability of the elite to raise capital that it intended to use to support lighting schemes, construction of footpaths and other amenities.[8] Similarly, the Beauforts' willingness to give land for the Lancastrian school in 1815 and for the new almshouses in 1825 made it possible for these developments to be enacted. However, by not granting land for a marketplace in 1845 and then insisting that the corporation purchase the land in 1863, the duke made it impossible for the corporation to solve the problems arising from the market being held in the streets.

This leads on to another significant issue faced by small towns, the lack of appropriate space. As shown in both chapter two and three, a lack of available space, both indoor and outdoor, hindered Usk's physical development and impacted the growth of leisure within the town. Although a shortage of space is not specific to small towns, it is perhaps unexpected when one considers the number of gardens, pastures and orchards within the town; however, this land was either in use or owned by territorial landlords and not available for development or to the community for recreational pursuits. The scarcity of land prevented the corporation from enacting plans that would improve the urban environment, but it is also apparent that it impacted the growth of leisure within Usk.

One of the key findings of this thesis is that the urban elites of small towns – as much as large towns - strived to respond and adapt to the changes explored above and to overcome the specific set of challenges they faced. They endeavoured to introduce modern urban amenities such as lighting, footpaths, sewers and running water; they sought solutions to aspects of urban life that were no longer deemed tolerable due to changes in expectations of what was acceptable within the urban environment and strived to introduce the forms of leisure that were found in other towns so to educate and entertain the wider community. The most interesting discovery, however, is that the urban elite successfully influenced how Usk was governed by establishing a local board. This was not change that was enforced from above but a decision that was made

[8] GA, D.156.17. Records of the borough of Usk, Recommendation of portreeve, aldermen, recorder and burgesses of Usk that the corporation rents should be applied for the improvement of the drains, gutters, pavements, footways, lighting and general improvements, 9 Mar. 1832.

within the elite who then brought it about, borne out of frustration with county administration as it was slow to make changes and perceived to be ignorant of the needs and demands of the Usk community. The fact that the urban elite brought about a change in regime shows that they were not a passive entity who were willing to accept their fate but were prepared to use developments in local government reform to regain control over their environment and remain independent of the county and to maintain the urban status of Usk. These actions mirror the ethos of urban self-governance that was to be found in Chamberlain's Birmingham at a similar time and demonstrates that the kind of municipal socialism that was evident in the civic gospel had its equivalent in small towns such as Usk.[9]

By establishing a local board, the urban elite were able to regain control over the urban setting while also allowing them to enhance their standing within the Usk community. The board, established in 1873, coincided with a governmental inquiry into Usk's charter and attempts to reinvigorate the corporation by swearing in new burgesses. It was during a period when their superiority was coming under increasing attack from within the upper-middle classes in the guise of Judge Falconer and Greenhow-Relph and from the lower-middle and working classes. While the former questioned the Anglican hold over the town, the latter, in addition to the religious aspect, were also contesting the elite's hegemony over the various bodies of urban governance such as the Roger Edwards Charity and the almshouses. Finally, the Second Reform Act, passed in 1867, meant that the franchise was enjoyed by a greater number of inhabitants which once again blurred the boundaries between the elite and the wider community. By introducing a local board, the elite could once again redefine themselves while their role as principal inhabitants enabled them to ensure they remained in control of the urban settlement.

Nonetheless, it is apparent that the establishment of the local board enabled a form of government that would eventually permit the lower-middle and working classes to successfully penetrate the public sphere. By the end of the 1870s, two nonconformists, Col. Greenhow-Relph and W. Hiley, had been elected to the local board.[10] Although

[9] For an in-depth discussion of Chamberlain and the civic gospel in Birmingham see A. Briggs, *Victorian cities* (Reading, 1963), pp. 184-240.
[10] *County Observer and Monmouthshire Central Advertiser*, 13 Apr. 1878, p. 4.

these men were wealthy residents and higher ratepayers, they were symptomatic of a process that would see a self-declared ‘working man’ win a seat by the end of the 1880s and the Anglican elite lose the almshouse election in 1891.

