Propertied Society and Public Life: the Social History of Birmingham, 1780-1832

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Short Abstract

Social history has been much criticised over the past thirty years. This criticism and the consequent turn to cultural history have brought many advances, developing our understanding of the language, discourse, ritual and culture. However, it has also led to a neglect of structural factors and a turn away from the study of collectivities. This has meant that many subjects that class used to explain (social difference, social relationships and collective actions) are often ignored or undertheorized in current historical scholarship. This thesis examines one of these issues: how should historians understand and analyse the process of social-group formation? It does this through a case study of propertied society in Birmingham between 1780 and 1832. Propertied society is a loose category that does not have the connotations of concepts such as 'middle class'.

This thesis suggests that there were many different types of social group and that historians need to differentiate between them when analysing past societies. The most important distinction is between groups who shared attributes and groups that acted together. However, there was no simple relationship between attributes and actions; individuals who shared attributes did not necessarily act in the same way. The first part of the thesis (chapters 1-3) discusses who was included within the category of propertied society and the social and geographical understandings of those individuals. The second part of the thesis (chapters 4-6) moves from the general material and cultural structures of propertied society to consider three case studies that examine a number of processes by which individuals came together to form groups focused on particular discourses, institutions and events. The three case studies discuss the family and the transfer of social knowledge (chapter 4), local government and the nature of elites (chapter 5), and the process of politicization through examining membership of the Birmingham Political Union (chapter 6).

Long Abstract

The social history of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain has suffered from a failure to convincingly answer the critiques offered of class-based models of social group formation. These models, often based on Marxian theory, have come under attack from both inside and outside the academy. The impact of the 'linguistic' and 'cultural turns' has damaged the 'new social history' of Thompson, Hobsbawm and others. These developments have brought many advances, developing our understanding of language, discourse, ritual and culture. However, it has also led to a neglect of structural factors and a turn away from the study of collectivities. This has meant that many subjects that class used to explain (social difference, social relationships and collective actions) are often ignored or undertheorized in current historical scholarship. This tendency has been exacerbated by a political culture that since the end of the 1970s has tended to emphasize that the individual is the appropriate analytical unit to explain political, economic and cultural events. This thesis aims to contribute to a developing historiographical move to reintegrate structural factors into the study of past societies by suggesting a new approach to studying social-group formation based on a close study of Birmingham between 1780 and 1832.

The introduction surveys recent approaches to social-group formation and argues that a new approach is required that seeks to move beyond the troubled arguments of the 1980s and 1990s and to integrate structural and linguistic approaches to studying collectivities. In response to the problems with existing approaches to social-group formation, this thesis argues that there are multiple different types of social groups. The most important distinction is between groups who shared attributes and groups that acted together. Individuals who shared attributes did not necessarily act in the same way. This thesis repeatedly stresses that there is no simple relationship between attributes and activities. The relationship between these two is a key problem for social historians. Groups of individuals acting together formed

around particular issues, events, cultural activities or institution. They were temporary and small-scale, though they often clothed themselves in rhetoric that stressed unity and permanence. The use of such rhetoric can have a feedback effect, encouraging particular ways of thinking about society.

This thesis develops this approach through studying propertied society in Birmingham between 1780 and 1832. The term propertied society is used because it has indeterminate boundaries. This flexibility avoids the connotations and presumptions that accompany use of the concept 'class'. Thus propertied society is not a reified category; it is not a category that plays a historical role in a larger narrative, as classes or the aristocracy do. It is a way to conceptualize what is often termed the 'middle class' without prejudging that it was a 'thing', while also allowing me to examine how contemporaries used the term 'middle class'. The term has been chosen to open up many ways to analyse and categorize Birmingham's society in this period varying with the particular sources used and the criteria (often source-dependent) employed. This plurality is a strength as it allows different approaches to deployed to analyse different issues, instead of using only one analytical approach.

This thesis has two parts. The first part discusses who was included within the category of propertied society and the attitudes of those individuals. Three main approaches to this issue are taken. In chapter 1 a series of quantitative sources are used to build up a picture of the composition of propertied society. The chapter argues that the sources considered (ratebooks, trade directories, tax records and association records) were all based upon subjective categories (ratepayer, subscriber etc.) and the elements of cultural construction contained within such categories complicate our use of them to understand Birmingham society and its structure.

Chapter 2 examines the terms and discourses that individuals within the category of propertied society used to understand their society and their own place within it. It analyses the terms 'gentleman', 'respectable', 'middle/higher class', 'prominent' and 'eminent'. It also

considers the relationship between discourse and vocabulary by examining the idea of 'industry' – a discourse that is used by a wide range of individuals of different political opinions throughout this period. This chapter suggests that the social imaginaries of these propertied authors were very fluid. Depending on the situation and the individual author they could be hierarchical, binary or tripartite and within those categories different terms were deployed: gentility, respectability, class, prominence and industriousness. The use of a number of these terms was strongly linked to the local politics of this period; terms such as 'gentleman' and 'respectable' were used in attempts to control who could and could not act in Birmingham's public life. Thus, loyalists attempted to cast their radical opponents as 'unrespectable' and so reduce their political power and portray their meetings as illegitimate.

Chapter 3 moves onto geographical identities and practice. It examines the various geographical concepts used by propertied authors during this period (the town, the neighbourhood, the nation and the wider world). It also considers the ways in which those individuals moved through and used the town, and how they were connected to and interacted with the world beyond Birmingham. This chapter suggests that a strong Birmingham identity developed over this period and was expressed by many individuals within propertied society. This identity took on an important political role as a key discourse that could form a basis for a collective identity in this period and was particularly important in the campaign for Parliamentary reform that culminated in the Great Reform Act. However, this chapter also questions any easy relationship between geographical reality and discourse by considering the issue of a regional identity. The strength of the concept of a Birmingham identity and the diversity of people's connections beyond the town both militated against the creation of a regional, 'Midlands' identity.

The second part of this thesis moves from those general observations on the material and cultural structures of propertied society to consider three case studies. These three case studies examine a number of processes by which individuals came together to form groups

focused on particular discourses, institutions and events. It suggests a number of ways that historians might understand the relationship between attributes and activities and how they can use that understanding to move from describing past societies to begin to explain events.

Chapter 4 examines the Galton family and how Samuel and Lucy Galton educated their youngest son John Howard. It uses this example to consider how social knowledge is transferred across generations and to critique existing models of social reproduction, notably Bourdieu's idea of 'cultural capital'. Much recent writing on social-group formation has suggested that individuals' personal social understandings played a key role in the formation of particular social groups. This chapter questions whether the process of communicating social knowledge to others was as easy as many scholars have suggested and therefore that models of social-group formation based around people sharing particular social understandings (for example, the idea that we can establish a particular genteel social group based on those educated as gentlemen) need rethinking. It argues that we need to think in terms of social education, a process that could easily fail for a variety of reasons. It also further complicates the relationship between attributes and consciousness. The Galtons understood themselves as genteel, yet the definition and practice of gentility varied between members of the family and their success in avoiding scandal owed more to their wealth than either their connections or 'cultural capital'.

Chapter 5 considers a specific type of social group in close detail: the urban governing group. It examines the attributes, connections, actions and representations of those Birmingham inhabitants who were members of the two key local government institutions: the Street Commission and the Board of Guardians. This chapter has two main aims. First, to complicate the concept of 'elites'. Instead, of thinking in terms of a single elite that formed the top of a social stratum, this thesis suggests there were multiple elites that dominated different areas of Birmingham's public life. These elites were themselves internally divided. Thus, this chapter examines the split within the governing group between those who were

active in local government and those who held office but never undertook their duties. Secondly, it discusses why Birmingham's local government was relatively harmonious compared to other towns', notably Manchester. This harmony cannot be explained by the composition of Birmingham's elite. Instead, the particular political history of Birmingham provides an explanation. I suggest that the memory of the 1791 Priestley Riots militated against the emergence of the kind of fierce party political conflict that occurred elsewhere.

Chapter 6 turns to the relationship between social and political history. As with much of this thesis, this chapter stresses the plurality and complexity of the connections between attributes and actions. Thus, political activity or views cannot be simply assumed from economic position, connections, or discourses and therefore much political history continues to be reductive. This chapter does support previous accounts that suggest that religious denomination played an important role in the creation of political views as Unitarianism was an important factor in the radicalism of a number of the individuals considered in this chapter. However, such religious views did not determine political opinion; there were plenty of Unitarians who were not radicals and many radicals who were not Unitarians. Therefore, additional factors must be considered. This chapter proposes a different way of thinking about this relationship developed through considering how four propertied individuals came to adopt radical political positions in supporting the Birmingham Political Union. This involves changing the focus of socio-political history, from examining explicit political ideas and actions to tracing the possible processes and routes through which people could be politicized. These processes offer a way of conceptualizing how individuals for whom we have no surviving archives could have become members of a social group focused on politics. This allows the relationship between attributes, processes and actions to be conceptualized more rigorously. The possible politicization offered by the processes examined in this chapter combine with the particular political history of the early nineteenth century to make possible the formation of a group containing individuals from different economic positions and with

varied political views to unite, focused on the goal of parliamentary reform.

The thesis concludes with a discussion of the implications of the approach to social-group formation adopted in thesis for future social-historical study. How does this thesis' stress on the plurality of social groups, the multiplicity of hierarchies, the complex and indeterminate nature of structures, and on process affect how historians should study the traditional, and still important, issues of inequality, and relationships between social groups, whether co-operation, open conflict or resistance? Furthermore, it considers the issue of change over time and suggests that further comparative study is needed in order to understand the particularity or otherwise of Birmingham and to judge the causal importance of social groups.

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Abbreviations

AHR	*American Historical Review*
Aris'	*Aris' Birmingham Gazette*
BAHS	Birmingham Archives and Heritage Service
BH	*Business History*
CSH	*Cultural and Social History*
EcHR	*Economic History Review*
EHR	*English Historical Review*
HJ	*Historical Journal*
HOP, 1754-1790	L. Namier and J. Brooke (eds.), *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1754-1790* (London, 1964).
HOP, 1790-1820	R.G. Thorne (ed.), *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1790-1820* (London, 1986).
HOP, 1820-1832	D.R. Fisher, *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1820-1832* (London, 2009).
HWJ	*History Workshop Journal*
JBS	*Journal of British Studies*
JSH	*Journal of Social History*
MH	*Midland History*
ODNB	*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004-)
PP	*Parliamentary Papers*
P&P	*Past & Present*

SH	*Social History*
UH	*Urban History*
VCH	W.B. Stephens (ed.), *A History of the County of Warwick, Vol. VII: The City of Birmingham* (Oxford, 1965)
WRO	Warwickshire Record Office

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HS
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Introduction: Social History, Propertied Society and Birmingham.

In January 1787 the secretary of the General Chamber of Manufacturers, William Nicholson, wrote from London to the Birmingham manufacturer Matthew Boulton regarding the 'present State of the Chamber'. Nicholson and the special committee of the General Chamber were concerned that the organisation was falling apart.

> The Committee are firmly persuaded that very considerable advantages have been derived from this Institution and that many may be expected from its lasting Establishment. But they regret that the Manufacturers of this City [London] as well as of various parts of the kingdom seem not to be excited to a sense thereof except in times of imminent danger to their Interests instead of firmly uniting for the purpose of preventing danger.[1]

The General Chamber had formed around opposition to Pitt the Younger's Irish Propositions in 1785, united by a fear that equalized duties would allow Irish manufacturers to undersell British businesses. The organisation broke apart over the Anglo-French commercial treaty of 1786, with the manufacturers from the North and the Midlands in favour of the treaty, and those of London and the south-east against it. There had also been disagreements over the correct tactics to pursue, both in terms of how to lobby Parliament and the government and which politicians to approach. This was a body which, even at its most united, was torn between different economic interests and tactical views.[2] However, none of this appeared in Nicholson's letter. His analysis rested on a belief in a commonality of 'interest' between manufacturers of all types and locations. He could not comprehend why a social group based on shared economic positions only united defensively, despite it having a common discourse which stressed (as Boulton put it) that manufacturing was the source of 'National Wealth … population & power', and despite it having been formed around an institutional base with individuals (Boulton, Samuel Garbett, Josiah Wedgwood) with significant 'cultural capital'

1 BAHS, MS3782/12/87/98, William Nicholson to Matthew Boulton, 11 Jan. 1787, original emphasis.
2 J. Money, *Experience and Identity: Birmingham and the West Midlands, 1760-1800* (Manchester, 1977), pp. 33-47.

and experience in acting as 'community brokers'.[3]

Historians have often expressed similar frustration at individuals who have supposedly acted against own economic interests or refused to acknowledge their membership of particular social groups. This thesis is concerned with how historians should think about how social groups formed, acted and dissolved in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century British society. It suggests that current understandings of how social groups functioned have been too concerned with unity and a desire to understand the structure of society by using only one type of social group, most often 'class'. Social groups come in different guises and sizes and as historians we need to distinguish between different types of group and the different analytical tools we use to understand them.

This introduction discusses the historiographical and methodological background to this thesis. It moves from discussing the most general issues (the theoretical and methodological issues associated with the writing of social history) to particular issues (the historiography of Birmingham). Such a structure might give the impression that theory and method came before empirical study; such an impression would be incorrect. The methodological approach adopted in this thesis has been worked out through a process of exchange between empirical research, historiography and methodological literature.

Why Social History?

In the period between the 1950s and the 1970s this question would have been, if not redundant, then comparatively simple to answer. Many important pieces of historical scholarship could have been cited in support of an approach which was focused on 'society'

[3] BAHS, MS3782/12/92/28, M. Boulton, 'Thoughts on Irish Arrangements', 1785; for 'cultural capital' see S. Gunn, 'Translating Bourdieu: Cultural Capital and the English Middle Class in Historical Perspective', *British Journal of Sociology*, 56/1 (2005), pp. 49-64; for 'community brokers' see S. D'Cruze, 'The Middling Sort in Eighteenth-Century Colchester: Independence, Social Relations and the Community Broker', in J. Barry and C. Brooks (eds.), *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society and Politics in England, 1550-1800* (Basingstoke, 1994), pp. 181-207.

as a totality. This approach was ambitious in terms of the problems it addressed, the methods it used and the solutions it proposed. It was epitomised by historians such as E.P. Thompson, Christopher Hill and Eric Hobsbawm who sought to understand the transformation of human society from feudalism to industrial capitalism and the effects that transformation had on society, usually from below, rescuing workers and others from the 'enormous condescension of posterity'. Much of this history was based on a Marxist or Marxian understanding of historical process that placed 'class' at its heart. This was a period in which social history was the dominant mode of historical study, the most exciting and the most theoretically advanced; the work produced in this period recast our understanding of the development of modern society.[4]

Since the late 1970s social history has fallen from its position of dominance. This decline was caused by a number of factors. World political events: the rise of Reagan and Thatcher and the concomitant revival of the right; the events in Hungary in 1956, in Prague in 1968 and finally the end of the Soviet Union in 1989; and the changing nature of capitalist economics have all promoted an understanding of history which downplays the importance of social groups.[5] This happened for two reasons. Though many social historians repudiated Communism, the failure of the Soviet regime undoubtedly damaged, probably fatally, Marxist and Marxian modes of historical analysis, if only by bolstering their critics. In addition, the increasing prominence of neo-liberal discourses and the apparently increasing volatility and instability of post-Fordist capitalism have encouraged approaches to the past that concentrate on the individual and the particular rather than the collective and the general.[6]

A second force for change has been the impact of ideas from outside historical

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4 Geoff Eley offers a sometimes idiosyncratic but useful account of this in *A Crooked Line: From Cultural History to the History of Society* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2005), ch. 2. For other helpful discussions see D. Feldman and J. Lawrence, 'Introduction: Structures and Transformations in British Historiography', in D. Feldman and J. Lawrence (eds), *Structures and Transformations in Modern British History* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 1-8; G. Stedman Jones, 'History and Theory: An English Story', *Historein*, 3 (2001), pp. 103-24; J. Kocka, 'Loses, Gains and Opportunities: Social History Today', *JSH*, 37/1 (2003), pp. 21-8.

5 W.H. Sewell Jr., *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (Chicago, IL, 2005), pp. 53-77.

6 Ibid., pp. 55-60.

scholarship, particularly from cultural anthropology and literary criticism. Such ideas prompted many former social historians to abandon social-historical study and take up the study of 'culture'. In the process, some cultural historians began to radically challenge the epistemological basis of social history, pointing to its often naïve positivism and its reliance on overly-simplistic models of structural determinism.[7] These two developments seem to have been connected in certain ways and it is definitely true that historians began to move away from studying society as a totality and the issue of class just as right-wing politicians were stressing that society and class were unimportant or non-existent, as Margaret Thatcher put it in 1987, 'There is no such thing [as society]! There are individual men and women and there are families'.[8] William Sewell suggests that these two developments were intertwined, and that many historians' advocacy of approaches from anthropology and literary criticism arose, in part, from the political context of the 1980s and that there are underexplored connections between late twentieth-century historiography and developments in capitalism.[9] Further work is required on the politics of history-writing in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, but it is clear that social history and the issue of social groups are of comparatively minor importance to historians now compared to their heyday in the 1960s and 1970s.[10] The

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7 Ibid., ch. 2; Eley, *Crooked Line*, ch. 4; G. Eley and K. Nield, *The Future of Class in History: What's Left of the Social?* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2007), ch. 4; J. Caplan, 'Postmodernism, Poststructuralism, and Deconstruction: Notes for Historians', *Central European History*, 22/3-4 (1989), pp. 260-78; P. Joyce, *Class* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 4-11; G. Spiegel, 'History and Post-Modernism IV', *P&P*, 135 (1992), pp. 194-208; idem., 'The Task of the Historian', *AHR*, 114/1 (2009), pp. 1-15; Forum on 'Historiographic "Turns" in Critical Perspective', *AHR*, 117/3 (2012).

8 'Interview for *Woman Own* ("no such thing as society"), http://www.margaretthatcher.org/speeches/displaydocument.asp?docid=106689 (accessed 2/9/12). Tony Judt treats these developments historically in his *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (London, 2005), ch. 17; polemically in his *Ill Fares the Land: A Treatise On Our Present Discontents* (London, 2010); and biographically in T. Judt with T. Snyder, *Thinking the Twentieth Century* (London, 2012), esp. pp. 246-8, 331-88. The particular British case is well analysed in J. Lawrence and F. Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, 'Margaret Thatcher and the Decline of Class Politics', in B. Jackson and R. Saunders (eds.), *Making Thatcher's Britain* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 132-47. I am grateful to Dr. James McDougall and Dr. Aurelia Annat for discussions of twentieth-century historiography.

9 Sewell, *Logics*, pp. 61-2. It is important to note that different politics can emerge from poststructuralist thought see Caplan, 'Postmodernism', pp. 271-2. For discussion of the origins of postmodernism, see D. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford, 1990); Z. Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity* (London, 1992).

10 Many of Chris Wickham comments on Marxism and medieval history are relevant to other periods, see C. Wickham, 'Memories of Underdevelopment: What Has Marxism Done for Medieval History, and What Can it Still Do?', in idem (ed.), *Marxist History-Writing for the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 32-6.

question then becomes, has this change had detrimental consequences for historical scholarship in general?

It will be apparent from the topic of my thesis and the tone of the previous comments that I think these developments have led to serious losses in terms of our ability to understand the past. The move from social to cultural history has produced much excellent scholarship and it is impossible to imagine a historiography in which cultural history played no role. However, this is not the same as saying that all historical problems can be solved only through cultural-historical approaches. The problems with cultural history take two forms: first, there are flaws in the methodology of some cultural history; secondly, there are important historical topics that cultural history says very little about. It must be noted that the following criticisms do not apply to the whole field of cultural history. However, all approaches to historical study have their weaknesses and blind spots and such problems need to be acknowledged.

The problems with cultural history have been pointed out by a number of historians. Dror Wahrman convincingly argues that more attention must be paid to the nature of the sources used in cultural history, to issues of evidential weighting and coverage, and to how sources of different genres and media fit together.[11] He argues that, without a rigorous approach to these issues, cultural history tends to be based on gathering references to particular words or symbols in disparate cultural spheres, creating coherent cultural traditions where no such coherence existed. He suggests an approach that requires cultural historians to range widely across numerous types of sources, thinking more rigorously about the connections between such sources and about what repetition means.[12] As Peter Mandler has put it, cultural historians should aim for 'a mental map of the *entire field of representation* in which their texts sit'.[13]

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[11] D. Wahrman, 'Change and the Corporeal in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Gender History: Or, can Cultural History be Rigorous?', *Gender & History*, 20/3 (2008), pp. 584-602.