Due to the actions and efforts of the urban elite, small towns were able to maintain their urban status in a world. The accumulation of urban characteristics, amenities and services, its role as a market town, a judicial centre and as a provider of leisure and recreation meant that it remained an important component of local and county life. Towns as small as Usk retained an urban identity due to the functions they served, and as Usk demonstrates, some small towns that remained small towns. For them the nineteenth century was not a story of rapid growth and urbanisation, but a slow and steady process that saw them transition from the rural economy and society of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries into the more urbanized world of the modern era.

Although this thesis cannot provide definitive answers to the questions regarding Welsh urbanity, its findings reinforce the argument that Welsh towns urbanised at a much slower rate than in England, not just in terms of population growth but also in the modernisation of the urban environment and the development of urban-based leisure. More research is needed before it can be determined whether Welsh towns followed the same process of urbanisation as their English counterparts, but early indicators suggest that economic dependence on industry, a large working class, the presence of the Welsh language and culture and the growth of nonconformity resulted in clear differences. It should also be noted that the process within Wales happened within a much shorter timeframe and at a time when perceptions of what it meant to be urban were changing and these factors should not be disregarded. When this has been done it will be possible to fully understand the extent to which Wales’ slower economic growth, poor transport and communication links and under-developed social hierarchy hindered its urban development.

Finally, it has found that an alternative definition of urban should be used when considering Welsh towns. This study of Usk has shown that settlements with a population less than 2,500 can possess the characteristics and attributes of a town. In Wales, it was not size that defined a settlement but its right to self-govern, the services that a settlement such as Usk provided to its inhabitants and those of the surrounding

communities and the complexity of its economy reflected in the variety of businesses, services and shops available. Although Usk's bodies of government were based on its medieval charter and the traditional system of parochial government, its ability to adopt new forms of governance and administration ensured it remained recognisably urban. The presence of banks, tradesmen and shops meant Usk was providing essentials and services that were fundamental to everyday life making it a central hub for the immediate locality while the presence of the quarter sessions and county gaol meant it was the judicial centre of Monmouthshire. These findings contribute to the arguments put forward by numerous historians, of all nationalities, that there needs to be a more flexible definition of urban that reflects what was happening within a settlement, its functionality rather than its size.[11]

Scope for further scholarship.

This thesis has provided an in-depth study of a small town during the nineteenth century and by doing so it has demonstrated the benefits of exploring the experiences of Britain's smallest towns. This case study of Usk suggests that there is considerable scope for further study of small towns in the nineteenth century and provides a framework through which that work might be undertaken. It cannot be assumed that what happened in Usk, and the actions and reactions of its elite were reflected within other small towns. It does, however, demonstrate that although they sat at the bottom of the urban hierarchy, towns like Usk responded and adapted to the changes that transformed urban Britain. By expanding the focus to incorporate other small towns, it will be possible to determine how small towns managed to maintain their autonomy and urban status.

This study also highlights the need for further research into the fortunes of Welsh towns during the eighteenth and nineteenth century. The growing scholarship on the Scottish

[11] For examples see, J. D. Marshall, 'The rise and fall of the Cumbrian market town, 1660-1900', *Northern History*, 19 (1983), p. 128; P. Borsay (ed.), *The eighteenth-century town 1688-1820* (London, 1990), p. 5; R. Sweet, *The English town. 1680-1840 Government, society and culture* (Harlow, 1999), p. 8; B. Harris and C. McKean, *The Scottish town in the age of the enlightenment 1740-1820* (Edinburgh, 2014), pp. 489-90; R. E. Dickinson, 'The distribution and functions of the smaller urban settlements of East Anglia', *Geography*, 17 (1932), p. 20; S. A. Royle, 'The development of small towns in Britain', in M Daunton (ed.), *The Cambridge urban history of Britain, Vol. III, 1840–1950* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 152.

and Irish urban experience demonstrates that the current thesis that Wales followed England needs to be tested. This study has tried to draw attention to the presence of factors that might have impacted urban growth or perhaps resulted in the process taking a different form. The existing scholarship does not yet address the experiences of non-industrial towns such as Cowbridge and Tenby, which like Usk, were left unreformed in 1835 so research into their experiences of the nineteenth century would shed further light on the process of Welsh urbanisation. Towns such as Carmarthen and Brecon would make interesting case studies as they were county towns that, having formerly topped the urban hierarchy, were now having to redefine themselves in a world where they were eclipsed in size and significance by their industrial counterparts.