[12] Ibid., pp. 592-3; For similar criticisms see R. Biernacki, 'Method and Metaphor after the New Cultural History', in V.E. Bonnell and L. Hunt (eds.), *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture* (Berkeley, CA, 1999), pp. 70-2.

[13] P. Mandler, 'The Problem with Cultural History', *CSH*, 1/1 (2004), p. 97, original emphasis.

To this critique of the methods of cultural history it might be added that some cultural historians are unclear about *who* is producing and consuming the objects and ideas that form the basis of their studies. To take just one example, Henry French and Mark Rothery's recent work on gentry masculinities analyses a number of correspondence archives and claims to think both culturally and socially by seeking to examine the relationship between the cultural discourses about masculinity and the day-to-day practice of the gentry.[14] While this is a valuable approach to understanding how identities were created and performed, there is a problem with their source base. The study is based on detailed analysis of the correspondence archives left by sixteen families, yet it is unclear how these families relate to a coherent social group called 'the gentry'.[15] This is because their definition of 'the gentry' is unsophisticated and it is unclear what type of social group they think they are analysing. Indeed, they offer no definition of 'the gentry' beyond saying that they were 'agrarian, *rentier* landowners in possession of high levels of annual rental income' who wielded significant political power over the locality as landowners and potentially nationally as independent men.[16] This is a reasonable definition of a social group; however, it is quite broad and the implications of this definition for the analysis of the evidence provided by the sixteen families is not fully worked out in their analysis. This is not so much a question of how representative the chosen families were but rather of understanding the relationship between them and the larger group that they are meant to fall within and are implied to stand for. Similar criticisms could be made of other works of cultural history; either it is not always clear who the cultural discourse being discussed applies to or the historian generalizes too quickly from a particular case study. In such cases, connections between discourse, individual and action need to be demonstrated.[17]

[14] H. French and M. Rothery, *Man's Estate: Landed Gentry Masculinities, 1660-1900* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 15-18.

[15] Ibid., p. 20.

[16] Ibid., p. 16.

[17] For some examples, see J. Seigel, *Modernity and Bourgeois Life: Society, Politics, and Culture in England, France, and Germany since 1750* (Cambridge, 2012), ch. 12; M. Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender, and the Family in England, 1680-1780* (Berkeley & London, 1996), p. 72; D. Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class: the Political Representation of Class in Britain, c. 1780-1840* (Cambridge, 1995); P. Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom: Liberalism and the Modern City* (London, 2003), chs. 3-4; see also the comments

In order to understand this relationship we need a more developed and refined approach to studying the character and boundaries of social groups, and to be more aware of the variation in the kinds of social group we are analysing. A parish elite was a different type of social group from a national gentry and its relationship to cultural discourse was similarly different. As Jon Lawrence has observed, in a discussion of Ross McKibbin's *Classes and Cultures*, 'In what sense … were cultural practices such as football, music hall, the pools or the fish and chip supper "working class"?' Such practices were neither universally popular among the working population nor enjoyed only by the working population. Lawrence reminds us that we need to be very careful about the relationship between 'class as culture' and 'class as economic role'.[18] Historians need to be aware of the type of analysis they are performing and not confuse cultural self-identification (where historical actors describe certain activities or ideas as 'middle-class' and so on) with objective cultural sociology (understanding the particular social position of the individuals that undertook activities or used particular discourses).[19]

The second main flaw in much cultural history is lack of reflection on what is meant by 'culture'. William Sewell offers a useful discussion of the five main definitions of culture that have been used in historical scholarship: culture as learned behaviour; culture as an institutional sphere devoted to the making of meaning; culture as creativity or agency; culture as a system of symbols and meanings; culture as practice. Sewell recommends a combination of culture as system and practice.[20] The tendency not to differentiate between these definitions means that cultural history, as an academic practice, includes a wide variety of not necessarily compatible or comparable subjects. For example, it is unclear what is shared by a history of

regarding Theodore Koditschek and William Reddy in J. Seed, 'Capital and Class Formation in Early Industrial England', *SH*, 18/1 (1993), pp. 28-9 and the criticisms of Davidoff and Hall's argument that the domestic ideology was the hegemonic culture among the middle class in A. Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronologies of English Women's History', *Historical Journal*, 36/2 (1993), pp. 383-414; K. Harvey, *The Little Republic: Masculinity and Domestic Authority in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 2012).

18 J. Lawrence, 'The British Sense of Class', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 35/2 (2000), pp. 315-16.

19 Ibid., p. 316.

20 Sewell, *Logics*, pp. 157-64.

the theatre and a history of the meaning of a particular symbol.[21] Again this is not a criticism of either histories of cultural venues or studies of representations (and we should note that similar charges could have been brought against 'social history' in its heyday). Rather it is simply to point out that placing such different historical projects under the same field can create problems, especially because the term 'culture', as Richard Biernacki points out, is increasingly seen as a foundational category, an ontological 'thing' that can explain rather than a term that refers to particular areas of human life.[22] This seems to reflect the fact that historians have played relatively little attention to the debates that have occurred in anthropology over the utility of 'culture' as an analytical concept.[23]

Cultural history has tended to direct attention away from a number of important issues. For example, as 'class' is now understood primarily as a form of identity, attention has moved away from other issues formerly considered as aspects of class.[24] Most prominent among these are social interaction, social difference (including issues of inequality) and collective action.[25] These were all concerns of the older social history and, while older approaches to such questions may well have been flawed, the questions themselves were important. This is not because culture cannot shed light on some of these issues (as, for example, in Ross McKibbin's important discussion of how cultural perceptions of the 'working class' shaped aspects of politics and social interaction in inter-war Britain) but rather because such issues have largely disappeared from the historical agenda.[26]

These criticisms of cultural history point to a general move in the previous thirty years away from the issue of social structure in historical scholarship. This thesis aims to contribute to the reintroduction social structural analysis into historical study.[27] Such an aim necessitates

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21 Ibid., pp. 156-7.
22 Biernacki, 'Method', pp. 63-6, 68, 70, 73; Sewell, *Logics*, pp. 327-8.
23 Sewell, *Logics*, pp. 161-2.
24 C. Steedman, *Labours Lost: Domestic Service and the Making of Modern England* (Cambridge, 2009), p. 34.
25 Sewell, *Logics*, pp. 77-8; Eley and Nield, *Future of Class*, pp. 108, 116, 126, 194-5.
26 R. McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain, 1880-1950* (Oxford, 1990), ch. 9.
27 For other works also attempting this see those cited in p. 33, n. 52 below.

a discussion of three complex concepts: the 'social', 'society', and 'structure'.

The terms 'society' and 'social' are notoriously difficult to define.[28] The history of the words suggest that between the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries 'society' changed from meaning active association towards signifying the mass of individuals living in a particular community.[29] However, the abstract meaning only slowly came to dominate the older associational meaning, chiefly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[30] It was the idea of 'society' as a reified totality, as a supposedly value-free term describing the institutions, relationships and processes which structured life, that the 'new social historians' of the 1950s-70s used and through their use inscribed at the heart of professional historical practice in Great Britain.[31]

Changing meanings of 'social' are more difficult to trace. In the nineteenth century it began to be used in opposition to the individualist economic theory of liberalism, and, therefore, gained a strong moral connotation. It was in this context that it was used in terms such as 'the social problem' and 'socialism'.[32] In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries it refers to both the idea of totality (as in 'social norms' or, indeed, 'the new social history') and has a more particular, associative meaning (as in someone's 'social life' or 'social networks'). As used by historians in practice, 'social' tends to refer to a combination of these various meanings – both everyday issues of 'sociability' and association, and the totality of relationships within a population. Part of the difficulty of defining the 'social' comes from this complex of meanings. Further complications arise from its origins in enlightenment discussions of the relationship between 'civil society' and religion. It emerged as a key

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[28] Sewell, *Logics*, p. 321. Good short discussions of nineteenth-century thinking about society are provided by J. Harris, 'Servile State or Discredited State? Some Historical Antecedents of Current "Big Society" Debates', *The Political Quarterly*, 82/supplement s1 (2011), pp. 55-67 and idem, 'French Revolution to *Fin de Siècle*: Political Thought in Retrospect and Prospect, 1800-1914', in G. Stedman Jones and G. Claeys (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Political Thought* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 913-6.

[29] P. Withington, *Society in Early Modern England: The Vernacular Origins of Some Powerful Ideas* (Cambridge, 2010), ch. 4.

[30] Sewell, *Logics*, p. 322, P. Joyce, 'What is the Social in Social History?', *P&P*, 206 (2010), pp. 214-15; Harris, 'Servile State', pp. 58-62, 66.

[31] Withington, *Society*, p. 104.

[32] Sewell, *Logics*, p. 324.

concept in the move from a God-centred understanding of human life to one focused on humanity.[33] As William Sewell comments, because 'social' is '[a]n underlying generalized ontological signification – of the totality of complex interrelatedness that we understand as constituting the basic reality of human existence' it 'still carries a whiff of the divine.'[34]

This brings us to the work of Gareth Stedman Jones and Patrick Joyce, who have both adopted a critical stance towards the concept of the social. They remind us (to adapt Stedman Jones' phrase) that society is 'a discursive rather than ontological reality'; it is a concept constructed from other areas of human life (economics, culture, politics and so on) rather than something which exists in and of itself – though this does not make it unimportant.[35] Joyce argues that we should not utilise a simplistic dichotomy whereby meaning and representation are the concerns of 'cultural history' and materiality and social relations, of 'social history'. If 'the social' or 'society' mean anything they include both materiality and meaning.[36] One cautious note must be added with reference to the account of 'society' and 'the social' provided by Joyce: his advocacy of the notion of a 'flat social' leaves little space for social structure.[37] This absence makes it hard to understand how structures and processes can limit agency as well as enable it.

It is widely argued that historians need to discard a reified notion of 'society'. The question is, what more fluid understanding of society and 'the social' should take its place.[38] What some theorists have urged is a concern with practice and process. It is through a focus

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33 K.M. Baker, 'Enlightenment and the Institution of Society: Notes for a Conceptual History', in W. Melching and W. Velema (eds.), *Main Trends in Cultural History: Ten Essays* (Amsterdam, 1994), pp. 95-120.

34 Sewell, *Logics*, p. 326; see also, Joyce, 'What is the Social?', p. 223; Baker, 'Enlightenment and the Institution of Society', pp. 96, 105, 113, 119; C. Muldrew, 'From a "Light Cloak" to an "Iron Cage": Historical Changes in the Relation between Community and Individualism', in P. Withington and A. Shepard (eds.), *Communities in Early Modern England: Networks, Place, Rhetoric* (Manchester, 2000), pp. 159, 161, 163.

35 G. Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in Working Class History, 1832-1980* (Cambridge, 1983), p. 8; Joyce, *Class*, p. 8; idem, 'What is the Social?', pp. 227, 229-30; Baker, 'Enlightenment', p. 114; Sewell, *Logics*, p. 326.

36 Joyce, 'What is the Social?', pp. 218-9, 223.

37 Ibid., pp. 227-8; this idea comes from Latour, see *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 165-72.

38 Joyce, 'What is the Social?', p. 225.

on practice (how individuals and collectivities acted and interacted) that we can begin to move away from the problems of older social history. This approach allows us to address the dichotomies of structure/agency and materiality/meaning and to produce new understandings of the older concerns of social history – social groups, the state and the economy.[39] Marx urged a similar approach. As he put it, 'All social life is essentially *practical*. All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice.'[40] However, practices do not operate in a vacuum. Therefore, we need to combine a concern with practice with an analysis of structure and thus the distribution of attributes within a population.

Social history, therefore, in this thesis is conceived of as the study of connections: connections between politics, culture and economics; between individuals and collectivities; and how such connections formed and disintegrated. I do not want to suggest that such connections were inevitable; on the contrary, it is vital to investigate when, how and why connections did not form or formed incompletely, in other words, to think about *uneven connection*.[41] Bearing this approach to social history in mind, this thesis conceives of social groups as collections of individuals that were connected in some way whether by association or shared attributes. This is, of course, a very broad definition of social group, but I argue that there are many different types of social group and that historians need to be more mindful of this multiplicity and to use different analytical approaches to understand different types of social group. Social groups defined by different shared criteria (whether shared attributes or activities) are liable to touch on different areas of human life and to exhibit various patterns of behaviour.

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[39] In this context the key theorists are Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens: Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. R. Nice (Cambridge, 1977); A. Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Cambridge, 1984).

[40] K. Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach* (1845), in *Karl Marx, Frederick Engels: Collected Works* (50 vols., London, 1975-2005), v, http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/index.htm (accessed 24/12/12), original emphasis.

[41] I have come across the phrase 'uneven connection' mainly in discussions of global history, but feel that it offers a useful term to describe the mixture of connection and disconnection that constitutes any social relation.

If we are to combine the study of practice with an appreciation of the structures present within a society then a consideration of the concept is required. 'Structure' is at the heart of much sociological and historical scholarship and has important rhetorical power; however, its importance goes beyond this and, as William Sewell argues, a sophisticated understanding of structure must be at the heart of historical scholarship despite its problems and difficulties.[42] Structure has tended to be treated by historians as something external to individuals and societies which determines the actions of individuals; this has been as true for historians who focus on language and culture as for those who focus on material conditions.[43] This is particularly the case in political histories where accounts of individuals' political views and actions are often too reductive.[44] However, the same tendency can be seen in some histories which explain the development of certain cultural activities as an effect of a changing social structure.[45] In both cases what is argued here is not that politics or culture are not connected to changing economic and social conditions but rather that the relationship is not a determinative one.[46] Instead of thinking of structure as outside human actors, and consequently determining their actions, we should think in terms of what Anthony Giddens has termed the 'duality of structures'. Giddens suggests that structure and agency should not be opposed but instead seen as two perspectives on the nature of social life. Structures are made up of both 'rules' (transposable procedures) and resources (human and nonhuman objects and capacities that enhance or maintain power) and they are 'dual' in the sense that

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42 Sewell, *Logics*, ch. 4

43 G. Stedman Jones, 'The Determinist Fix: Some Obstacles to the Further Development of the Linguistic Approach to History in the 1990s', *HWJ*, 42 (1996), pp. 19-35.

44 See pp. 300-303 below.

45 Much of the work on 'polite culture' exhibits this tendency in linking the emergence of 'politeness' to the changing structure of English society. For example, Lawrence Klein in his 'Politeness and the Interpretation of the British Eighteenth Century', *HJ*, 45/2 (2002), pp. 869-98, despite warning against social determinism, ends up arguing that politeness emerged because 'traditional social arrangements came under constant pressure from prosperity and commercialization' and because '[t]his society was characterized by rising expectations of material comfort, forms of social mobility, and the appropriation of artefacts and images that mediated economic and sociological fluidity.' (p. 898).

46 R. Biernacki, *The Fabrication of Labor: Germany and Britain, 1640-1914* (Berkeley, CA, 1995), pp. 23-4, 35-6.

they shape people's practices but are also constituted (and reproduced) by people's actions.[47] In this understanding, structure is not something outside of and separate from individuals. It both constrains and enables human agency; rules (such as cultural understandings) combine with resources (such as control of property) to empower individuals to take actions, actions whose meaning is granted by the structures.[48] There are a multiplicity of structures in any one society and the 'agency exercised by different persons is far from uniform', depending on the rules and resources that constitute the particular structure.[49] This understanding of structure is adopted in this thesis and the distinction between agency (the ability of individuals to control and transform social relations) and structure (the mental and material rules and resources available to individuals) is used to illuminate how and why particular social groups form and to propose a particular way of understanding the nature of society.[50] For example, the socio-economic structures of Birmingham in this period as depicted in the trade directories are shown to have been shaped by economic resources (the ownership of a sufficiently substantial business) but also by rules (the connotations of appearing in a trade directory). These combined to enable certain representations of economic activity and social status.[51]

The project of reintegrating a sophisticated understanding of social structure into historical study is a large undertaking, one that some historians are now attempting with varying degrees of success.[52] This thesis examines one aspect of social history in one location – the process of social-group formation in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Birmingham. The approach to studying social-group formation adopted in this thesis attempts

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47 Giddens, *Constitution*, pp. 16-28. My reading is influenced by Sewell's discussion of Giddens, see *Logics*, pp. 127-37.

48 Giddens, *Constitution*, pp. 14-16; Sewell, *Logics*, pp. 143-5.

49 Sewell, *Logics*, pp. 144-5, quotation at p. 144.

50 The definition of agency comes from ibid., p. 143.

51 See chapter 1, particularly the discussion of Charlotte Matthew's estimation of the status of Mr. Rotch from trade directories.

52 For examples of this move away from cultural history and back to structures see Eley and Nield, *The Future of Class*; Steedman, *Labours Lost*; J. Vernon, 'Distant Strangers: How Imperial Britain Became Modern', Astor Lecture, Magdalen College, University of Oxford, 29 Oct. 2012; M. Mulholland, *Bourgeois Liberty and the Politics of Fear: From Absolutism to Neo-Conservatism* (Oxford, 2012); Seigel, *Modernity and Bourgeois Life*; D. Priestland, *Merchant, Soldier, Sage: a New History of Power* (London, 2012).

to integrate an understanding of structure modelled on the discussion above. I suggest that historians need to distinguish between two different types of social groups: those who shared attributes and those who acted together. The first type might be conceived of under the rubric of structure – the material and mental resources and rules that limited and enabled particular types of action. The second relates to agency by examining how individuals came to act together in collectivities. I suggest that groups of individuals acting together tended to form around particular issues, events, cultural activities or institutions. Such groups of actively associating individuals were usually temporary and small-scale, though they often clothed themselves in rhetoric that stressed unity and permanence. The use of such rhetoric could have a feedback effect, encouraging particular ways of thinking about society.[53] For example, the Birmingham Political Union in 1830-32 spoke of a 'Union of the Lower and the Middle Classes of the People', and they did indeed include individuals of varied socio-economic status. This union disintegrated after the passing of the Great Reform Act, but the use of a rhetoric that explained the structure of society in terms of 'classes' promoted the idea of Britain as a class-based society.[54] Such groups waxed and waned as the issues that they formed around emerged and faded away; as this happened they changed the structures that enabled their initial emergence, changing the situation in which future groups could emerge.[55]

Why Propertied Society?

If this thesis' use of 'social history' reflects an intention to address some of the issues not dealt with by cultural history, especially the issue of social structure, then what explains its focus on 'propertied society'? The term 'propertied society' is one that is relatively common in

[53] For this notion of 'feedback' see M. Poovey, 'Stories We Tell about Liberal Markets: The Efficient Market Hypothesis and Great-Men Narratives of Change', in S. Gunn and J. Vernon (eds.), *The Peculiarities of Liberal Modernity in Imperial Britain* (Berkeley, CA, 2011), pp. 204-6, 210-12.
[54] Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class*, ch. 10.
[55] Sewell, *Logics*, pp. 139-43.

historians' vocabulary but is rarely defined.[56] The most sustained analysis of propertied society is to be found in Paul Langford's *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman*.[57] Langford never explicitly demarcates the boundaries of propertied society, but he is generally concerned with those who wielded extra-parochial authority: whether MPs, magistrates, statutory commissioners or militia officers.[58] He is interested not only in the composition of the broad, property-owning group that occupied these positions of governmental power, but also in how they thought about government and property in general.[59] Langford's work remains the most important study of processes of government in eighteenth-century England. It has a sophisticated understanding of the social nature of political life; as Langford puts it 'the study of politics in its fullest and authentically "highest" sense [consists of studying] the means by which communities organize themselves for what they perceive to be the public good'.[60] Langford is not particularly concerned with the issue of social group formation and I use 'propertied society' in a rather different way in this thesis.

I have picked the term propertied society precisely because it is a loose one that carries relatively few connotations, except as interpreted by Langford. While terms such as 'gentry', 'middle class', 'middling sort' all have strong connotations, that have been shown to misrepresent the society they seek to describe, propertied society refers instead to a broad group of people linked only by a loose relationship with property, most easily defined in terms of paying taxes on the ownership or occupation of property. However, this definition is not

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56 For a handful of examples see J. Seed, 'Capital and Class Formation', p. 25; S. Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class: Ritual and Authority in the English Industrial City, 1840-1914* (Manchester, 2000), pp. 16, 18, 23; E.P. Hennock, *Fit and Proper Persons: Ideal and Reality in Nineteenth-Century Urban Government* (London, 1973), p. 18; P. Joyce, *The State of Freedom: A Social History of the British State since 1800* (Cambridge, 2013), p. 26; the term can also be found in nineteenth-century social thinkers for example, M. Weber, 'Class, Status, Party', in H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (London, 1948), pp. 182, 186; K. Marx, 'The Civil War in France', in D. McLellan (ed.), *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, 2nd edn. (Oxford, 2000), pp. 585, 586. A Google Ngram search for 'propertied society' shows growth from the early 1960s with a spike in the use of the term in 1969-75 followed by a decline in the early 1980s before a smaller peak between 1989-92 before declining again, http://books.google.com/ngrams (accessed 10/12/12).

57 P. Langford, *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman, 1689-1798* (Oxford, 1991).

58 J. Innes, 'Politics, Property and the Middle Class', *Parliamentary History*, 11/2 (1992), pp. 286-7.

59 Langford, *Public Life*, ch. 1.

60 Ibid., p. ix.

perfect and chapter 1 examines in detail several ways in which propertied society might be defined and its structure analysed and categorized depending on the sources used and the criteria deployed (which are themselves often defined by what is available). The reason for defining propertied society in this loose fashion is that historians have tended to simply accept exceptions and 'anomalies' to their definitions of the 'middle class' or the 'gentry' rather than seeking to understand what the conflicting visions of society that such exceptions represent might suggest about how eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British society was structured and functioned.

Propertied society defines a large subject; however, it does not involve too many assumptions and commitments in terms of what that subject might contain. This is in stark contrast to class-based approaches to society. Class has declined in popularity recently, for similar reasons to the decline of social history. The political and ideological backlash against 'class' has made it a more difficult concept to use in historical study and there is virtue in using alternatives as it avoids long-winded and increasingly unhelpful arguments about the meaning and nature of 'class' and creates space to examine how contemporaries used the language of class.

There are, however, more positive reasons for not adopting a class-based analysis originating in its flaws as an analytical tool. There is, of course, no one, unified Marxian or Marxist understanding of class.[61] However, there are two issues that I wish to highlight that arise from many Marxian and Marxist approaches. First, the long history of the word 'class' and its consequent multiple definitions mean that any use of it requires a firm and precise definition of the term.[62] The origins of class as an analytical tool in the nineteenth century,

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[61] For good discussions of the nature of and problems with Marxian ideas of class, especially in British historiography, see Eley and Nield, *Future of Class*; G. Stedman Jones, 'Anglo-Marxism, Neo-Marxism and the Discursive Approach to History', in A. Lüdtke (ed.), *Was Bleibt von Marxistischen Perspektiven in der Geschichtsforschung* (Gottingen, 1997), pp. 148-209; idem, 'Marx's *Critique of Political Economy*: A Theory of History or a Theory of Communism?', in Wickham, *Marxist History-Writing*, pp. 140-57.

[62] Here I agree with Patrick Joyce, who sets out a very precise and rigid definition of class based around economics and conflict, see, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class, 1848-1914* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 11, 13.

frequently with reference to early industrial Britain, mean that most rigorous definitions have to be based in Marxist or Weberian thought, making it difficult to think about other periods, places and sections of society using the same term. This is most obvious when it comes to integrating groups other than those defined by relation to the mode of production within class-based analysis.[63]

Secondly, as Jerrold Seigel has recently put it, some historians have tended to assume that 'real or potential unity is an essential condition of class as a social category.'[64] Many historians have acknowledged the divisions within social categories, but too often supposedly divided groups become reified into coherent blocks during the process of analysis. Thus, Davidoff and Hall pointed out the extensive economic, political and religious differences within their middle class yet despite this they go on to make rash claims to unity. For example, they claim that evangelical domesticity was 'mandatory' for the middle class.[65] One way to avoid this problem is to think in terms of multiple types of social group rather than in terms of classes which have various states of unity or division. A group of individuals linked by shared property ownership is a different phenomenon to a group linked by a common culture, or by a common political ideology, or by shared sociability. Acknowledging this and treating these different collectives as different groups rather than as divisions within a larger overall group means that the 'middle class' or 'urban elite' cease to be actors in themselves and allows historians to start to unpick the interplay of contingency, agency and structure that

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63 J.W. Scott, 'Women in *The Making of the English Working Class*', in idem, *Gender and the Politics of History*, rev. edn. (New York and London, 1999), pp. 68-90; C. Hall, 'The Tale of Samuel and Jemima. Gender and Working Class Culture in Nineteenth-Century England', in H.J. Kaye and K. McClelland (eds.), *E.P. Thompson: Critical Debates* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 78-102; idem, 'Marxism and its Others', in Wickham, *Marxist History-Writing*, pp. 112-39; Caplan, 'Postmodernism', p. 262.

64 Seigel, *Modernity and Bourgeois Life*, pp. 26; this would of course be closer to Marx's own understanding of classes as full of fissures.

65 L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850*, rev. edn. (London, 2002), p. 21. For some other examples of historians emphasising division in their definitions of the middle class but in their analysis discussing collectives as actors see Hunt, *Middling Sort*, pp. 36, 44-5, 56, 58, 72; Seigel, *Modernity and Bourgeois Life*, pp. 159-60, 166-7; H. Grieg, *The Beau Monde: Fashionable Society in Georgian London* (Oxford, 2013), 'Introduction'. Even some of the best social historians occasionally fall into this trap; for example, Bob Morris writes of the 'urban elite' or 'middle class elite' functioning as an actor in attempting to gain control of the 'major agencies of the state'; R.J. Morris, 'Voluntary Societies and British Urban Elites, 1780-1850: An Analysis', *HJ*, 26/1 (1983) p. 110.

is at the heart of any action.

If these objections explain why a Marxian version of 'class' has not been used in this thesis, then it is also necessary to detail why more recent non-Marxian approaches have not been used. One such approach has involved identifying particular cultural traits which are defined as middle- or working-class and which determine the members of the particular class under discussion. For example, the middle class might be defined as those who subscribed to a particular domestic ideology.[66] The problem with this approach, as Henry French has noted, is that choosing different cultural traits defines different groups.[67] Thus, different, sometimes contradictory, middle or working classes have been identified in the same society. The fact that groups that shared a socio-economic position could exhibit different cultural traits has tended to be ignored rather than integrated into our understanding of the nature of social groups. Furthermore, as noted above, it is left unclear quite what is middle- or working-class about a particular activity.[68] This approach tends towards circularity: activities are defined as middle-class because middle-class people participate, yet membership of the middle class is then defined by participation in those activities.

Examples of historians defining social groups according to their cultural traits can be found in eighteenth-century scholarship on the middling sorts/middle classes. Paul Langford, Peter Borsay and Maxine Berg have described a middle class that is defined by polite consumption and aspirational emulation of the gentry.[69] In contrast, Margaret Hunt and Theodore Koditschek have characterized the middle class as frugal, industrious and critical of the upper classes.[70] Bob Morris and Jonathan Barry have offered a different definition in which the middle class consisted of those who engaged in associational culture.[71] Extensive

66 Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, ch. 3

67 H. French, 'The Search for the "Middle Sort of People" in England, 1660-1800', *HJ*, 43/1 (2000), pp. 288-9.

68 See pp. 25-6 above.

69 P. Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England, 1727-1783* (Oxford, 1998) P. Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance: Culture and Society in the Provincial Town, 1660-1770* (Oxford, 1989); M. Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 2005), ch. 6.

70 Hunt, *Middling Sort*; T. Koditschek, *Class Formation and Urban-Industrial Society: Bradford, 1750-1850* (Cambridge, 1990..

71 R.J. Morris, *Class, Sect and Party: the Making of the British Middle Class, Leeds, 1820-1850* (Manchester,

evidence for the existence of each of these different 'middle classes' can be readily found.

While these studies map out the cultural habits and discourses associated with certain groups of people, the relationship between such traits and social identity is not fully worked out. Two key issues are not discussed or, if they are, they tend to be asserted rather than shown. First, the question of when and under what circumstances those who share a common culture conceived of themselves as a group. Does engagement in cultural activity force people to consider and define their social identity (however temporarily)? Do certain cultural activities tend to encourage group identities more than others? In other words, how does the process of cultural self-identification work? Secondly, the understanding of the relationship between economic structure and culture is often simplistic.[72] For example, Margaret Hunt's work on the middling sort makes too easy a connection between 'the peculiarities and inadequacies of the early modern marketplace' and 'the culture of the middling classes'. Though she states that values associated with the market had appeal to people beyond the middling sort, she then states that 'it is out of the experiences of the middling that they most *authentically* derive.'[73] This equation of a social group with certain values leads to rather sweeping statements like '*All* middling attempts to influence the use of time implicitly set their morality against "upper-class" attitudes'.[74]

A second non-Marxian approach to 'class' has been based on the analysis of social languages. This is undoubtedly a vital task, and recreating the discursive structures, or social imaginaries, of a particular society is central to understanding how individuals could conceive of themselves and of others as members of particular social groups.[75] However, much of this

1990), pp. 161-248; J. Barry, 'Bourgeois Collectivism? Urban Association and the Middling Sort, 1550-1800', in Barry and Brooks (eds.), *Middling Sort*, pp. 84-112.

72 R.J. Morris, 'Structure, Culture and Society in British Towns', in M. Daunton (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain: Volume 3: 1840-1950* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 402, 405-8.

73 Hunt, *Middling Sort*, pp. 44-5, my emphasis.

74 Ibid., p. 56, my emphasis.

75 A. Briggs, 'The Language of "Class" in Early Nineteenth-Century England', in A. Briggs and J. Saville (eds.), *Essays in Labour History* (London, 1967), pp. 43-73; P.J. Corfield, 'Class by Name and Number in Eighteenth-Century Britain' and G. Crossick, 'From Gentlemen to the Residuum: Languages of Social Description in Victorian Britain', both in P.J. Corfield (ed.), *Language, History and Class* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 101-30, 150-78; J. Seed, 'From "Middling Sort" to Middle Class in Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth-

work simply examines the 'representation' of a social group; it does not seek to explore the relationship between representation and the uses or effects of that representation.[76] Changes in representations tend to be charted rather than explained. This reflects the diminished interest in claims of causality since the cultural turn.[77] Moreover, though concepts used by contemporaries (emic) are important, those that historians impose on the past in order to illuminate particular issues (etic) have their own analytical uses and importance.

Finally, all of these approaches continue to use a language of class, even when they reject a Marxian or Marxist definition of the concept. It is difficult to understand why historians keep pointing to the deficiencies of the concept and yet continue to use the term.[78] This tendency only adds confusion to an already difficult topic.

My intention here is not to suggest that class is never a useful concept; rather that we need to be careful when and why we use it. For example, it became the most important concept in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries in terms of individuals' self identities and understandings of society.[79] It should also be noted that one of the most successful and sophisticated attempt to use class as an analytical tool, the work of Ross McKibbin on twentieth-century Britain, adopts an approach that is similar, though not identical, to that used in this thesis. For example, McKibbin's understanding of class begins by constructing a

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Century England', in M.L. Bush (ed.), *Social Orders and Social Classes in Europe since 1500: Studies in Social Stratification* (London, 1992), pp. 114-35; Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class*. For a similar approach for France see S. Maza, *The Myth of the French Bourgeoisie: an Essay on the Social Imaginary, 1750-1850* (Cambridge, MA, 2003).

[76] For a work that does attempt this, see Biernacki, *Fabrication*.

[77] Kocka, 'Loses', p. 24; Feldman and Lawrence, 'Introduction', p. 19; Caplan, 'Postmodernism', p. 261; Biernacki, 'Method', pp. 64, 67, 72-3;W.G. Runciman, 'Introduction', in Wickham, *Marxist History-Writing*, p. 3; E. Hobsbawm, 'Marxist Historiography Today', in ibid., p. 184.

[78] For example, Hunt, *Middling Sort*, p. 14; S.M. Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 5-7; J. Kocka, 'The Middle Classes in Europe', *Journal of Modern History*, 67/4 (1995), p. 785.

[79] The process by, and the extent to which this occurred is explored in interesting ways in J. Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit: Britain, 1870-1914* (London, 1994), 6-11, ch. 8; McKibbin, *Ideologies of Class*, ch. 6, 9; S. Todd, 'Affluence, Class and Crown Street: Reinvestigating the Post-War Working Class', *Contemporary British History*, 22/4 (2008), pp. 501-18; J. Hinton, 'The "Class" Complex: Mass-Observation in Pre-War Britain', *P&P*, 199 (2008), pp. 207-36; J. Howarth, 'Classes and Cultures in England after 1951: The Case of Working-Class Women', in C.V.J. Griffiths, J.J. Nott and W. Whyte (eds.), *Classes, Cultures, and Politics: Essays on British History for Ross McKibbin* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 85-101, esp. 86; J. Lawrence, 'Class, "Affluence" and the Study of Everyday Life in Britain, *c.* 1930-64', *CSH*, 10/2 (2013), pp. 273-99.

quantitative picture of those who shared economic attributes before moving on to discuss the particular cultural activities that those individuals undertook. In both cases his focus is on shared attributes rather than consciousness.[80] It is on the basis of these large, attribute-based groups that he constructs his analyses of particular social, cultural and political developments. So, for example, he explains the absence of a Marxist political party in Britain partly in terms of economic and cultural structures (the structure of the British economy, the theatre of the monarchy, patriotism and the role of Parliament) but also in contingent terms (because the British state absented itself from industrial relations there was no 'overwhelming grievance which could have united the working class').[81] So we have a model whereby shared attributes set the outer limits of what was possible, within these bounds groups of active people formed around particular issues and events, their agency feeding back in and changing the overall situation.[82] McKibbin is less explicit about this approach than I am, tending instead to subsume both attributes and activity within his phrase 'Classes and Cultures'. However, his work, and that of others such as Jon Lawrence and Selina Todd, demonstrates the utility of a class-based approach to particular periods when undertaken carefully and with conceptual sophistication.[83]

This thesis has two parts. In the first part I examine the ways in which we can analyse and categorize Birmingham's propertied society in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Here I use both quantitative and qualitative analysis to reconstruct material and cultural structures. The second part considers how historians should understand the relationship between attributes and actions. It argues that there is no simple relationship between these two issues and that historians must examine the processes by which individuals

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80 For example, R. McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918-1951* (Oxford, 1998), ch. 2; idem, *Ideologies of Class*, chs. 4, 5.

81 McKibbin, *Ideologies*, ch. 1, esp p. 40.

82 See for example McKibbin's description of the importance of World War Two in changing the cultural structures that united disparate groups in a 'negative status-group' in opposition to the working class, ibid., pp. 280-93, 298-300.

83 See p. 39 n. 79 above for references.

came together to form groups focused on particular discourses, events and institutions. It does this by offering case studies of two key areas of social life: the family and politics. Examining the history of the family allows a consideration of the means by which social values and understandings were transmitted across generations, an important aspect of the reproduction of structures, as well as considering how successful this type of process was. Politics, broadly defined, provides a focus for two chapters. One considers the practice of local government and the nature, composition and perception of Birmingham's governing elite, and the other the nature of politicization and individuals' engagement with national political issues. Politics supplies a focus for two connected reasons. First, political activities tend to produce a large amount of source material. Secondly, much of this material contains information on conceptions of society and social identity. This is because political rhetoric tends to represent identities as fixed and stable: 'boroughmongers' against 'the people', the virtue of the 'middle classes' against the corruption of the 'aristocracy' and so on. This aspect of politics means that it reveals a vital way in which certain social identities, individual and collective, became more prominent than others. Politics forces individuals to think about their understanding of society and their own place within it.[84] Though political rhetoric can destabilise identities, because competing interests use the same vocabulary and discourses, it offers a body of sources which reveal much about the social discourses that were circulating and how such language and discourse changed. Furthermore, such sources also often provide extensive information on *who* was involved, which allows connections between individuals of differing socio-economic positions to be analysed.

This thesis focuses on public life in contrast to many recent studies of social identity, which have focused on the domestic realm.[85] This focus on the private world has tended to

[84] Eley and Nield, *Future of Class*, p. 169.

[85] Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall's work is an obvious starting point that has been expanded on, challenged and refined in work such as A. Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven, CT, 1998); French and Rothery, *Man's Estate*. Combining the two, and quite brilliant, is Carolyn Steedman's recent work on servants, see *Master and Servant: Love and Labour in the English Industrial Age* (Cambridge, 2007); idem, *Labours Lost*.

move historical scholarship away from thinking about collectives and towards individual family units or individuals themselves. These are worthwhile objects of study in their own right. However, social groups and social status are fundamentally public phenomena. Individuals may have understandings of their social position that are entirely private, but determining how those individual conceptions of social position relate to the process of social-group formation and the nature of social structures, to how groups of people associate and act together, require a consideration of life beyond the individual's consciousness and a focus that is rather different from recent studies of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century private life.

Chapters 5 and 6, and the source material used throughout chapters 1 to 3, tend to focus this thesis on a particular definition of public life that is masculine in nature. This vision of public life is not the only possible starting point and a different view of propertied society would be produced by beginning from a different set of quantitative sources; for example, focusing on insurance, parish registers or bankruptcy records, or greater use of wills would lead in a different direction. However, the method of this thesis, approaching the issue of social-group formation by focusing on groups forming around particular issues, events or attributes, would still be fruitful. The particular definition of public life used in this thesis allows certain topics to be explored (especially the relationship between social and political analysis) but it is not suggested as a definitive or exclusive representation of Birmingham's propertied population.

Gender and religion are two topics that receive less attention in this thesis than in much existing scholarship. I do not wish to deny their importance. A great deal of recent scholarship has demonstrated the relationship between gender, religion and social-group formation, not least in the particular context of Birmingham.[86] Indeed, part of the reason for

[86] See, most obviously, Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, but also Harvey, *Little Republic*; Hunt, *Middling Sort*; and the works cited in n. 84 above. The relationship between gender and the economy in Birmingham has also received extensive study, see the works by Berg and Wiskin cited in p. 46 n. 102 below. Regarding religion, I have discussed an attempt to create a collective Unitarian identity after the Priestley Riots in '"The

focusing on other aspects of Birmingham's history was to avoid repeating the conclusions of existing scholarship. Furthermore, my approach to understanding the relationship between structure, agency, identity and activity takes inspiration from much recent writing on the social and political history of gender.[87] Once again, the particular choices made in this thesis are not designed to shut down other focuses and I do not regard my approach as more valid than one focused on gender or religion; instead I have made these choices to answer certain questions. Furthermore, the stress in this thesis on the multiplicity of social groups, the complexity of social hierarchy and the level of connection between different areas of human life are all compatible with a greater focus on gender and religion. Therefore, though both gender and religion are touched on throughout this thesis, neither has been made a primary focus for enquiry.

Why Birmingham?

This thesis uses a close study of Birmingham to investigate the issues raised in the preceding discussion. It builds on my earlier work on the same town.[88] A single town provides an attractive focus for a number of reasons. First, town-based studies have produced some of the

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Blessedness of Those Who are Persecuted for Righteousness Sake": The Role of "Candour" and the Priestley Riots in Birmingham Unitarian Identity, 1791-1815', *MH*, 35/2 (2010), pp. 174-90. The work of John Seed has done much to illuminate the importance of religion to social identities and activities, see J. Seed, 'Gentleman Dissenters: The Social and Politics Meanings of Rational Dissent in the 1770s and 1780s', *HJ*, 28/2 (1985), pp. 299-325; idem, 'Theologies of Power: Unitarianism and the Social Relations of Religious Discourse, 1800-1850', in R.J. Morris (ed.), *Class, Power and Social Structure in British Nineteenth-Century Towns* (Leicester, 1986), pp. 107-56; idem, 'History and Narrative Identity: Religious Dissent and the Politics of Memory in Eighteenth-Century England', *JBS*, 44/1 (2005), pp. 46-63.