Another avenue for further exploration is the relationship between aristocratic landlords and the urban settlement. Although my own article has attempted to do this by exploring how the Dukes of Beaufort and the Marquesses of Bute exercised influence over the corporations of Usk and Cardiff respectively, more research is required in order to fully understand the influence the aristocracy enjoyed, the ways in which they exercised their authority and the impact they had on urban development.[12] Research into the relationship between corporations and their borough lords during the nineteenth century would build on the similar work for the eighteenth century and demonstrate how it evolved in response to the Reforms introduced by Parliament. It would also explain how the urban elites responded and the nature of the negotiations that occurred between them and their borough lord. Further research on the Beauforts' property management would establish whether their stance towards Usk was typical of their attitudes towards other towns where they had similar rights and privileges. Usk provided little economic benefit which may help explain the duke's apathy towards the town demonstrated in his refusal to support attempts to bring about change. Beaufort was also lord of the borough of Swansea, and it would be interesting to see whether he demonstrated the same resistance towards urban development in a town that could potentially have been a greater source of income. At the end of the eighteenth century, Beaufort's agent, Gabriel Powell, attempted to block the corporation's efforts to

[12] E. Fayrer Jones, '"Make him an offer he can't refuse": corruption, coercion, and aristocratic landowners in nineteenth-century Wales', *International Journal of Regional and Local History*, 14.2 (2019), pp. 62-75.

establish an improvement or paving commission while at the same time he 'vehemently opposed' the campaign for a Harbour Improvement Act, while the Duke of Beaufort pursued legal action against the corporation in 1849.[13] Further research would show whether this was typical of attitudes toward borough lordship and the ways in which it changed following 1832. Research into Beaufort's interactions with Swansea in the nineteenth century would also highlight the role he played in the governance and administration of the town and whether a settlement with a wealthier and more powerful urban elite was more successful in challenging and curtailing his authority.

To conclude, this thesis has engaged with a wide variety of sources to explore the experience of a small-town in Wales during the nineteenth century. The aim was to fill a void in the historiography by addressing the experience of a town such as Usk at a time when urban reform and the changing expectations of urban life transformed the towns and cities of Britain. By doing so, it has shown the urban elites of small towns were able to respond and adapt to external and internal changes that threatened both the urban credentials of the town and their positions within it. It has also tried to draw attention to the need for further research on Welsh urbanisation. If the true nature of British urbanity is to be fully understood, then the process in Wales needs to be explored in its own right in order to determine whether it followed the same pattern as in England or experienced something more distinctive.

[13] R. Sweet, Stability and continuity: Swansea politics and reform, 1780-1820', *Welsh History Review*, 18, no. 1 (1996), p. 19; *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 17 Feb. 1849, p. 3.

Appendix 1.

Usk's urban elite including occupation, religious affiliation and posts held, 1814-1900.

Name[1]	**Occupation**	**Religious Affiliation**[2]	**Positions held within the town**[3]
Addams Williams, Rev. Thomas	Vicar of Usk	Anglican	Trustee of Roger Edwards Charity (1789) Burgess (1820) Portreeve (1822) Select Vestry (1825)
Addams Williams, William	Landed gentry, Llangybi Castle and MP for County	Anglican	Burgess (1816) Trustee of Roger Edwards Charity (1821) Portreeve (1823)
Baker, Rev. Stephen C.	Vicar of Usk	Anglican	Trustee of Roger Edwards Charity (1860) Ex-offio Trustee, Almshouse Charity (1891) Governor of Grammar Usk School (1886) Manager of Usk National School (1870)
Bull, William	Draper		Burgess (1849) Portreeve (1863) Director of Gas Company (1851) Nuisance Removal Committee (1859)
Cherry, John Tempest	Manager of Usk Gas Company.	Anglican	Manager of Usk National School (1876) Local Board (1887) Urban District Council (1894)
Clark, James Henry	Stationer/Printer	Anglican	Burgess (1873) Portreeve (1874-78, 1882-5). Local board (1873) Chairman of Local Board (1874-1887) Director of Gas Company (1851) Nuisance Removal Committee (1857) Trustee of Roger Edwards Charity (1877)