87 For example, see K. Gleadle, *Borderline Citizens: Women, Gender, and British Political Culture, 1815-1867* (Oxford, 2009); B. Lemire, *The Business of Everyday Life: Gender, Practice and Social Politics in England, c. 1600-1900* (Manchester, 2005); H. Barker, *The Business of Women: Female Enterprise and Urban Development in Northern England, 1760-1830* (Oxford, 2006); R. Sweet and P. Lane (eds.), *Women and Urban Life in Eighteenth-Century England* (Aldershot, 2003).

88 H. Smith, 'The Reaction of the Birmingham Unitarians to the Priestley Riots, 1791-1815' (Oxford Univ. B.A. thesis, 2009); idem, 'Birmingham Radicalism, 1817-1819' (Oxford Univ, M.St. thesis, 2010); idem, '"The Blessedness"'; idem, '"A Kind of Capital to the Interior Kingdom": Identity and Geography in Birmingham, 1780-1832', in M. Dick (ed.), *The Shaping of the West Midlands: Landscape, Culture and Identity, c. 1750 to 1940* (Hatfield, forthcoming).

most fruitful studies of social-group formation in the mid and later nineteenth century.[89] A single town offers a manageable geographic unit in which to analyse a population.[90] Towns have an institutional density which provides a wide variety of issues and events which forced people to interact and to think about their own and others' social positions. This means that towns provide large quantities of sources about social-group formation and social understandings.[91] Thirdly this urban focus also allows this thesis to engage with the historiography which stresses the connection between the town and changing social structure in nineteenth-century Britain, typically framed in terms of the rise of the middle classes.[92] Finally, the kind of study based on a close reading of extensive archival sources across many intra-disciplinary boundaries (cultural, economic, political) renders a comparative study of multiple towns impractical within the three-year course of a doctorate.

These reasons explain why a single town was chosen, but not why Birmingham in particular. Birmingham has been relatively little studied in comparison to towns such as Manchester, London, Leeds and Glasgow.[93] It was like these towns in that compared to some other towns, the gentry and aristocracy had little impact on the public life of the town.[94] This means that Birmingham society in national terms lacked a top layer. But still in other respects it offers a type of town that has been little studied: it was unincorporated, unlike Glasgow, yet based around small-scale workshop production to a greater extent than towns like Manchester.

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89 Most notably Morris, *Class, Sect and Party*; idem, *Men, Women and Property in England: a Social and Economic History of Family Strategies Amongst the Leeds Middle Classes* (Cambridge, 2005); Gunn, *Public Culture*.

90 This is not to say that the town of Birmingham was hermetically sealed; for its connections to the wider world and the inhabitants' understandings of these connections, see chapter 3.

91 O. Zimmer, *Remaking the Rhythms of Life: German Communities in the Age of the Nation State* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 5-6; Morris, *Class, Sect and Party*, pp. 14-15.

92 S. Gunn, 'Class, Identity and the Urban: the Middle Class in England, c. 1790-1950', *UH*, 31/1 (2004), pp. 29-47; idem, *Public Culture*, ch. 1.

93 For example, no edited volume exists for Birmingham comparable to T.M. Devine and G. Jackson (eds.), *Glasgow: Volume I: Beginnings to 1830* (Manchester, 1995) and W.H. Fraser and I. Maver (eds.), *Glasgow: Volume II: 1830 to 1912* (Manchester, 1996), or D. Fraser (ed.), *A History of Modern Leeds* (Manchester, 1980). It has received little attention in general accounts of British history; for example, there are few references to Birmingham in any of the volumes of F.M.L. Thompson (ed.), *The Cambridge Social History of Britain* (3 vols., Cambridge, 1990).

94 For discussions of gentry impact on Birmingham, see chapter 3. For the impact of the gentry and aristocracy on towns in general see R. Sweet, *The English Town, 1680-1840: Government, Society and Culture* (Harlow, 1999), pp. 192-8.

Furthermore, as chapter 1 discusses, manufacturers played a more important role in the town's economic, social and political life than other towns in this period, even more so than Manchester.[95] Finally, Birmingham, like a number of other industrial towns, underwent a period of dramatic (though uneven) demographic and economic growth during the period considered in this thesis.[96]

We have comparatively few social histories that cover both the end of the eighteenth and the start of the nineteenth centuries; histories tend to either end before 1800 or begin in 1830.[97] Therefore, this thesis seeks to connect two generally separate historiographies. Furthermore, the economic, demographic, political, cultural and social turbulence of the years 1780-1832 is helpful when examining the processes involved in social-group formation as such processes are likely to be more visible at moments of tension and change.[98]

The particular dates covered by this thesis mark important moments in Birmingham's history and, in particular, its relationship with the nation. 1780 was the first election in which Birmingham's inhabitants played a vital role in determining who would be elected as one of the Warwickshire MPs.[99] This event, combined with others, such as the publication of the first history of Birmingham by William Hutton two years later, represents the beginnings of a period in which some elements within Birmingham's propertied population became increasingly self-confident of their own identity and their place within the nation's economy and society. 1832 was, of course, the year of the First Reform Act. This date is especially important in the social history of Birmingham. The passing of the 1832 Reform Act was the culmination of a long period of politicization in Birmingham which had resulted in the

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95 See chapter 1. For arguments that manufacturing was subservient to commerce and finance see W.D. Rubinstein, *Men of Property: The Very Wealthy in Britain Since the Industrial Revolution* (London, 1981), ch. 3; S. Nenadic, 'Businessmen, the Urban Middle Classes, and the "Dominance" of Manufacturers in Nineteenth-Century Britain', *EcHR*, 44/1 (1991), pp. 66-85. For Manchester, see V.A.C. Gatrell, 'Incorporation and the Pursuit of Liberal Hegemony in Manchester, 1790-1839', in Derek Fraser (ed.), *Municipal Reform and the Industrial City* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1982), p. 42.

96 P. Jones, *Industrial Enlightenment: Science, Technology and Culture in Birmingham and the West Midlands, 1760-1820* (Manchester, 2008), pp. 34-7.

97 For example, Hunt, *Middling Sort*, ends in 1780 while Morris, *Class, Sect and Party* begins in 1820.

98 Latour, *Reassembling*, p. 31.

99 Money, *Experience and Identity*, pp. 4, 179-80, 210-13, 280.

creation of the Birmingham Political Union. This period of politicization, and the social language of a 'union' between 'middle' and 'working classes' used by the Union altered the social imaginaries of many in Birmingham. Furthermore, there were important changes in the structure of Birmingham's economy in the 1820s. The creation of the ten-pound voting qualification created a socio-political division that was related to the national level, rather than the local-based division created by the poor rates.[100] These factors meant that the social landscape of Birmingham post-1832 looked very different, something reflected in the growing levels of conflict between social groups.[101]

The historiography of Birmingham has focused on two main issues: the industrial revolution and the nature of the town's social structure. With regards to the industrial revolution, Birmingham has provided a different model of industrialization from the more factory-based one suggested by study of Manchester. Accounts of Birmingham suggest a process of industrialization based around the continued existence of workshop-based production and a limited uptake of steam power.[102] This picture has been qualified, but not dismissed, by Clive Behagg who describes the growth of factories and the changing position of the small workshop in Birmingham's economy.[103] Other historians have used Birmingham, and Matthew Boulton in particular, as a test case for Joel Mokyr's concept of 'industrial

[100] G. Stedman Jones, *An End to Poverty? A Historical Debate* (London, 2004), p. 233; J. Lawrence, 'Paternalism, Class, and the British Path to Modernity', in Gunn and Vernon, *Peculiarities of Liberal Modernity*, pp. 150-1; P. Salmon, *Electoral Reform at Work: Local Politics and National Parties, 1832-1841* (Woodbridge, 2002), pp. 7-8.

[101] C. Behagg, *Politics and Production in the Early Nineteenth Century* (London, 1990), chs. 3, 5.

[102] E. Hopkins, *Birmingham: The First Manufacturing Town in the World, 1760-1840* (London, 1989), chs. 1-3; R. Samuel, 'Workshop of the World: Steam Power and Hand Technology in Mid-Victorian Britain', *HWJ*, 3 (1977), pp. 19-20, 26, 44, 52, 54-7; M. Berg, 'Small Producer Capitalism in Eighteenth-Century England', *BH*, 35/1 (1993), pp. 17-39; idem, 'Women's Property and the Industrial Revolution', *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 24/2 (1993), pp. 233-50; idem, *The Age of Manufactures, 1700-1820: Industry, Innovation and Work in Britain*, 2nd edn. (London, 1994), esp. pp. 72-4, 203-5; M.J. Wise, 'On the Evolution of the Jewellery and Gun Quarters in Birmingham', *Transactions and Papers (Institute of British Geographers)*, 15 (1949), pp. 59-72; C. Behagg, 'Mass Production Without the Factory: Craft Producers, Guns and Small Firm Innovation, 1790-1815', *BH*, 40/3 (1998), pp. 1-15; F. Carnevali, '"Crooks, Thieves, and Receivers": Transaction Costs in Nineteenth-Century Industrial Birmingham', *EcHR*, 57/3 (2004), pp. 533-50; idem, 'Luxury for the Masses: Jewellery and Jewellers in London and Birmingham in the Nineteenth Century', *Enterprises et Histoire*, 46 (2007), pp. 56-70; P. Ballard, 'A Commercial and Industrial Elite: A Study of Birmingham's Upper Middle Class, 1780-1914' (2 vols., Reading Univ. Ph.D. thesis, 1983), i, 23-94; C. Wiskin, 'Women, Finance and Credit in England, c. 1780-1826' (Warwick Univ. Ph.D. thesis, 2000), ch. 2.

[103] Behagg, *Politics and Production*, ch.1.

enlightenment'.[104] This thesis does not engage substantially with these debates, save to comment on the occupational structure of Birmingham's economy.

More important to this thesis is the existing scholarship on the social structure of Birmingham. This takes the form of two major debates: first, the competing visions offered by Asa Briggs and Clive Behagg; secondly, the work of Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall. Asa Briggs portrayed Birmingham as a town where the predominant social condition was class cohesion. He argued that the workshop-based economy of the town promoted peaceful social relations for two, connected, reasons. First, the close relationship and interaction of masters and men meant that both understood the culture of the other group. Secondly, this understanding was reinforced by a high level of social mobility.[105] This view of Birmingham was challenged by Clive Behagg. He argued that not only, as already noted, was the structure of Birmingham's economy not as described by Briggs, but also that the workshop did not automatically create harmonious social relations. Behagg contended that rituals of workplace secrecy and violence were vital for maintaining social distinctions between masters and men and that accounts of social cohesion were a political tactic rather than expressing of social reality.[106] My focus on propertied society in this thesis means I have relatively little to say

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[104] Jones, *Industrial Enlightenment*; K. Quickenden, M. Dick and S. Baggott (eds.), *Matthew Boulton: Enterprising Industrialist of the Enlightenment* (Farnham, 2013); M. Berg, 'Britain, Industry and Perceptions of China: Matthew Boulton, "Useful Knowledge" and the Macartney Embassy to China, 1792-94', *Journal of Global History*, 1/2 (2006), pp. 269-88; idem, 'The Genesis of "Useful Knowledge"', *History of Science*, 45/2 (2007), pp. 123-33.

[105] A. Briggs, 'Thomas Attwood and the Economic Background of the Birmingham Political Union', *Cambridge Historical Journal*, 9/2 (1948), pp. 190-216; idem, 'Social Structure and Politics in Birmingham and Lyons, 1825-48', *British Journal of Sociology*, 1 (1950), pp. 67-80; idem, 'The Background of the Parliamentary Reform Movement in Three English Cities, 1830-32', *Cambridge Historical Journal*, 10/3 (1952), pp. 293-317; idem, 'Social History since 1815' and 'Political and Administrative History: Political History from 1832', in *VCH*, pp. 223-45, 298-317; idem, *Victorian Cities* (London, 1990 [1960]), ch. 5. Other historians have shared this interpretation, for example see, Hopkins, *First Manufacturing Town*.

[106] C. Behagg, 'Custom, Class and Change: the Trade Societies of Birmingham', *SH*, 4/3 (1979), pp. 455-80; idem, 'Secrecy, Ritual and Folk Violence: the Opacity of the Workplace in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century', in R.D. Storch (ed.), *Popular Culture and Custom in Nineteenth-Century England* (London, 1982), pp. 154-79; idem, 'An Alliance with the Middle Class: the Birmingham Political Union and Early Chartism', in J. Epstein and D. Thompson (eds.), *The Chartist Experience: Studies in Working-Class Radicalism, 1830-1860* (Basingstoke, 1982), pp. 59-86; idem, 'Master and Manufactures: Social Values and the Smaller Unit of Production in Birmingham, 1800-1850', in G. Crossick and H.-G. Haupt (eds.), *Shopkeepers and Master Artisans in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (London, 1984), pp. 137-54; idem, 'Myths of Cohesion: Capital and Compromise in the Historiography of Nineteenth-Century Birmingham', *SH*, 11/3 (1986), pp. 375-84; idem, *Politics and Production*.

about master-worker relations. However, I agree with Behagg that the relationship between economic structure and social structure is more complex than Briggs suggests. To Behagg's criticism I would add that much of Briggs' model rests on an assumption that high levels of social mobility existed in nineteenth-century Birmingham *and* that this mobility necessarily promoted social cohesion and understanding.[107] Neither of these statements is proven; a full-scale study of social mobility in nineteenth-century Birmingham would be extremely useful, but it does not exist. Furthermore, even if Briggs is correct in arguing for high levels of social mobility in nineteenth-century Birmingham, then his argument is still essentially based around a Thompsonian notion of experience driving the growth of social consciousness, an approach which has received much criticism.[108] It should also be noted that scholarship exists which argues that workers in small workshops are likely to incline towards political radicalism; while Ross McKibbin makes the important point that working-class politics depends on much more than just the size of workplace.[109]

The second approach to Birmingham's social structure is that adopted in Davidoff and Hall's important study *Family Fortunes*. Their work fits in with the cultural approach to social structure criticized above. By choosing to base their model of social-group formation around the emergence of the ideology of 'separate spheres', Davidoff and Hall ensured that what they actually described was a section of society that shared a particular ideology. This was a rather different type of social group from that which they professed to identify, essentially a Marxian class.[110] The faults of *Family Fortunes* have been frequently pointed to and in general I would agree with Amanda Vickery's comment that 'the richness and singularity of the picture

[107] Briggs' account has recently been endorsed by the late Francesca Carnevali, see her 'Victorian Capitalists and Middle-Class Formation: Reflections on Asa Briggs' Birmingham', conference paper, 'Lord Asa Briggs: A Celebration', Institute of Historical Research, 18 May 2011, https://historyspot.org.uk/podcasts/lord-asa-briggs-celebration/02-victorian-studies (accessed 11/12/12).

[108] For this criticism see P. Anderson, *Arguments Within English Marxism* (London, 1980), esp. ch. 2; W.H. Sewell Jr., 'How Classes are Made: Critical Reflections on E.P. Thompson's Theory of Class Formation', in H.J. Kaye and K. McClelland (eds.), *E.P. Thompson: Critical Debates* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 50-77; J.W. Scott, 'The Evidence of Experience', *Critical Inquiry*, 17/4 (1991), pp. 773-97.

[109] Stedman Jones, 'Working-Class Culture', p. 505, n. 96; McKibbin, *Ideologies of Class*, pp. 7-9; Behagg, *Politics and Production*, pp. 6-7, 49-50.

[110] Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, p. 30.

Davidoff and Hall reconstruct refuses the general structure they seek to impose. The picture still stands although the claims they make for it … do not.'[111] Their account has a number of further methodological flaws, notably a confused approach to the meaning of 'public' and 'private'.[112] Simply having a home separate from the place of work does not mean an individual had sharply separate conceptions of 'work' and 'home'. This thesis' focus on public life, discussed above, is partly derived from a reaction to Davidoff and Hall's neglect of politics.

This thesis represents the first extensive investigation of the social history of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Birmingham since Behagg's volume appeared in 1990.[113] The picture of Birmingham society which emerges from this thesis is significantly different from those that have emerged both from the Briggs/Behagg debate and *Family Fortunes*. Rather than depicting classes organised in a simple hierarchy, I argue for multiple different types of social group arranged in complex hierarchies. Furthermore, I suggest that using different sources and starting points produce different views of Birmingham's social structure. It is not obvious that any one view is superior to the others; indeed, it seems that this multiplicity is a strength, as the difference between each view provides information as the connection and disconnection between different areas of Birmingham's public life.

Conclusion

This introduction must end with brief discussions of two important issues; first, the problems

[111] Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres?', p. 394.

[112] K. Gleadle, 'Revisiting *Family Fortunes*: Reflections on the Twentieth Anniversary of the Publication of L. Davidoff & C. Hall (1987) *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (London: Hutchinson)', *Women's History Review*, 16/5 (2007), pp. 775-6; L.E. Klein, 'Gender and the Public/Private Distinction in the Eighteenth Century: Some Questions about Evidence and Analytic Procedure', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 29/1 (1995), pp. 97-109.

[113] There are discussions of Birmingham's society in a number of recent works but they are not the main focus of these works; for example, Jones, *Industrial Enlightenment*, ch. 2; A. Pieper, *Music and the Making of Middle-Class Culture: A Comparative History of Nineteenth-Century Leipzig and Birmingham* (Basingstoke, 2008), ch. 1.

associated with focusing on practice and process; secondly, the ambitions of the approach suggested here. Process and practice have been suggested as the next important analytical approach in history.[114] The comments made above will make it obvious that I endorse this suggestion and see practice as one way out of some of the methodological problems that have emerged since the 1980s. However, the limitations of this approach must be remembered. In particular, a focus on processes and practices can lead to the creation of teleologies, just as easily as focusing on endpoints can. For example, the competing narratives of communism and neo-liberalism both suggested models of history in which the process of capitalism would lead to particular outcomes.[115] Such teleologies develop from the assumption that processes are separate from the individuals that carry them out; that processes are machines which constantly produce the same output independent of the actions of the individuals involved. Instead, we need to remember that practices and processes are performed by individuals and thus subject to change and variation. Concentration on practice and process is a heuristic approach rather than a deterministic explanatory model. Discovering that particular outcomes derive from particular practices should not lead us towards the creation of 'rules', but rather to the suggestion of approaches.

This thesis produces a specific account of Birmingham's society; however, the approach to studying social-group formation that it adopts is suggested as an approach that would be useful for studying societies in other places and at other times. Thus, further comparative study is required. Such study would refine and develop the approach taken in this thesis. The processes and practices that have been studied in this thesis and that have formed the basis for the approach suggested here are considered to be the most important, but it is not immediately obvious that they would always end with the same outcomes or would always be the most important social issues in different locations and periods.

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[114] For example, Kocka, 'Loses, Gains and Opportunities', p. 26; V.E. Bonnell and L. Hunt 'Introduction', in idem, *Beyond the Cultural Turn*, p. 26.

[115] Judt with Snyder, *Thinking*, pp. 31-2, 86-7.

I hope that this approach will accomplish three tasks. First, it will reveal a great deal more about the social history of Birmingham in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-centuries and balance the historiographical focus on Manchester and London. Secondly, it will contribute to the reintegration of social structural factors into historical study. The definition of structure that I have adopted means that I am more sceptical than many social historians about the existence of, and out ability to discern large-scale social groups with shared cultures. Instead, I emphasise the important interaction of structure, agency and contingency in shaping the conditions in which social groups emerge, act and dissolve. Thirdly, it aims to prompt other historians to rethink the nature of social group formation in different locations and periods so that we can begin to create a comparative history of the processes involved in the creation of social groups and examine how they vary according to chronology and geography. Such further study is needed if historians are to regain an adequate understanding of the importance and influence of structural forces, an understanding that is important both politically and for historical scholarship.

Part One

Chapter 1: Counting Propertied Society.

This thesis offers a study of a loose category here termed propertied society. The first step must be to identify who has some claim to be included within this category. The dates of this study mean that individualized census data is not available. Therefore, we have to turn to quantitative data provided by sources such as trade directories, subscription lists, ratebooks and tax records. Historians have sometimes sought to use sources like these to build up a quantitative picture of a social stratum. Here I will be interested in the data, but also in its limits, and in the different possible ways of conceptualising propertied society suggested by what these particular sources counted.