[1] This list includes the individuals who sat as portreeve, as inaugural members of the Local board or as inaugural members of the Urban District Council. Other individuals who have been discussed in this thesis have also been included. While great effort has been made to be as accurate as possible, the popularity of certain names and surnames has made it difficult to differentiate between some individuals. In these cases, it has not been possible to confirm occupation, affiliation and all offices held.
[2] As mentioned throughout this thesis, it has not always been possible to determine the religious affiliation of everyone. Therefore, a religious affiliation has only been given when it could be confirmed.
[3] This column shows the positions held by members of the elite and the date they were appointed. Gaps in the source material mean that despite thorough research, this list is not exhaustive.

			Cooperative trustee, Almshouse Charity (1891) Governor of Grammar Usk School (1879) Manager of Usk National School (1879)
Davies, James			Urban District Council (1894)
Davies, Oliver	Bank manager	Anglican	Burgess (1873) Local Board (1873) Manager of Usk National School (1870)
Davies, William	Builder		Local Board (1892) Urban District Council (1894)
Davies, Rev. James Barnard	Vicar/Clerk	Anglican	Burgess (1813) Portreeve (1816) Select Vestry (1825) Trustee of Roger Edwards Charity (1822)
Dunn, Thomas	Gentleman	Anglican	Burgess (1846) Portreeve (1849, 1856) Local Board (1873) Director of Gas Company (1851) Trustee of Roger Edwards Charity (1869) Nuisance Removal Committee (1857)
Falconer, Thomas	County Judge	Nonconformist	Trustee of Roger Edwards Charity (1860)
Gabb, Rev. James Ashe	Vicar/Clerk		Burgess (1829) Portreeve (1830, 1835) Trustee of Roger Edwards Charity (1836)
Greenhow-Relph, George	Retired comb merchant	Nonconformist	Nuisance Removal Committee (1857) Local Board (1878)
Gustard, Henry Stafford	Solicitor	Anglican	Burgess (1879) Portreeve (1880) Manager of Usk National School (1882)
Hiley, Sidney A.	Chemical manufacturer	Nonconformist	Trustee of Roger Edwards Charity (1882) Local Board (1887) Chairman (1887) Governor of Grammar Usk School (1882) Urban District Council (1894) Ex-offio Trustee, Almshouse Charity (1891)

Hiley, William	Manufacturer of Chemicals	Nonconformist	Local Board (1878)
Horsfield, Walter	Bank cashier		Usk District Council (1894)
Jennings, Frank	Carrier for Great Western Railway	Nonconformist	Local Board (1887) Representative trustee, Almshouse Charity (1891) Urban District Council (1894)
Jones, Alexander	Solicitor Clerk of the Peace	Anglican	Burgess (1796) Select Vestry (1825) Recorder (1832) Trustee of Roger Edwards Charity (1808)
Jones, Evan	Japanner	Nonconformist	Burgess (1825) Portreeve (1829, 1840, 1848, 1850-52) Director of Gas Company (1851)
Jones, James	Grocer and draper		Burgess (1873) Local Board (1873) Governor of Grammar Usk School (1884)
Matthews, William	Attorney		Burgess (1813) Portreeve (1814, 1818)
McDonnell, Francis	Solicitor	Roman Catholic	Burgess (1820) Portreeve (1833) Select Vestry (1825)
Miller, Charles	Retired merchant		Local Board (1873)
Morgan, Francis	Gentleman		Burgess (1826) Portreeve (1826,1827)
Morgan, Reuben	Bootmaker		Local Board (1891) Urban District Council (1894)
Mundy, George	Hay and coal merchant	Anglican	Manager of Usk National School (1891) Local Board (1892) Urban District Council (1894)
Nichol, Illtyd	Gentleman	Anglican	Burgess (1809) Select Vestry (1825)
Nicholas, John Oliver		Nonconformist	Local Board (1891) Representative trustee, Almshouse Charity (1891) Urban District Council (1894)
Parker, James	Grocer	Anglican	Nuisance Removal Committee (1857) Burgess (1873) Local Board (1873) Manager of Usk National School (1877)
Parry, Edwin	Railway Clerk	Nonconformist	Cooperative trustee, Almshouse Charity (1891)