This chapter considers the internal structure of a section of Birmingham's population I have termed propertied society. Broadly these were people with sufficient incomes to give them standing in local society: they were people who paid rates on properties of which they were householder, making them contributors to the community purse; people who managed businesses and thus had independent standing within the local economy, or who had enough spare income to feature as contributors to charities or other voluntary collective enterprises. The category includes at most a quarter of Birmingham's total population. However, some individuals that we could describe as artisans or employees (such as commercial travellers) are included within its boundaries; this is suggested by the low value of the properties occupied by a number of individuals included in the trade directories (see tables 1.19-20). At the top end there were substantial manufacturers, dealers or bankers, or professional men. We tend to talk in terms of *an* elite; however, there were multiple elites. If we define an elite as a group who were able to wield significant power within public life, then we need to recognise the plural nature of the concept. Different, though overlapping elites dominated different areas of public life. I discuss two of these elites in this chapter, the very wealthiest (see tables 1.23-

24) and a group that was particularly active in public life.[1] In chapter 5 I examine the governmental elite. Distinctions can also be drawn within these elites, for example, between active and inactive individuals (as chapter 5 shows). Acknowledging the plural nature of elites enables it to be an important category for analysis because the differences, gaps, interactions and conflicts between these various elite groupings reveals much about how Birmingham's public life functioned. Additionally, as chapter 2 discusses, contemporary understandings of society were very varied. These issues mean that a simple understanding of social hierarchy is inadequate to deal with the complexity suggested by the sources available. Instead, this thesis stresses the importance of recognising the plural nature of social groups, and that the interactions between them reveal a great deal about how society functioned.

Despite denying the validity of a simple hierarchy, this thesis does not accept that we need a 'flat social' approach to understanding society.[2] Such an approach downplays important structural inequalities. The fact that these inequalities did not create a simple ladder-like social hierarchy does not mean that we can abandon all attempts to understand those inequalities.

Sources: Problems of Interpretation

Historians have used a number of quantitative sources to create pictures of social structure. Leonard Schwarz used census records, assessed- and income-tax records, and insurance records to outline the social structure of eighteenth-century London.[3] Bill Rubinstein used probate data to measure wealth.[4] Bob Morris used wills to study property holding and

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1 See p. 100 below.

2 B. Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford, 2005).

3 L.D. Schwarz, *London in the Age of Industrialisation: Entrepreneurs, Labour Force and Living Conditions, 170-1850* (Cambridge, 1992), chs. 1, 2; idem, 'Income Distribution and Social Structure in the Late Eighteenth Century', *EcHR*, 32/2 (1979), pp. 250-59; L.D. Schwarz and L.J. Jones, 'Wealth, Occupations, and Insurance in the Late Eighteenth Century: The Policy Registers of the Sun Fire Office', *EcHR*, 36/3 (1983), pp. 365-73.

4 W.D. Rubinstein, *Men of Property: the Very Wealthy in Britain since the Industrial Revolution* (London,

strategies of the middle class in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Leeds.[5] Morris did not use wills to establish who were members of his middle class. Instead, he turned to a combination of poll books and trade directories to identify the limits of a group in society which had 'control over the means of production and consumption' because of their political power and wealth.[6] Similar studies have been carried out by Stana Nenadic and Vic Gatrell for Glasgow and Manchester respectively.[7]

None of these sources present objective statistics which incontestably define a social group. Different sources were created for different reasons, using different methods and were published and distributed in different ways. A more nuanced approach to these sources is required. These sources required the collection of data and this involved subjective judgements. For example, the occupation data contained in trade directories was created by a combination of individual self-definition, external categorization and simplification as varied occupations were grouped under the same headings. Furthermore, the statistics which historians generate from these sources should be treated with care, since they move from the pliable world of words to the seemingly solid and self-evident world of numbers. Many studies of social structure are too simplistic in their use of these sources. They treat trade directories, the census and other quantitative sources as simple repositories of information.[8] Instead these sources should be viewed as culturally constructed representations of society. They were created for particular reasons and these reasons shaped their form and limit how they can be used. Furthermore, most of these sources were published and this process created

1981).

5 R.J. Morris, *Men, Women and Property in England, 1780-1870: A Social and Economic History of Family Strategies Amongst the Leeds Middle Classes* (Cambridge, 2005), ch. 3.

6 Ibid., pp. 69.

7 S. Nenadic, 'The Structure, Values and Influence of the Scottish Urban Middle Class: Glasgow, 1800-1870' (Glasgow Univ. Ph.D. Thesis, 1986), chs. 2, 3, appendix 6.2; idem, 'Record Linkage and the Exploration of Nineteenth Century Social Groups: A Methodological Perspective on the Glasgow Middle Class in 1861', *UH*, 14 (1987), pp. 32-42; V. Gatrell, 'Incorporation and the Pursuit of Liberal Hegemony in Manchester, 1790-1839', in D. Fraser (ed.), *Municipal Reform and the Industrial City* (Leicester, 1982), pp. 15-60.

8 Bob Morris uses *The General and Commercial Directory of the Borough of Leeds* of 1834 to provide an 'operational' definition of the 'middle class' of Leeds. While that directory might give the compiler's definition of the Leeds middle class, it does not give the only possible picture of the middle class, Morris, *Men, Women and Property*, p. 70.

a type of feedback whereby their categories became the categories used by inhabitants to order and understand their world.[9] Therefore, before we begin to examine the data provided by these sources we need to consider the complications associated with each source. In this chapter four main sources have been analysed: poor-law ratebooks, trade directories, hair-powder tax records and association and subscription records. In this section I will discuss the first three. The nature of association records will be considered in a subsequent section. It should also be noted that a number of sources used by other historians have not been examined in this chapter. For example, income tax records have not been used, because individual returns do not exist for this period.[10] Some analysis of probate records has been undertaken; however, more research on probate and insurance records would develop the picture of personal wealth given in this chapter.

Ratebooks

Historians have suggested that ratebooks distinguish the middle of society from those below. Paul Langford comments that: 'Nothing more clearly created "two nations" than the line of demarcation between those who paid poor-rates and those who were not only exempt from payment by their poverty but were all too likely to find themselves applying for relief.'[11] The ratebooks available for Birmingham in this period are those for the poor rate. Different rates were levied by separate bodies: Street-Commissioner rates, county rate and so on. Therefore the section of the population described by the poor-law ratebook was not the entire group who could describe themselves as ratepayers. For example, from 1769 to 1773 the Street Commissioner rate was levied on all houses worth more than six pounds, and from 1773 on

[9] For this process see P. Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom: Liberalism and the Modern City* (London, 2003), pp. 197-201; P.J. Corfield, 'Business Leaders and Urban Gentry in Early Industrial Britain: Specialist Occupations and Shared Urbanism', *UH*, 29/1 (2012), pp. 23, 26-8, 45.

[10] Rubinstein, *Men of Property*, pp. 16-17.

[11] Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England, 1727-1783* (Oxford, 1998), p. 63.

all properties worth more than one pound.[12] So the Street-Commission rate encompassed a larger section of the town's population than the poor-law rate.

In Birmingham every house was assessed for the poor rate, but the rate was collected only from houses worth more than twelve pounds per annum. This rate was paid on two-thirds of the value of the property. Much of the property in Birmingham was worth less than twelve pounds. This led to numerous calls for these small houses to be rated. The Sturges Bourne Act to Amend the Laws for the Relief of the Poor of 1819 (59 Geo. III, c. 12) allowed the Guardians and Overseers of the Poor to levy rates from the owners, rather than the occupants, of buildings worth between six and twenty pounds per annum, though property worth between six and ten pounds were assessed at their full value rather than at two-thirds.[13] However, it seems that this was a difficult power to enforce in Birmingham. In November 1820 the Overseers complained that they were struggling to collect the rate on small houses.[14]

'Ratepayer' was used by many as a self-description. There were numerous petitions and letters either from the ratepayers of the town or addressed to them. They were perceived as important to the public life of the town.[15] The twelve-pound boundary defined a group of propertied individuals who contributed towards the finances of the town and therefore (should have) had a special interest in local affairs. Despite being one of the most common terms of social and political description, ratepayer has received little analysis from historians.[16] The ratepayers were a politically important group as was evinced by the many public meetings held in their name during this period. Their importance was also evident in the fact that

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12 J.T. Bunce, *History of the Corporation of Birmingham; with a Sketch of the Earlier Government of the Town* (6 vols., Birmingham, 1878-1957), i, 79, 84.

13 C.R. Elrington, 'Local Government and Public Services', in *VCH*, p. 321; *Report from His Majesty's Commissioners for Inquiring into the Administration and Practical Operation of the Poor Laws*, *PP 1834*, xliv, http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&res_dat=xri:hcpp&rft_dat=xri:hcpp:rec:1834-014987 (accessed 19/12/11), appendix A, part II, p. 58a.

14 BAHS, GP/B/2/1/2, Board of Guardians Minutes, 1807-26, 14 Nov. 1820.

15 For example, when Lord Calthorpe requested information about Birmingham, John Harris, his agent, tended to consult the ratepayers, see BAHS, MS2126/3/5/f/1827/44, John Harris to Lord Calthorpe, 3 Dec. 1827.

16 For some comments see H. French, *The Middle Sort of People in Provincial England, 1600-1750* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 106, 108-10, 252-3; P. Langford, *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman, 1689-1798* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 207, 230, 234-6, 267, 362; for a later period see N. McCord, 'Ratepayers and Social Policy', in P. Thane (ed.), *The Origins of British Social Policy* (London, 1978), pp. 21-35.

George Edmonds, and other post-war radicals, made numerous appeals to the ratepayers. They sought the support of this section of society to bolster their cause with the ratepayers' supposed respectability. Edmonds used reform of the administration of poor relief in the town as a springboard to discuss the need for more general reform.[17] He was a firm advocate of what we might call 'ratepayer democracy'.[18] Edmonds believed that the more 'ratepayers' who exercised their right to vote in the election of the Guardians the better. They would elect more appropriate people as Guardians and exercise a greater degree of superintendence by removing those Guardians who were ineffective or negligent. As the Unitarian radical William Hawkes Smith put it in 1817, 'it is obvious, that while those, who demand and disperse it are not chosen by the Levy-Payers in general, we suffer ourselves, … to be amenable to a system of *Taxation without Representation*, of the heaviest sort.'[19]

Ratepayers were a section of the Birmingham population that was defined by its income, but which was supposed to be civic-minded and active. Whether they were active is another matter; however, the key is that the public discourse about them endowed them with significant public responsibilities and powers. They were seen as the key group in the administration of important local bodies such as the Street Commissioners and the Guardians of the Poor. To proceed on any plan without consulting them was perceived as a serious mistake, as one group of disgruntled landlords said in 1817, complaining about a bill that would make landlords pay the rates on small houses: 'The Bill has been brought into Parliament … without any Public or Private notice to the landlords, intended to be burthened by the Bill, nor has any Public Meeting been convened at Birmingham on the Subject.'[20] They were outraged that the ratepayers had not been consulted on a matter which materially

17 G. Edmonds, *Letters to the Payers of Levies of the Parish of Birmingham* (Birmingham, 1825).

18 For this concept see J. Prest, *Liberty and Locality: Parliament, Permissive Legislation, and Ratepayers' Democracies in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 1990), esp. pp. 9-10; M. Latham, 'From Oligarchy to a "Rate Payer's Democracy": the Evolution of the Corporation of London, 1680s-1750s', *UH*, 39/2 (2012), pp. 225-45.

19 *The Birmingham Inspector; A Periodical Work* (Birmingham, 1817), p. 210, original emphasis.

20 BAHS, MS1098/101, Papers Relating to a Petition by the Birmingham Landowners Against the Birmingham Poor Rates Bill, 1817.

affected both them and, they argued, the rest of the town. Representatives of these disgruntled ratepayers would have attended the Commons and given evidence against the bill, but the opportunity never came as the Birmingham bill was subsumed within the general discussion of the poor laws conducted by William Sturges Bourne.[21]

'Ratepayer' was a term which was vital to contemporary understandings of how society in Birmingham was ordered. In contrast to terms such as 'gentleman' or 'principal inhabitants', 'ratepayer' was relatively concrete and had a definite set of rights and duties attached to it, as well as connotations of respectability.[22] When we examine ratebooks we must remember that the poor-rate assessment was a vital process in political life of the town. It identified and empowered a propertied group that could exercise financial power, because of their occupation or ownership of property, but also political power due to its civic activity and the discourses about its (supposed) sense of duty towards the town.

Trade Directories

Trade directories started to appear outside London from 1751 onwards and provided lists of the names and locations of merchants, manufacturers and professionals resident in a town.[23] They were designed to assist strangers and residents of towns find goods and services. As Jane Norton points out, they were commercial publications, designed to promote the prosperity of the town and its businesses.[24] However, they were not just commercial documents; they listed also the 'principal' or 'respectable' inhabitants. This aim was noted in many directories' titles and preface.[25] This means that we can use the trade directories not just

[21] *Journal of the House of Commons*, 72 (2 May 1817), 231; (12 May 1817), 255.
[22] For other terms of social description see chapter 2.
[23] The first Birmingham directory appeared in 1763.
[24] J.E. Norton, *Guide to the National and Provincial Directories of England and Wales, Excluding London, Published before 1856* (London, 1950), p. 1.
[25] *The Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Walsall, Dudley, Bilston, and Willenhall Directory* (Birmingham, 1780), title page.

to provide information about the occupational structure of a town, but also to provide information on who the compilers thought of as the most important residents, businesses and professionals.

These compilers were driven by an assortment of motivations, and used a wide variety of methods to collect the information. These factors are important for our use of these sources. Some compilers, or agents employed by them, visited each house individually to collect information directly from the inhabitants. Others sent out circulars requesting people to send their information to them. More underhand methods included lifting lists of names from other people's directories, adding some new individuals and then publishing the results. Collecting information personally was usually the most accurate method.[26] However, this could still lead to failure, as Charles Pye found out in 1797 when he was compiling a new edition of his directory. In his preface he explained that his directory was not comprehensive because some inhabitants had refused to give him their information, 'being prepossessed in their own opinion that I was taking down names for the Militia'.[27] Directories were most likely a combination of the compiler's impression of the town and the efforts of some inhabitants to get themselves included in order to promote their businesses.

What did it mean to appear in a directory? Penelope Corfield and Serena Kelly suggest that inclusion was generally a sign of significant local status, arguing that most of the 'town gentry' were usually included, though they also comment that 'compilation could be pretty rough-and-ready, and it cannot be assumed that all local bigwigs were correctly identified.'[28] However, as will be discussed below when trade directories and ratebooks are compared, there is reason to think that at least the economic status required to appear in a trade directory was rather lower than historians have assumed. Trade directories became one of the most

[26] Norton, *Guide to the Directories*, pp. 16-19.
[27] C. Pye, *The Birmingham Directory, for the Year 1797* (Birmingham, 1797), advertisements.
[28] P. Corfield and S. Kelly, '"Giving Directions to the Town": the Early Town Directories', *UH*, 11 (1984), p. 26.

important publications through which understandings of a town were created and circulated. They acted as a readily available database which could immediately signal who was significant and who was not. It became increasingly important to appear in the trade directories. This was reflected in two 1794 letters from the London banker, insurance broker and shipowner Charlotte Matthews to Birmingham businessman Matthew Boulton. Boulton had asked Matthews to enquire into the character and business credentials of one Mr. Rotch. Matthews began her enquiries by consulting the directories, writing in July 1794 to Boulton, 'I don't know Mr. Rotch or what line he is in, as he is not in the Directory'.[29] Her next letter reported that 'I have made enquiries respecting Mr. Rotch who only *lodges* in Lawrence Poultney Lane & I cannot learn what he is – unless therefore he should bring a good recommendation it will be necessary to make further enquiries before you favour him with your acquaintance'.[30] In these two quotations Charlotte Matthews expressed the importance and commercial significance of directories. Rotch's absence from any of the London directories meant that Matthews knew nothing of him, and that Boulton did no business with him. In the second quotation Matthews linked this absence from the directory with a judgement on his social standing, 'only *lodges*', meaning not only was he absent from the directories but he wasn't even a householder. This vignette reflects the combination of social and commercial connotations bound up in trade directories.

Hair-Powder Tax Records

The final source to be considered are the hair-powder tax records. The hair-powder tax was one of a group of taxes introduced in the late eighteenth century known as the assessed taxes. They were aimed at so-called 'luxuries' such as carriages, servants, horses and printed linen.[31]

[29] BAHS, MS 3782/12/68/80, Charlotte Matthews to Matthew Boulton, 29 July 1794.
[30] BAHS, MS 3782/12/68/81, Charlotte Matthews to Matthew Boulton, 31 July 1794, original emphasis.
[31] Langford, *Public Life*, p. 356; S. Dowell, *A History of Taxation and Taxes: from the Earliest Times to the*

As Langford argues, they were aimed at the consumption habits of a particular sector of society. When he introduced the hair-powder tax, Pitt the Younger made great play on the fact that it was designed to fall only on a wealthy section of society for whom wearing hair powder was a necessity in order to maintain their status.[32] The assessed taxes, in effect, created a social group, in which consuming certain taxed goods represented a certain level of wealth. However, these records were not simply an attempt by an external body to define a social group. Choosing to powder one's hair had always meant that an individual was making a statement about their position in society. As a consequence, the group defined by this source are to a certain extent self-selecting and, therefore, its composition was influenced by a whole host of issues connected to self-identity and consumption, most notably the issue of taste and the debates over luxuries and necessities.[33] Taxing this action had two main effects. First, it made the wearing of hair powder not just a social statement, but a political one. As John Barrell points out, much of the furore which developed over the hair-powder tax originated in claims that it was a sumptuary law; one which not only cemented a division between rich and poor, but which made it a division between wig-wearing Tories and cropped-haired radicals.[34] The second change was that it made the social statement of wearing hair powder official. Lists of those who purchased hair-powder licences were drawn up and pinned to the parish church door.[35] These lists served to define, in public, a particular section of society. They connected people who in every other aspect of their lives might have been completely unconnected. We might speculate that such a list acted in a similar manner to some of the sources discussed by Patrick Joyce.[36] He suggests that there was a process whereby objective 'truths' about society were constructed. Here the power of an official list of individuals helped to create the idea of

Present Day (4 vols., London, 1884), ii, 184, 188; C. Steedman, *Labours Lost: Domestic Service and the Making of Modern England* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 129-71.

32 J. Barrell, *The Spirit of Despotism: Invasions of Privacy in the 1790s* (Oxford, 2006), p. 153.

33 Ibid., pp. 147-52, 182-9, 191-4. More generally on taste and self-identity see M. Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 2005), chs. 6-7.

34 Barrel, *Spirit of Despotism*, pp. 159, 197-203.

35 Ibid., p. 155.

36 Joyce, 'What is the Social in Social History?', *P&P*, 206 (2010), pp. 235-6.

the objective existence of a particular social group. In fact none of the sources considered here provide objective accounts of the structure of the town's society. Instead they provided externally defined images of the Birmingham population which divide the inhabitants into social groups defined by particular characteristics: income and civic responsibility in the ratebooks; occupation and reputation in the trade directories; and politicized consumption in the hair-powder tax records.

Ratebooks

The ratebooks describe the largest body of people. The number of ratepayers changed over the course of this period. Figure 1.1 shows the ratepaying households compared to the overall number of houses in Birmingham. This graph is imperfect as it contains relatively few data points for the number of ratepaying houses; however, it provides a helpful impression of the change over time. Ratepaying households varied between one sixth and one quarter of the total number of households. The reasons for this variation are in part linked to the fluctuation of Birmingham's economy. During the period 1780-1832 there were a number of building booms that increased the number of houses paying the rates. However, these building booms often outstripped demand and the economic downturns that occurred between 1793 and 1811, 1816 and 1821, and in the late 1820s left Birmingham with a large surplus of empty housing.[37] For example, in 1801 around twelve per cent of the town's 15,650 houses were unoccupied.[38] Moreover, such economic downturns inevitably reduced the numbers paying the poor rates (as well as increasing the number applying for relief).[39]

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37 C.W. Chalklin, *The Provincial Towns of Georgian England: A Study of the Building Process, 1740-1820* (London, 1974), pp. 274-5, 279-80, 285-8.

38 P.M. Jones, *Industrial Enlightenment: Science, Technology and Culture in Birmingham and the West Midlands, 1760-1820* (Manchester, 2008), p. 38.

39 For example, BAHS, GP/B/2/1/2, 28 Jan. 1817.

Figure 1.1, Number of Houses that Paid the Poor Rates, 1660-1835.

Figure 1.1 is not currently available in ORA.

Source: Jones, *Industrial Enlightenment*, p. 37.

Figure 1.2, New Street, Digbeth and Suffolk Street districts. **Figure 1.2 is not currently available in ORA.**

New Street – red

Digbeth – blue

Suffolk Street – purple

The ratebooks can be used to give an impression of the structure of income in Birmingham's propertied society. The town of Birmingham was split into twelve districts. The rates assessed in three of these districts (New Street, Digbeth and Suffolk Street) were analysed for the years 1801 and 1830. The roads included in the three districts used are marked on figure 1.2. New Street encompassed the central area of the town and was home to the major commercial areas and civic buildings. Digbeth was one of the key manufacturing areas in the town. Suffolk Street began this period on the periphery of the town, but much of the expansion during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries took place in this direction.[40] The overall value of the rate collected in each district is detailed in table 1.1. Rates were levied at different levels at different times. The rate in 1801 was four pence in the pound; in 1830 it was two shillings in the pound. The poor quality of the 1830 ratebook meant it was not possible for me to collect every entry. Thus the 1830 values should be considered as under-estimates, particularly for the New Street district.

Table 1.2 derives from this data the total value of rated property in the districts. Although by 1830 the rate was levied on all properties worth over six pounds, I have not included properties worth between six and twelve pounds in tables 1.1 and 1.2 in order to show change over time given constant definitions. Table 1.3 gives the property values in 1830 with the smaller properties included. It must be remembered that inflation means that these figures must be treated with some caution. For example, some of the increase in the number of properties worth more than twelve pounds, and hence rateable, was due to inflation rather than increasing real income.[41]

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[40] C.R. Elrington, and P.M. Tillott, 'The Growth of the City', in *VCH*, p. 9.

[41] Indications of inflation can be seen in the various price indexes compiled for this period, P.K. O'Brien, 'Agriculture and the Home Market for English Industry, 1660-1820', *EHR*, 100/397 (1985), pp. 789-90, 795; B.R. Mitchell, *British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge, 1988), ch. 14.

Table 1.1, Total Poor-Rate Assessments, 1801 and 1830 (Houses Rated at ≥£12 only).

District	Year	Number of rateable properties	Total sum raised by assessment (£.s.d.)			Mean rate levied (£.s.d.)		
New Street	1801	294	154	10	8	0	10	6
	1830	295	719	19	7	2	8	9¾
Digbeth	1801	349	124	14	5	0	7	1¾
	1830	359	653	6	9	1	16	4¾
Suffolk St	1801	277	93	8	6½	0	6	9
	1830	290	925	3	4	3	3	9¾

Sources: BAHS, CP/B/Birmingham Ratebook, 244512, 1794-1801; 244513, 1801-1802; 244524, 1827-33.
Note: Properties worth twelve pounds and over only; the rate in 1801 was 4d. in the pound, in 1830 was 2s. in the pound.

Table 1.2, Rateable Property Values, 1801, 1830 (Houses Rated at ≥£12 only).

District	Year	Number of rateable properties	Total assessed value of rated property (£.s.d.)			Mean assessed value (£.s.d.)			Percentage change in total assessed value 1801-1830 (%)
New Street	1801	294	13908	0	0	47	9	4	
	1830	295	10799	13	9	36	12	2	-23.4
Digbeth	1801	349	11224	17	6	32	12	4½	
	1830	359	9800	1	3	27	5	11½	-13.7
Suffolk St	1801	277	8408	8	9	30	13	9	
	1830	290	13877	10	0	47	17	¾	+65

Sources: See table 1.1.

Table 1.3, Ratepaying Property Values, Including Properties Between £6 and £12, 1830.

District	Assessment range (£)	Number of rateable properties	Total assessed value of rated property (£.s.d.)		
New St	6-12	71	687	0	0
	>12	295	10799	13	9
	Combined	366	11486	13	9
Digbeth	6-12	143	1357	17	6
	>12	359	9800	1	3
	Combined	502	11157	18	9
Suffolk St	6-12	150	1501	7	6
	>12	290	13877	10	0
	Combined	440	15378	17	6

Source: BAHS, CP/B/Birmingham Ratebook, 244524, 1827-33.
Note: Property worth ten pounds and more was assessed at two-thirds of its value and property below ten pounds at its full value; this has been taken into account in the calculations for this table.

For Suffolk St the increase is in line with accounts of Birmingham's history which stress the area's growing prosperity in this period. However, it is surprising that the overall value of New Street and Digbeth in 1830 seems to have decreased from 1801. These results are still more striking because Birmingham was in the middle of a long depression in 1801.[42] Two explanations might be offered for these figures. First, the 1830 assessment was carried out after the passing of the Sturges Bourne act in 1819 which allowed buildings worth less than twelve pounds to be rated. This seems to have caused some added confusion and inefficiency in the collection of the rate. In 1832 the Guardians proposed that a new survey and assessment of the town be made. In doing so they pointed to the inconvenience caused by having to assess buildings worth less than ten pounds at their total value and those worth more than ten pounds at two-thirds of their value.[43] In contrast, in 1801 the Guardians were under public pressure to be more efficient and complete in their assessment and collection of the rates.[44] Rate collectors may also have declined in efficiency as the town grew over time (73,670 inhabitants in 1801 compared to 142,206 in 1830). This increase in size, combined with the fact that the assessment was still being done by just the twelve Overseers of the Poor, may have made the processes of assessment and collection more difficult.[45] Additionally, growth was occurring in other areas of the town. For example, more and more residents of Birmingham who had once lived in the centre were now resident in the surrounding countryside and in areas such as Edgbaston and this may have meant a shift in wealth away from the central district.[46] The population and income of the parish of Edgbaston increased greatly between 1801 and 1831, as table 1.4 suggests.

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42 E. Hopkins, *Birmingham: The First Manufacturing Town in the World, 1760-1840* (London, 1989), pp. 76-7.

43 BAHS, GP/B/2/1/3, Board of Guardians Minutes, 1826-38, 31 July 1832.

44 For example, BAHS, GP/B/2/1/1, 26 Feb. 1800.

45 BAHS, GP/B/2/1/2, 3 June 1817 suggests that the Guardians were trying to lessen the burden on the Overseers by appointing twelve collectors so that the Overseers did not have to assess and collect the poor rate. This seems to have helped, see, 11 Aug. 1818.

46 Hopkins, *Birmingham*, p. 120; L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class* (2nd edn., London, 2002), pp. 39-43, 226, 251-2, 358, 368-9; D. Cannadine, *Lords and Landlords: the Aristocracy and the Towns, 1774-1967* (Leicester, 1980), pp. 94-108, esp. p. 96.

Table 1.4, Poor-Rate Assessments in Edgbaston Parish, 1788, 1801, 1831.

Year	Number of rateable properties	Total sum raised by assessment (£.s.d.)			Mean rate levied (£.s.d.)		
1788	92	71	16	2	0	15	7¼
1801	104	77	1	0	0	14	9¾
1831	550	373	15	5	0	13	7

Sources: BAHS, CP/ED/2/1/1, Edgbaston Ratebook, 1788-1792; CP/ED/2/1/3, Edgbaston Ratebook, 1800-1810; CP/ED/2/1/7, Edgbaston Ratebook, 1831-2.
Note: In all three years the rate was 6d in the pound.

I have not collected data on the number of female ratepayers in each district. However, I do have this data for two sample streets (New Street and Suffolk Street) in 1801 and 1830. In 1801 6 of the 99 New Street ratepayers and 4 of the 41 Suffolk Street ratepayers were female. In 1830 there were similarly few female ratepayers: 8 of the 130 New Street ratepayers and 2 of the 54 Suffolk Street ratepayers. The sample sizes are too small to carry out any extensive analysis. However, the very low number of female ratepayers probably reflects the household-focused nature of this source. More research is required to establish whether female occupation was generally as low as these small samples suggest. The political importance of the title of 'ratepayer' means that, if confirmed, this represents a significant formal obstacle to female engagement in Birmingham's local politics.

The data on ratepayer property can be compared to the total assessments made on the property in each district, given in tables 1.5.-1.7. This comparison shows that the ratepayers owned the majority of property in terms of value in all three districts in both sample years. This is especially noticeable in the New St district, where over 80 per cent of the property (in terms of value) was owned by ratepayers. However, in terms of the number of properties the ratepayers were always a minority and the proportion of rateable properties decreased in the Digbeth and Suffolk St districts between 1801 and 1830. This suggests that although the number of ratepayers increased in real terms in each district between 1801 and 1830, proportionally they represented an increasingly small group and so there was a sharper concentration of high-value property in their hands during this period, nootably in Suffolk St.

Table 1.5, Ratepaying Property Values and Total Assessed Property Values, 1801 and 1830.

District	Year	Total assessed value of all properties (£.s.d.)			Total assessed value of ratepayer properties (£.s.d.)			Total assessed value of non-ratepayer all properties (£.s.d.)		
New St	1801	16924	10	0	13908	0	0	3015	10	0
	1830	13100	10	4¾	11486	13	9	1613	16	7¾
Digbeth	1801	16925	12	6	11224	17	6	5700	15	0
	1830	16357	8	9	11157	18	9	5199	10	0
Suffolk St	1801	12243	11	3	8408	8	9	3835	2	6
	1830	19036	9	1¼	15378	17	6	3657	11	7¼

Source: see table 1.1.
Note: Boundary of rateable property in 1801 was £12, in 1830, £6. All properties in 1801 assessed at two-thirds of its value; in 1830 properties worth over £10 assessed at two-thirds of its value, property worth less was assessed at its total value.

Table 1.6, Assessed Value of Rateable Properties as a Percentage of Total Assessed Value of all Properties, 1801 and 1830.

District	Year	Percentage (%)
New St	1801	82.2
	1830	87.7
Digbeth	1801	66.3
	1830	68.2
Suffolk St	1801	68.7
	1830	80.8

Source: see table 1.1.

Table 1.7, Total Number of Properties Compared to Total Number of Rateable Properties, 1801 and 1830.

District	Year	Total number of properties	Total number of ratepayer properties	Percentage (%) of rateable properties
New St	1801	748	294	39.3
	1830	897	366	40.8
Digbeth	1801	1278	349	27.3
	1830	2076	502	24.2
Suffolk St	1801	787	277	35.2
	1830	1598	440	27.5

Source: see table 1.1.

There are limits to the utility of ratebook data for judging income. Not only were

assessments imperfectly accurate,[47] but also, the very fact that these were assessments only of real property means that ratebooks show income refracted through a particular lens. Using them in this manner rests on an assumption that individuals who spend a certain amount on their house or business premises would belong to a band in the population with similar overall income. This makes it an inadequate source of information about income, and so we need to consider other sources for economic status, notably probate evaluations which are discussed below. Even if the connection between property value and income is not assumed, then the analysis in this chapter reveals much about the structure of property in Birmingham during this period.

Further analysis can be undertaken. The data for each section has been broken down to examine the assessed properties in each district according to value. Again I have excluded properties worth less than twelve pounds for the 1830 data in order to allow change over time to be more easily observed. The figures for properties worth less than twelve pounds in 1830 can be seen in table 1.3. The assessed property values show the expected pyramidal structure in each district. In all three districts there was an increase in the number of low-value rateable properties during this period. This fits with a narrative of urbanisation during the early nineteenth century based around the construction of smaller buildings.[48] It is striking that, of all the bands over thirty pounds, only eight (out of thirty in total) saw an increase between 1801 and 1830, the rest either decreased or stayed the same. This is most obvious in the Digbeth district, possibly reflecting the predominance of small workshops in this part of Birmingham and the fact that it was less salubrious than either the New St or Suffolk St districts; for example, there were open sewers and the area was prone to flooding.[49] Apart from the fifteen to thirty pound band (where the greatest changes were seen), the largest

[47] For just a few examples, see BAHS, GP/B/2/1/1, 1 May 1798; GP/B/2/1/2, 16 July 1811; GP/B/2/1/3, 31 July 1832.

[48] M.J. Daunton, 'Housing', in F.M.L. Thompson (ed.), *The Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750-1950* (3 vols., Cambridge, 1990), ii, 202-03.

[49] M.J. Wise and P. O'N. Thorpe, 'The Growth of Birmingham, 1800-1950' in R.H. Kinvig, J.G. Smith and M.J. Wise (eds.) *Birmingham and its Regional Setting: A Scientific Survey* (Birmingham, 1950), p. 221.

changes were in Digbeth, where the number of properties assessed as worth between 45 and 60 pounds and between 60 and 75 pounds fell by eighteen and fifteen respectively. No other band changed by more than eight. This suggests an income structure in these three districts which saw overall consistency (the pyramid did not change into a column or an hourglass) but with a decline in the higher value properties. This data also intimates that propertied society (as defined by inclusion in the ratebooks) expanded slightly during this period. This increase was based on the inclusion of increasingly large numbers of individuals with comparatively low incomes and a decline in those with the highest.

Table 1.8, Assessed Values of Rateable Properties, 1801 and 1830.

Value (£)	1801 New St	1830 New St	+/-	1801 Digbeth	1830 Digbeth	+/-	1801 Suffolk St	1830 Suffolk St	+/-
12-15	28	32	+4	59	61	+2	59	60	+1
15-30	98	120	+22	173	211	+38	119	154	+35
30-45	55	55	0	60	58	-2	46	39	-7
45-60	48	44	-4	30	12	-18	28	20	-8
60-75	28	23	-5	16	1	-15	13	5	-8
75-90	8	10	+2	5	1	-4	0	4	+4
90-105	13	6	-7	3	8	+5	2	4	+2
105-120	4	1	-3	2	2	0	2	0	-2
120-135	6	2	-4	2	0	-2	0	1	+1
135-150	1	0	-1	1	0	-1	2	1	-1
150-165	0	1	+1	0	0	0	0	0	0
165>	4	1	-3	4	5	+1	3	2	-1
Total	293	295	+2	355	359	+4	274	290	+16

Sources: See table 1.1.

Table 1.9, Assessed Values of Rateable Properties, 1801 and 1830, Percentages (%).

Value (£)	1801 New St	1830 New St	1801 Digbeth	1830 Digbeth	1801 Suffolk St	1830 Suffolk St
12-15	9.6	10.8	16.6	17	21.5	20.7
15-30	33.4	40.7	48.7	58.8	43.4	53.1
30-45	18.8	18.6	16.9	16.2	16.8	13.4
45-60	16.4	14.9	8.5	3.3	10.2	6.9
60-75	9.6	7.8	4.5	0.3	4.7	1.7
75-90	2.7	3.4	1.4	0.3	0	1.4
90-105	4.4	2	0.8	2.2	0.7	1.4
105-120	1.4	0.3	0.6	0.6	0.7	0
120-135	2	0.7	0.6	0	0	0.3
135-150	0.3	0	0.3	0	0.7	0.3
150-165	0	0.3	0	0	0	0
165>	1.4	0.3	1.1	1.4	1.1	0.7

Sources: See table 1.1.

Figure 1.3, Assessed Values of Rateable Properties, 1801 and 1830.

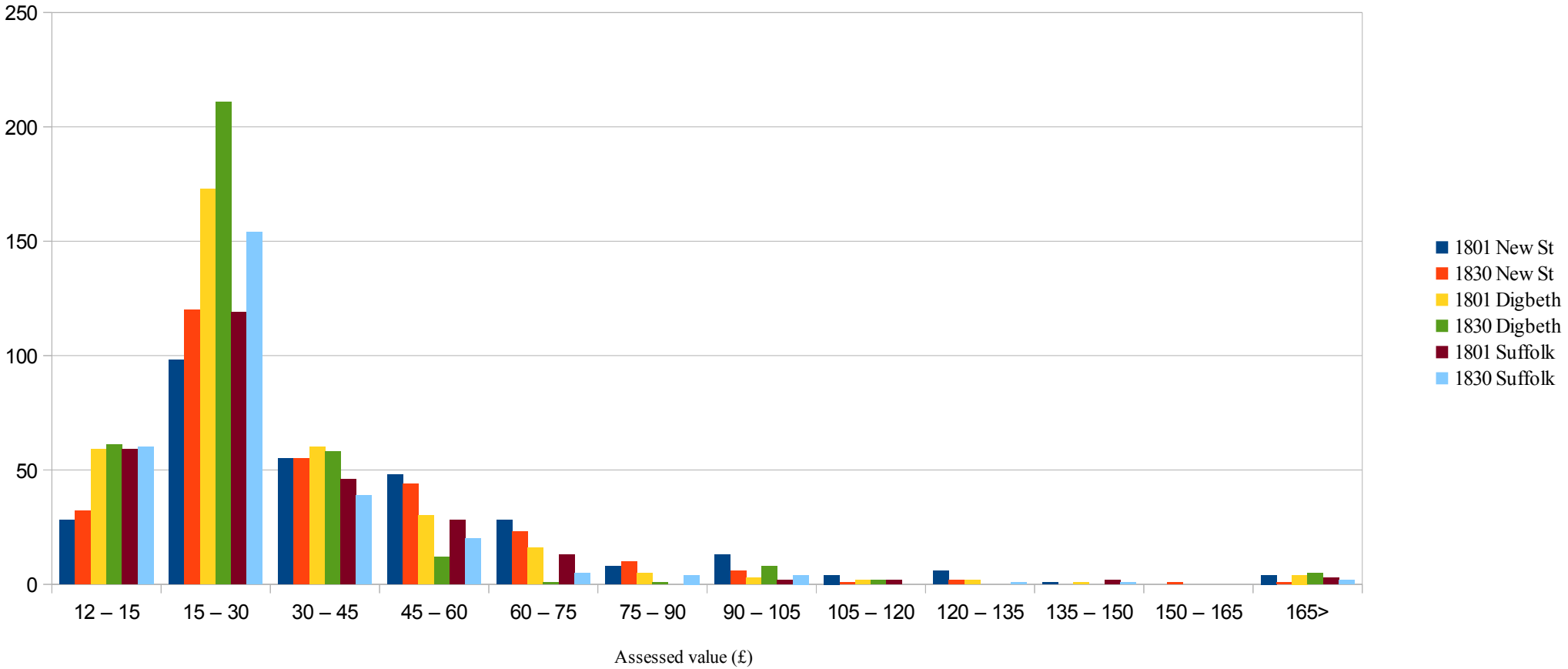
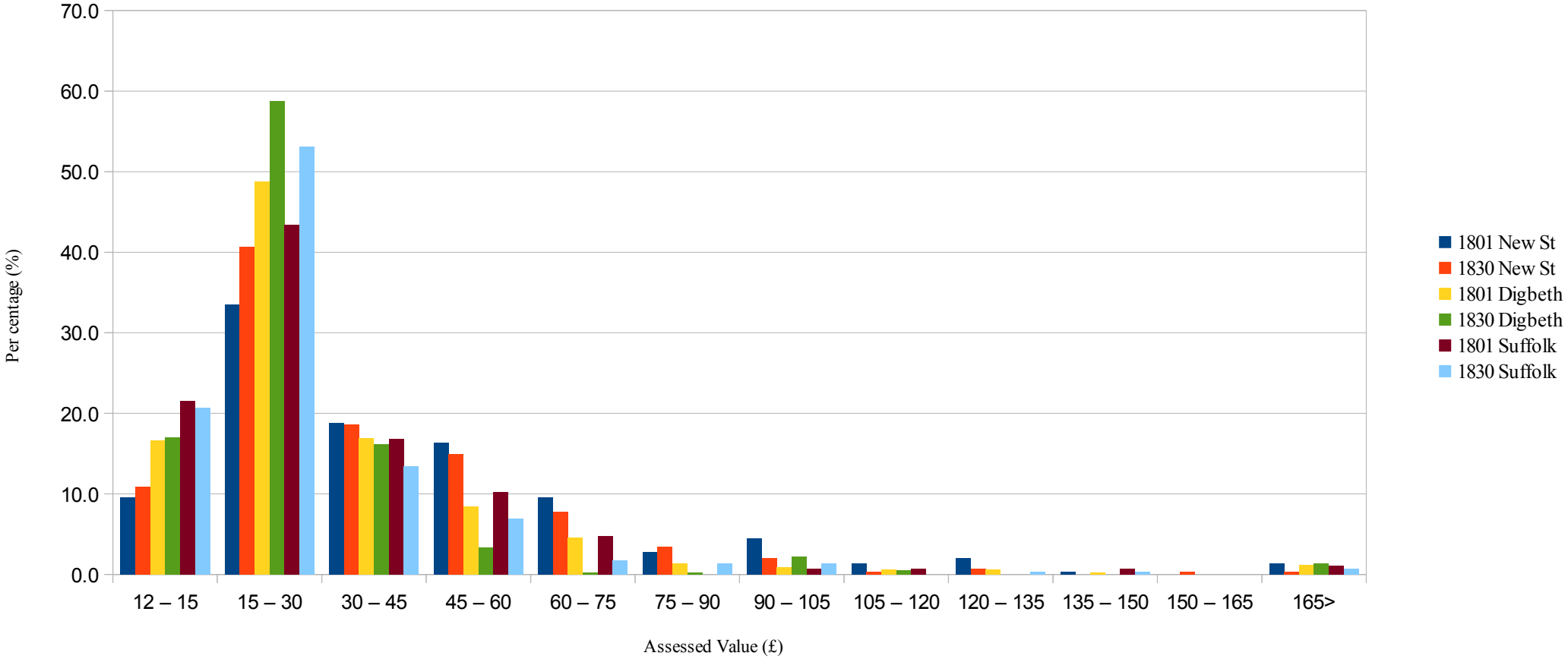


Figure 1.4, Assessed Values of Rateable Properties, 1801 and 1830, Percentages (%).