Partridge, Daniel E.	Lawyer	Anglican	Burgess (1846) Portreeve (1847, 1857-8, 1860-62, 1866) Trustee of Roger Edwards Charity (1862)
Powell, John Farmer	Draper	Anglican	Burgess (1873) Portreeve (1879) Member of Local board (1882) Trustee of Roger Edwards Charity (1862) Manager of Usk National School (1878)
Pyrke, James	Japanner	Nonconformist	Portreeve (1817, 1819)
Pyrke, John	Japanner	Nonconformist	Burgess (1815) Portreeve (1824)
Reece, Thomas	Gentleman	Anglican	Burgess (1830) Portreeve (1831 – 32, 1834, 1838) Select Vestry (1825) Trustee of Roger Edwards Charity (1821)
Roberts, Henry	Attorney		Burgess (1864) Portreeve (1864-5)
Rogers, Richard Arthur	Contractor		Local Board (1893) Urban District Council (1894)
Saunders, Rev. John	Master of Usk Grammer School	Anglican	Burgess (1796) Portreeve (1815 and 1825)
Shepard, Alexander John	Gentleman		Burgess (1856) Portreeve (1859) Trustee of Roger Edwards Charity (1868) Governor of Grammar Usk School (1886)
Shepard, Horace	Attorney		Burgess (1847) Portreeve (1853-55)
Shepard, John	Solicitor Clerk of the Peace.		Burgess (1813) Portreeve (1821, 1828, 1836-7, 1839, 1841-3, 1846) Recorder (1848) Steward of the Manor of Usk (1848) Select Vestry (1825) Director of Gas Company (1851)
Smith, Sidney	Veterinary surgeon	Anglican	Local Board (1873) Urban District Council (1894)
Stockham, Charles	Cordwainer	Anglican	Nuisance Removal Committee (1857) Local Board (1873)

Stephens, William E.	Duke of Beaufort's agent	Anglican	Local Board (1873)
Thomas, Herbert	Builder		Local Board (1873)
Voyce, Charles	Gentleman	Anglican	Cooperative trustee, Almshouse Charity (1891) Local Board (1889) Chairman (1892) Urban District Council (1894)Chairman (1894)
Waddington, Alexander	Attorney	Anglican	Burgess (1820) Portreeve (1844-5, 1867-1873). Member/Chairman of Local board (1873). Director of Gas Company (1851).
Watkins, Thomas	Solicitor	Anglican	Burgess (1878) Portreeve (1880) Manager of Usk National School (1876) Roger Edwards trustee (1877) Member of Local board (1879) Governor of Usk Grammar School (1886)
Wigginton, John	Hairdresser	Anglican	Burgess (1796) Portreeve (1820). Select Vestry (1825)

Source: Clark, *Past and present*; NLW, Newspaper Archive, https://newspapers.library.wales/home [accessed 21.06.22]; GA, A5502/M/1 & 2. Records of Usk local board, 1873-1890; *Ibid*., A550/M/1. Records of Usk local board and Usk Urban District Council, 1890-1898; K. Schürer and E. Higgs, *Integrated Census Microdata (I-CeM); 1851-1911* [computer file]. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive [distributor], April 2014. SN: 7481, http://dx.doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-7481-1.

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