Trade Directories

Trade directories provide some information about occupations. An analysis of six trade directories is presented in tables 1.10 and 1.11 and figure 1.5. These directories were chosen from the thirty that appeared for Birmingham between 1780 and 1832 to give coverage of the entire period at roughly ten-year intervals.[50] They show a relatively consistent overall picture in the sense that manufacturing dominated all other occupational categories. Comparing the 1780 data to data collected from 16 other towns for the period between 1772 and 1787 we can see that in Birmingham the proportion of manufacturers was significantly above the overall average (56.7 per cent compared to 33 per cent).[51] By the end of this period 55.8 per cent of the individuals in the town's directory were manufacturers. In comparison, manufacturers made up 41 per cent of Manchester's electorate in 1832, 45.2 per cent of the Leeds directory in 1834, and in Glasgow manufacturers as a proportion of directory populations dropped from 35.3 in 1800 to 31.9 per cent in 1832.[52] When we combine this observation with the qualitative evidence from travel literature and the inhabitants' own descriptions of the town, we can suggest that their depiction of the town as one dominated by manufacturers was not far from reality, a reality Arthur Young summed up when he described Birmingham as the 'first manufacturing town in the world'.[53] If there was one major town which was dominated by manufacturers in the classic age of the Industrial Revolution, then it was Birmingham.

Proportions of each category varied apart from the dominance of manufacturers. The category of 'no occupation' is a difficult one to interpret. It may reflect a lack of information

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50 B. Walker, 'Birmingham Directories', *Birmingham Archaeological Society Transactions*, 58 (1937 for 1934), pp. 1-36; Norton, *Guide to the Directories*, pp. 183-91, this number is an underestimate, for example, Hunter's 1788 directory does not appear in Norton's list.

51 Corfield, 'Business Leaders', p. 38; as a consequence of the manufacturers' dominance, Birmingham had, proportionately, significantly fewer dealers and professionals: 26.7 per cent compared to 36.2, and 5.3 per cent compared to 14.3 respectively.

52 Gatrell, 'Incorporation', p. 42; Morris, *Class, Sect and Party: the Making of the British Middle Class: Leeds, 1820-1850* (Manchester, 1990), pp. 22-4; Nenadic, 'Structure', p. 69.

53 *Annals of Agriculture*, 16 (1791), p. 532.

provided by the individuals concerned. However, it may also represent individuals who were prominent enough in Birmingham society to be included without reference to their business activities. This is supported by two pieces of evidence. First, the frequent use of the term 'principal' in many directories' titles may refer to local fame rather than just business renown. Secondly, the 1830 directory does not, unlike the other directories, include individuals without occupation information; instead, it places them all together in one category termed 'Nobility, Gentry and Clergy'. Perhaps, the previous directories were doing something similar but not explicitly separating these eminent individuals. If so, then this reinforces the point that trade directories are social documents, full of value judgements, and not simple business listings.

Table 1.10, Occupations in Birmingham Trade Directories, 1780-1830.

Occupation	1780	1788	1801	1812	1818	1830
Agriculture	6	2	5	7	7	28
Building	94	126	192	162	217	495
Manufacturing	1220	1524	2089	2586	2390	5870
Transport	3	16	12	43	36	64
Dealing	575	408	1150	1260	1447	2755
Industrial Services	7	12	19	25	47	100
Public Service/Professional	115	127	221	299	326	625
Domestic Service	52	13	60	56	34	51
Gentleman	13	0	42	31	0	528
Widow (with no occupation given)	1	0	0	0	1	0
Esq (with no occupation given)	1	0	8	9	0	0
No occupation given	66	0	211	639	746	0
Total	2153	2228	4009	5117	5251	10516

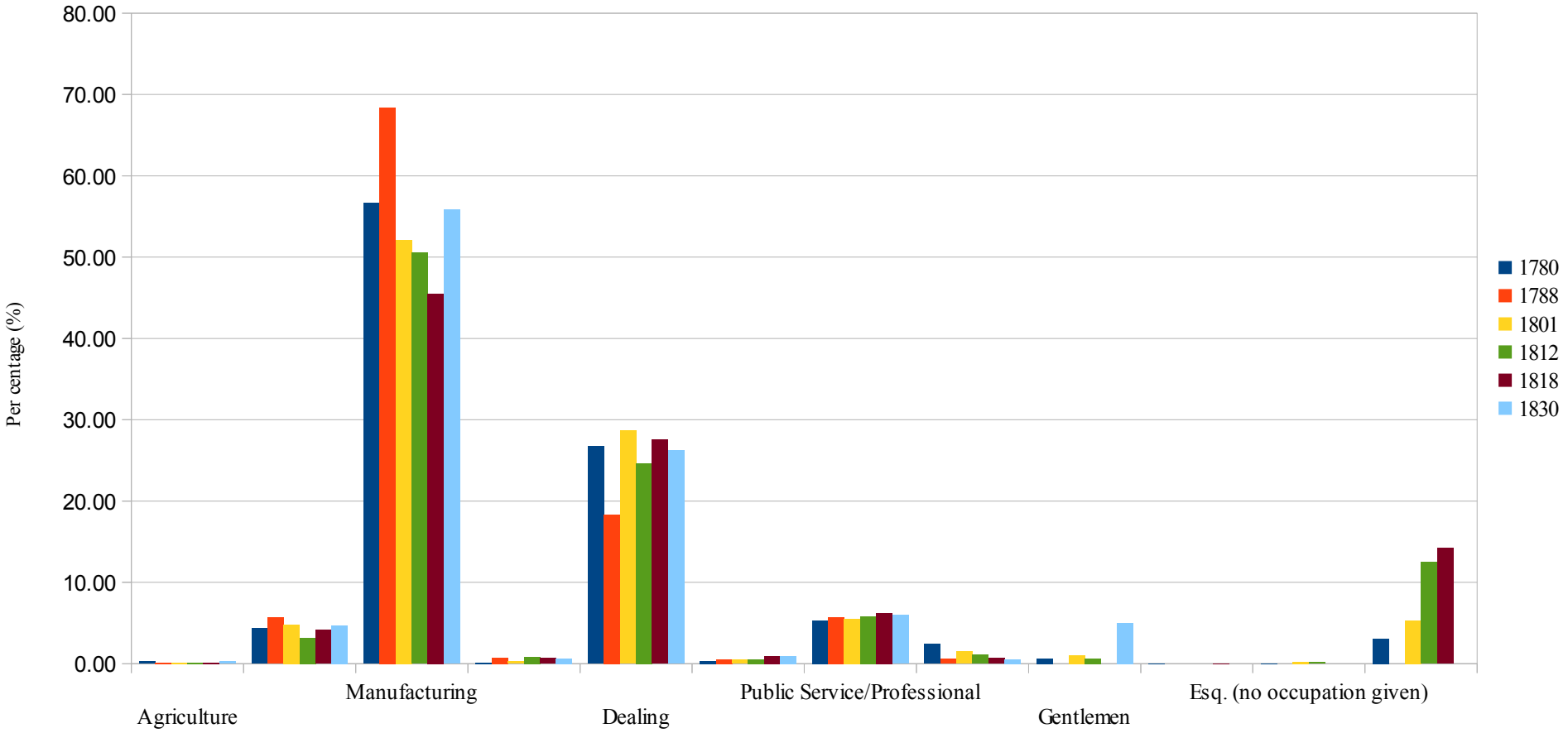
Sources: The Birmingham … Directory; Hunter, *The Distant Traders Guide*; *Chapman's Birmingham Directory*; *New Triennial Directory*; *Wrightson's New Triennial Directory of Birmingham*; *Pigot & Co.'s Commercial Directories of Birmingham, Worcester, and their environs* (London, 1830).
Notes: The occupational categories are taken from P.J. Corfield, 'Guide to the *Directories Database, 1772-87: Urban Occupations in Britain in the Early Industrial Revolution*, http://esds.ac.uk/doc/3443/mrdoc/pdf/guide.pdf (accessed 16 Oct. 2010). For 1830 the category 'Gentleman' is actually 'Nobility, Gentry & Clergy'; for problems with this scheme see Corfield, 'Business Leaders', p. 38.

Table 1.11, Occupations in Birmingham Trade Directories, 1780-1830, Percentages (%).

Occupation	1780	1788	1801	1812	1818	1830
Agriculture	0.3	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.3
Building	4.4	5.7	4.8	3.2	4.1	4.7
Manufacturing	56.7	68.4	52.1	50.5	45.5	55.8
Transport	0.1	0.7	0.3	0.8	0.7	0.6
Dealing	26.7	18.3	28.7	24.6	27.6	26.2
Industrial Services	0.3	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.9	1.0
Public Service/Professiona l	5.3	5.7	5.5	5.8	6.2	5.9
Domestic Service	2.4	0.6	1.5	1.1	0.7	0.5
Gentleman	0.6	0.0	1.1	0.6	0.0	5.0
Widow (with no occupation given)	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Esq (with no occupation given)	0.1	0.0	0.2	0.2	0.0	0.0
No occupation given	3.1	0.0	5.3	12.5	14.2	0.0

Sources: See table 1.10.

Figure 1.5, Occupations in Birmingham Trade Directories, 1780-1830, Percentages (%).



The trade directories shed some light on the place of women in this period. Table 1.12 contains the number and proportion of women contained within each directory. This suggests that women were a growing proportion of those individuals who were significant enough within Birmingham's industrial and commercial population to be included in a directory. This data can be compared to that collected by Christine Wiskin, for a similar period but using different Birmingham directories. In the ten directories she consulted the proportion of women varied between 1.5 and 6.1 per cent.[54] The difference between the figures for 1818 (496 women, 9.4 per cent) from table 1.12 and Wiskin's for 1820 (139, 3.1) is notable. Although they are very different in magnitude and proportion, they are from directories produced by the same author, Wrightson. This is particularly striking and re-emphasizes the difficulty of using directories to produce accurate pictures of the structure of the Birmingham economy.

These figures can be placed in a larger context by comparing them to the data gathered by Jennifer Aston for later nineteenth-century Birmingham and Hannah Barker for other industrial towns. The results can be seen in tables 1.13 and 1.14. Note that these are percentages of businesswomen, so that any women appearing in the directories with no occupation given have been removed to aid comparisons. Birmingham started the period with (on the evidence of directories) proportionately fewer women in business than other industrial towns, but by the 1810s was roughly similar to the other industrial towns. In terms of the town's own development, by 1830 a plateau of between 6 and 7 per cent had been reached that continued to be relatively stable throughout the nineteenth century. Given Birmingham's great size, smaller percentages represented, in real terms, a larger female business population. Table 1.14 suggests that Birmingham was not very different, in terms of the proportion of women present in trade directories, from other industrial towns during this period. This

[54] C. Wiskin, 'Women, Finance and Credit in England, c. 1780-1826' (Warwick Univ. Ph.D. thesis, 2000), p. 103.

supports Hannah Barker's argument that female business activity in the early nineteenth-century became more, not less, common.[55]

These figures can also be broken down by occupation, as shown in table 1.15. Comparing the occupational breakdown of women to the breakdown of the entire directory populations (see tables 1.10 and 1.11) reveals a number of notable differences. The proportion of women in the 'public service' and 'no occupation' categories was larger than the proportions in these categories in the overall directory population. There was a striking apparent decline in the proportion of women who were manufacturers over the period, though this masks a real increase in the number of female manufacturers. Between 1780 and 1801 dealers were over-represented in comparison with the proportion of dealers in the total directory population, but after 1801 the proportions of women and the whole directory population became roughly the same. This was combined with a growth in the proportions of women who were given no specific occupation in the directories. This might suggest that it was becoming increasingly feasible for women to be renowned for reasons other than their business activities. This point expands the conclusions of scholarship that argues that women were increasingly prominent in public life because of their business activities in the early nineteenth century.[56]

[55] H. Barker, *The Business of Women: Female Enterprise and Urban Development in Northern England, 1760-1830* (Oxford, 2006), p. 56.
[56] Ibid., chs. 2, 3.

Table 1.12, Women in Birmingham Trade Directories, 1780-1830.

Year	Number of women	Total number of entries in the directory	Percentage of women (%)
1780	91	2153	4.2
1785	170	2793	6.1
1788	79	2228	3.5
1791	81	2577	3.3
1797	43	2814	1.5
1801	194	4009	4.8
1805	42	765	5.5
1809	162	3396	4.8
1812	458	5117	9.0
1815	315	5472	5.8
1818	496	5251	9.4
1825	337	5981	5.6
1830	839	10516	8.0

Sources: see table 1.10; Wiskin, 'Women', p. 103.

Table 1.13, Businesswomen in Birmingham Trade Directories, 1780-1900, Percentages (%).

Year	Percentage of women (%)	Year	Percentage of women (%)
1780	3.9	1867	3.9
1788	3.5	1870	7.2
1801	4	1876	5.5
1812	5.7	1882	4.4
1818	5.9	1886	7.3
1830	6.2	1890	8.2
1849-50	6.8	1894	6.7
1855	7.1	1900	6.2
1861	6.1		

Sources: see table 1.10; J. Aston, 'Female Business Ownership in Birmingham, 1849-1901', *MH*, 37/2 (2012), p. 192.

Table 1.14, Women in Industrial Town Trade Directories, 1773-1830, Percentages (%).

Year	Birmingham	Manchester	Sheffield	Leeds
1773		5.8		
1774			5.0	
1780	3.9			
1787/1788	3.5	8.9	6.6	
1797			5.3	4.7
1801	4			
1804		6.0		
1809				6.0
1812	5.7			
1817/1818	5.9	6.0	4.3	5.7
1826				7.3
1828		7.6	9.0	
1830	6.2			

Sources: see table 1.10; H. Barker, *The Business of Women: Female Enterprise and Urban Development in Northern England, 1760-1830* (Oxford, 2006), p. 56.

Table 1.15, Birmingham Women's Occupations, 1780-1830 (Percentages in Brackets (%)).

Occupation	1780	1788	1801	1812	1818	1830
Building	1 (1.1)	1 (1.3)	0	2 (0.4)	7 (1.4)	3 (0.4)
Manufacturing	37 (40.7)	40 (50.6)	79 (40.7)	127 (27.7)	112 (22.6)	241 (28.7)
Dealing	40 (44.0)	29 (36.7)	67 (34.5)	132 (28.8)	146 (29.4)	238 (28.4)
Public Service and Professional	4 (4.4)	9 (11.4)	13 (6.7)	31 (6.7)	41 (8.3)	163 (19.4)
Domestic Service	1 (1.1)	0	1 (0.5)	0	1 (0.2)	2 (0.2)
Industrial Service	0	0	0	1 (0.2)	2 (0.4)	0
Transport	0	0	0	0	0	4 (0.5)
None	8 (8.8)	0	34 (17.5)	34 (36.0)	187 (37.7)	188 (22.4)

Sources: see table 1.10.

How did those identified by the directories compare with the ratepaying group? First, we should point out that the directories contained a much smaller proportion of Birmingham's population (see table 1.16): between 4 and 7 per cent of the population compared to the ratepayers 17 to 25 per cent. Tables 1.17 and 1.18 compare the trade directories to two sample streets from the ratebooks. The proportion of ratepayers who also appeared in directories

Table 1.16, Individuals Listed in Trade Directories as a Proportion of the Total Birmingham Population.

	1780	1788	1801	1812	1818	1830
Directory population	2153	2228	4009	5117	5251	10516
Total population	42,250 (1778)	52,250 (1785)	74000	85,755 (1811)	106,722 (1821)	146,986 (1831)
Percentage (%)	5.1	4.3	5.4	6.0	4.9	7.2

Sources: Elrington and Tillott, 'Growth', pp. 7, 9; 'Historic Population of Birmingham', http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/cs/Satellite?c=Page&childpagename=Lib-Central-Archives-and-Heritage%2FPageLayout&cid=1223092760414&pagename=BCC%2FCommon%2FWrapper%2FWrapper (accessed, 24 Apr. 2011); W. Hutton, *An History of Birmingham*, 3rd edn. (Birmingham, 1795), p. 69; R. Sweet, *The English Town, 1680-1840: Government, Society and Culture* (Harlow, 1999), p. 3, table 1; trade directories from table 1.10.
Notes: These population figures are estimates, especially those prior to 1801 and the start of the census, and generally are based on numbers of houses combined with an assumption of approximately five people per household.

Table 1.17, Number of Ratepayers in New St and Suffolk St, 1801, 1830.

	1801	1830
New St	99	130
Suffolk St	41	54

Sources: BAHS, CP/B/Birmingham Ratebooks, 244512, 1794-1801; 244524, 1827-33.
Notes: For 1830 the ratebooks give a combined list for the years covered in that volume instead of individual lists for each year. The 1830 ratebook is in parts illegible and so these are underestimates of the total number of ratepayers.

Table 1.18, Number of New St and Suffolk St Ratepayers Present in Trade Directories, 1780-1830, (Percentages in Brackets (%)).

	1801	1830
New St	65 (65.7)	60 (46.2)
Suffolk St	16 (39)	20 (37)

Sources: See table 1.17 and table 1.10.

decreased.

Tables 1.19, and 1.20 show the breakdown of the poor-rate assessment on all property in New St and Suffolk St for 1801 and 1830 compared with the assessment of property owned or occupied by individuals present in the trade directories. Not all these assessments would have been levied because many of them represent properties worth less than twelve pounds a year. The data suggests something of the structure of income of those present in the trade directories whose property assessment can be found.

These tables suggest that the distribution of individuals present in trade directories roughly mirrored the distribution of all assessments. This implies that the trade directories listed people of all levels of income among householders and not just the wealthiest. Indeed, the trade directory included individuals who were not within the ratepaying population. This suggests that trade directories included individuals from a rather wider section of society than historians have tended to assume. For example, Penelope Corfield describes those included in the trade directories as 'town gentry' including people from the aristocracy down to the middling ranks. Individuals occupying property rated at only a shilling or two were poorer than even the middling individuals Corfield describes as included with the 'town gentry'.[57] These tables also suggest that the ratepayers and people in directories were overlapping but distinct sections of Birmingham's society.

[57] Corfield, 'Business Leaders', pp. 23, 46-7.

Table 1.19, Assessed Value of all New St and Suffolk St Properties Compared with Assessed Value of Properties Inhabited by Individuals Present in the Trade Directory, 1801.

Property value (£)	All New St properties	Properties of those present in trade directory in New St	All Suffolk St properties	Properties of those present in trade directory in Suffolk St
0-6	3	0	10	0
6-12	6	0	57	12
12-24	12	3	25	6
24-36	16	6	7	3
36-48	20	16	5	4
48-60	14	11	2	2
60-72	6	5	2	1
72-84	5	5	0	0
84-96	8	5	0	0
96-108	6	5	0	0
108-120	4	3	0	0
120-132	4	4	0	0
>132	4	2	0	0
Total	108	65	108	28

Sources: BAHS, CP/B/Birmingham Ratebook, 244512-3; *Chapman's Birmingham Directory.*
Note: Rate paid on all properties worth more than twelve pounds.

Table 1.20, Assessed Value of all New St and Suffolk St Properties Compared with Assessed Value of Properties Inhabited by Individuals Present in the Trade Directory, 1830.

Property value (£)	All New St properties	Properties of those present in trade directory in New St	All Suffolk St properties	Properties of those present in trade directory in Suffolk St
0-6	1	0	14	1
6-12	10	2	10	0
12-24	21	9	16	8
24-36	21	8	17	7
36-48	25	13	2	2
48-60	20	9	5	3
60-72	15	9	0	0
72-84	7	4	0	0
84-96	2	1	0	0
96-108	3	3	1	0
108-120	1	0	0	0
120-132	1	0	1	0
>132	2	1	0	0
Total	129	60	66	21

Sources: BAHS, CP/B/Birmingham Ratebook, 244524; *Pigot's Commercial Directory.*
Note: Rates paid on all properties worth more than six pounds.

Hair-Powder Tax Records

The hair-powder records appear to encompass a smaller section of Birmingham's population than the other records so far considered. The 1557 people who bought licences in 1795 represented about 2 per cent of the total population of Birmingham as against the trade directories' 4-7 per cent and the ratepayers' 17-25 per cent. It must be noted that these tax records could include several individuals in the same household. For meaningful comparison one should focus on the number of households present in this source. There were 1159 separate households that paid the hair-powder tax. In 1801 there were 12,044 inhabited houses in the town.[58] Thus, those containing individuals that paid the hair-powder tax represented

[58] Elrington and Tillott, 'Growth', p. 9.

between 9 and 10 per cent of the overall number of houses, a greater percentage of households than the directories. 481 of the 1557 hair-powder taxpayers (30.1 per cent) were female. This is significantly higher than the proportion of women in the trade directories. Given that this source is focused on the individual, rather than on businesses, this is unsurprising. While, as Hannah Barker notes, trade directories tend to underestimate the business activity of women by only recording women trading independently, the hair-powder tax records note each individual who purchased a license, so women are not hidden within collective units headed by a man.[59] This of course suggests the hair-powder records point to an area of public life that women were more prominent in compared to the areas described by the ratebooks, trade directories or, as we shall see, subscription and association records.

Tables 1.21 and 1.22 compare hair-powder wearers with individuals appearing in the trade directories. When simply comparing those licence holders who appear under their own name in the directory we get a low level of overlap. However, the source contains information about how individual licence holders related to each other; it tells us whether one licence holder was the mother, brother, daughter etc. of another. This allows us to track the level of overlap between families and the directory.

Table 1.21, Payers of the Hair-Powder tax in 1795 Present in the 1797 Trade Directory.

Total number of payers	Payers present in trade directory	Percentage present in trade directory (%)
1577	428	27.14

Sources: WRO, QS16/4, List of persons who took out certificates to use hair powder in Mr. Clark's division, 1795; C. Pye, *The Birmingham Directory, for the Year 1797* (Birmingham, 1797).

Table 1.22, Payers of the Hair-Powder Tax Present of One or More of their Members in the Trade Directories, 1795.

Total number of payers	Payers present in the directory themselves	Payers with a relative present in the directory	Combined total	Percentage present in the directory (%)
1577	428	243	671	42.55

Sources: see table 1.21.

[59] Barker, *Business of Women*, p. 48.

It seems that most hair-powder taxpayers neither figured in the directory nor had family members who did. When compared with the ratebooks, there is a low level of overlap. Of the 130 individuals who paid the tax in New St, only 30 were ratepayers. In Suffolk St only four of the 21 taxpayers also paid the poor rates. Thus there were significant numbers of individuals who did not pay the poor rates but who did pay the hair-powder tax.

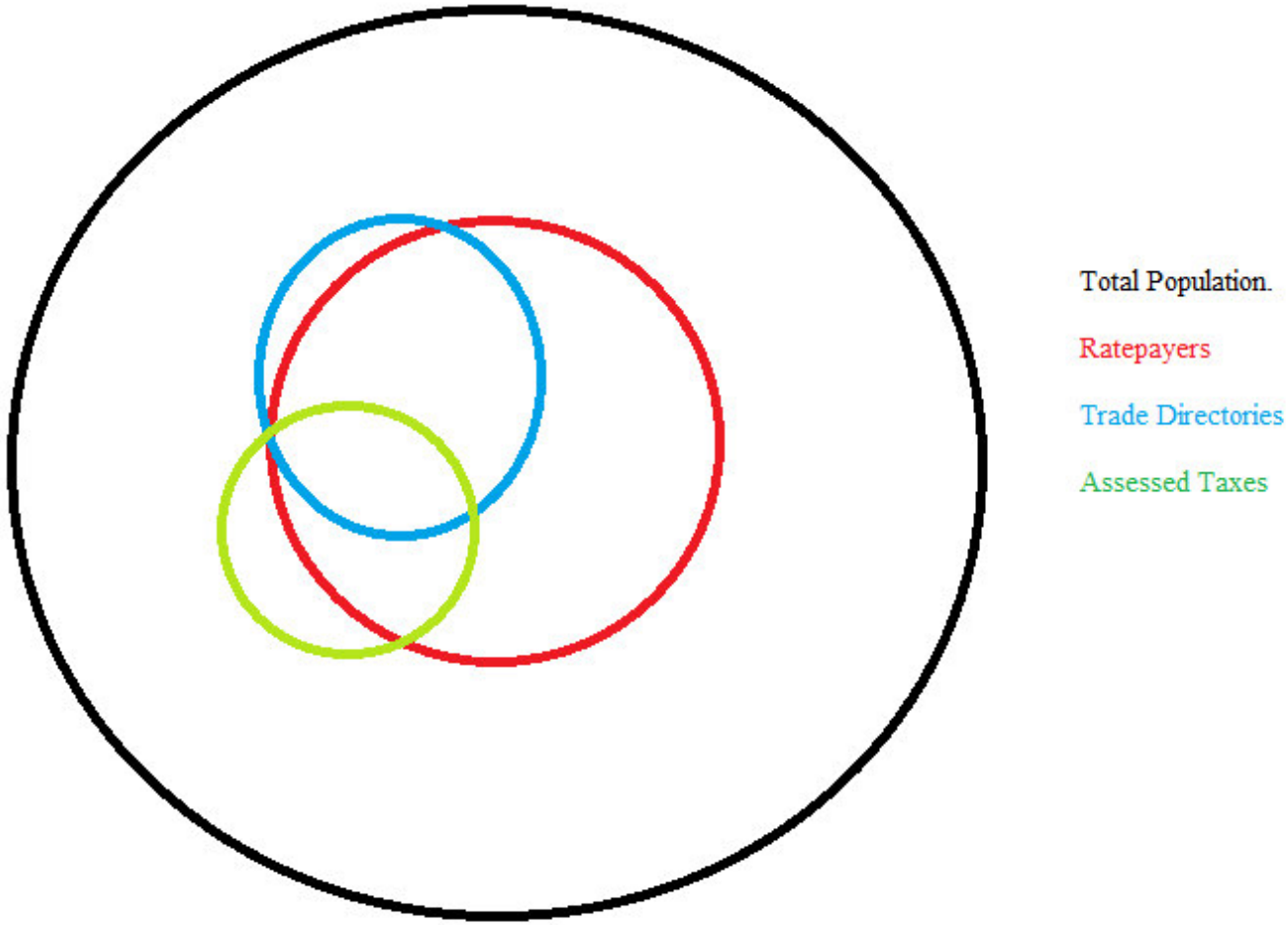
The significant difference between the groups included in the hair-powder tax records and the trade directories, and the much larger proportion of the town's population included in the ratebooks suggest that these three sources present us with three substantially different, though overlapping, groups within Birmingham's total population. This overall picture is illustrated by figure 1.6. It is a approximate picture of a section of Birmingham society which was roughly divided from the rest of the town's population by the twelve pound rate qualification. Within that boundary there was wide variation in terms of occupation and wealth. However, while it illustrates the relationship between these sources, the diagram cannot express the variation and fluidity of these relationships. Each of these intersecting groups appeared to change in terms of proportion and overlap with other groups. These changes were partly caused by the problems with these sources. For example, Hunter's 1788 directory gives different results from the other directories. I think that this stems from Hunter's method of compilation. Hunter, who admitted that he lacked 'local knowledge of the inhabitants', did not call on people individually to allow them to provide information about themselves. Instead he drew up a list of the businesses of the town and then employed 'an intelligent man to wait on some of those respective trades' who subsequently supplied corrections and omissions.[60] This rather slapdash approach to compilation seems to have produced a directory where there are numerous omissions; for example, not one doctor is

[60] G. Hunter, *The Distant Traders Guide and Residents Local Directory, for the Mercantile Town of Birmingham* (Birmingham, 1788), 'Preface'.

included. However, some of this variation was probably driven by real changes. For example, the rapid increase in the assessed value of property in Suffolk St between 1801 and 1830 reflected the large amount of building that occurred in that part of the town in that period.[61] Overall doubt is cast on the possibility of identifying a well-defined 'middle class', in the way that many historians have attempted. 'Propertied society', the intentionally loose term that I have chosen to employ, had blurred boundaries, which could be drawn in different places depending on the criteria employed. Moreover, we should not overstate its hierarchical organization. Individuals combined attributes in complex ways, which defy simple hierarchical ordering.

[61] Elrington and Tillott, 'Growth', pp. 9-10.

Figure 1.6, Propertied Social Groups in Birmingham, 1780-1832.



Wealth

Wealth is particularly hard to judge. The ratebooks give us a suggestion as to the structure of income but not wealth. Some information about wealth can be gained from examining probate records. This is a imperfect measure since it contains only wealth at death, does not include real property and cannot access familial property. However, it can give an impression of the structure of wealth in Birmingham across this period.

Phillada Ballard has identified those Birmingham inhabitants worth over £10,000 at death.[62] Table 1.23 displays some of her results. These figures require some explanation. The high number of those worth between £20,000 and £29,000 in 1790-99 is the result of the deficiencies of the probate material used. Before 1803 estates worth more than £10,000 were described as 'upper value' and not sworn to a precise sum.[63] Therefore, I have assigned those individuals a wealth value of £20,000; for some this is an overestimate, for others an underestimate. The data suggests a growth in the number and wealth of the richest members of Birmingham society. This growth is most marked between 1780-89 and 1790-99, suggesting sharp growth in elite wealth in that period, followed by a slower rate of increase over the remaining forty years. Furthermore, there was sustained growth in people with larger fortunes, though the lowest two bands (£10,000-19,000 and £20,000-29,000) remained the most common. This data would fit with Clive Behagg's description of Birmingham's manufacturing economy in the period 1820-40 as sharply divided between large and small producers, though more detailed research would be needed to confirm that this was a general phenomenon in all areas of Birmingham's economy and society.[64]

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62 She identified individuals using the Probate Calendars of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, rather than searching through the ecclesiastical court records at the Lichfield and Worcestershire record offices. This, as she admits, means she probably missed an unknown number of individuals worth over £10,000, P. Ballard, 'A Commercial and Industrial Elite: A Study of Birmingham's Upper Middle Class, 1780-1914' (2 vols., Reading Univ. Ph.D. thesis, 1983), i, 102-3.

63 Ibid., i, 103.

64 C. Behagg, *Politics and Production in the Early Nineteenth Century* (London, 1990), pp. 29-38.

Table 1.23, Wealth at Death of Birmingham Inhabitants Worth Over £10,000, 1780-1839.

Wealth (£)	1780-89	1790-99	1800-1809	1810-1819	1820-29	1830-39
250,000-499,999	0	0	0	1	0	0
100,000-249,999	0	1	1	1	0	2
50,000-99,999	0	0	1	3	1	0
40,000-49,999	0	0	1	1	3	2
30,000-39,999	0	0	2	2	7	8
20,000-29,999	1	11	6	6	8	14
10,000-19,999	0	2	12	11	13	18
Total	1	14	23	25	32	44

Source, P. Ballard, 'A Commercial and Industrial Elite: A Study of Birmingham's Upper Middle Class, 1780-1914' (2 vols., Reading Univ. Ph.D. thesis, 1983), ii, Appendices 1, 2.

Table 1.24, Occupations of Birmingham Individuals Worth Over £10,000 at Death, 1780-1839.

Year	Manufacturing	Dealing	Professional/ public service	Industrial services	Building	Unknown
1780-89	1	0	0	0	0	0
1790-99	9	2	2	0	0	1
1800-09	11	8	1	2	1	0
1810-19	14	7	0	2	0	2
1820-29	15	9	5	1	0	2
1830-39	21	13	4	3	0	3

Source: see table 1.23.

The occupational breakdown in table 1.24 suggests that the dominance of the broad category of manufacturers suggested by the trade directories was mirrored in the town's elite. In the first four-year brackets, manufacturers made up over half of the richest individuals, and in 1820-29 and 1830-39 they made up just under half.

Comparing the structure of society as indicated by this data with that indicated by the ratebooks (table 1.8) is not easy as ratebooks do not directly measure wealth. However, I would tentatively suggest that this further information implies that the growth in low-income brackets (represented by the growth of the £15-30 ratepaying bracket) was accompanied by a growth in the wealth of the richest inhabitants. This points towards a general growth in the

wealth of the town's propertied population, though more detailed studies of wills would be required to work out what happened to individuals in the middle of the propertied population.[65]

Subscriptions and Associations

The preceding analysis raises an important question: does the image constructed bear any relation to the lived experience of groups within Birmingham society? In answering this, first we can point to the process of self-identification involved in the trade directories and the hair-powder tax. This issue can be further examined by comparing the sources considered so far with subscription and association records.

Associations have been placed at the heart of a number of definitions of middle-class society. Morris, Barry, and Davidoff and Hall all stress the importance of associations in overcoming divisions throughout this section of society. Barry suggests that not only did associations help overcome (or bypass) economic, religious and political divisions within the bourgeoisie, but also that association was key to the creation of a middle-class identity.[66] They not only provided a space in which relationships could be created, but also the emotional tools that allowed individuals to conceive of themselves as belonging to a larger social group, one which existed beyond their own acquaintances.[67]

Subscription records represent a different type of source, one focused on contribution rather than membership. However, I would suggest that these two sources describe a group of

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[65] Maxine Berg suggests that ownership of multiple pieces of property fell in Birmingham between 1750 and 1800, but her study is focused on metalworkers and further study, both chronologically and in terms of occupation, is required, M. Berg, 'Small Producer Capitalism in Eighteenth-Century England', *BH*, 35/1 (1993), p. 32.

[66] R.J. Morris, 'Voluntary Societies and British Urban Elites, 1780-1850: An Analysis', *HJ*, 26/1 (1983) pp. 96, 103-4, 110, 112-13.

[67] J. Barry, 'Bourgeois Collectivism? Urban Association and the Middling Sort, 1550-1800' in J. Barry and C. Brooks (eds.) *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society and Politics in England, 1550-1800* (Basingstoke, 1994), pp. 91-5; see also Morris, 'Voluntary Societies'; Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, pp. 419-36.

individuals that shared a particular trait – the desire to contribute to public life. The sources used in this section embrace a variety of causes, from subscribing to the Birmingham General Hospital or Birmingham Blue Coat School to joining an association to prosecute felons. Yet all the individuals included contributed either time or money to them and did so in public. Subscribers' names were listed in the local newspapers, often alongside the amount they had subscribed, while many of the membership lists used below were drawn from newspapers. Similar to the process of public statement discussed above in relation to the hair-powder licences; appearing in *Aris' Birmingham Gazette* as a subscriber to a charity publicly placed an individual into a certain social category. To be a subscriber, to assist others through the expenditure of one's own resources was to assert one's position as an independent individual and to make a statement about one's place within the public culture of Birmingham. The public importance of such subscriptions can be seen by an example from 1798 when the Unitarian minister John Edwards wrote two thunderous letters to the members of the Birmingham New Meeting House attacking the fact they had donated £41.14.0. to the town-wide subscription for the wives and orphans of the sailors of the Battle of the Nile. He felt the subscription represented a public and political action, one which meant they had 'acceded to the *justice* of a war'.[68] It is this idea public contribution that links the individuals discussed below. The names of those who were members of associations or contributed to subscriptions were obtained from *Aris'* and the association and subscription records held in the Birmingham Archives and Heritage Service. These samples are unlikely to be comprehensive because of the incomplete survival of records.

[68] BAHS, UC2/14/3, Scrap Book, 1798-1923 contains copies of both letters; for the New Meeting's subscription see *Aris'*, 26 Nov., 3 Dec. 1798.

Table 1.25, Cross Reference of Subscription Records and Trade Directories, 1780-1830.

	1780	**1788**	**1801**	**1812**	**1818**	**1830**
Total number of subscribers	290	834	261	787	1266	919
Number of subscribers in trade directories	209	312	153	533	852	656
Percentage of subscribers in the directories (%)	72.1	37.4	58.6	67.7	67.3	71.4

Sources: J.T. Bunce, *History of the Corporation of Birmingham; with a Sketch of the Earlier Government of the Town* (3 vols., Birmingham, 1878), i, 85; BAHS, MS2818/1/3, Birmingham Street Commission minutes, 1801-1812; HC/GH/2/5/2, annual list of subscribers to the General Hospital, June 1787-June 1790; UC2/6/3/3, New Meeting House seat rental account book, 1812-13; UC2/9/1/1/1, proceedings of the committee appointed by the New Meeting Society for the relief of Protestant Dissenting Congregations at a distance, 1771-87; ZZ75A 567108-11, Anacreontic Society rules and lists of members, 1795-1814; Birmingham Miscellaneous M/1 202323, *Overseers of the Poor: Gentlemen Eligible to Fill the Situation of Guardians, 1831* (Birmingham, 1831); MS1622/1/5/1, *List of Subscribers to the Blue Coat Charity School,* Birmingham (Birmingham, 1818); MS1622/3/1/1, Subscribers to the Blue Coat Charity School, 1750-95; MS1622/3/1/4, register of children and subscribers, 1805-49; MS1622/3/1/5, List of subscribers to the Blue Coat Charity School, 1816-38; *Aris's*; directories from table 1.10.

Of the 4358 individuals identified in subscription records, 2716, or 63 per cent, were present in the trade directories. The breakdown of these figures for each sample year can be found in table 1.25. In general, they suggest that the majority (60-70 per cent) of subscribers were from that section of society described by the trade directories. The anomaly for 1788 is most probably due to the poor quality of that directory. This degree of correlation is striking, especially as the analysis of trade directories undertaken above suggests that they include a cross-section of income levels (see tables 1.19-1.20). This data also expands our understanding of who was involved in this type of activity, providing the beginnings of a proof that individuals of widely varying economic status within propertied society were involved.[69] Since this data shows individuals with a range of incomes undertaking the same public activity we can suggest that it supports the argument that subscription and association were helpful means of uniting individuals of different economic status and so mitigating economically driven social tension; however, it cannot confirm or deny Morris' argument that such societies helped overcome religious or political tension. Furthermore, while the data suggests that subscribers' economic statuses were varied, it cannot tell us anything directly about the social status of such individuals.

The impression that individuals with varied incomes took part in subscription activity is supported by comparing subscribers to the evaluations made of their property in the ratebooks (see tables 1.26-1.27). These results generally mirror the distribution of the overall assessments; both in terms of the geographical distribution (more in New Street than Suffolk St) and in terms of property values. The numbers are too small for Suffolk Street to allow detailed analysis. However, the New Street distribution supports an analysis which suggests that subscribers came from the wide range of different levels of income present throughout

[69] Morris in his extensive work on voluntary societies does not compare membership with ratebook or probate data; instead, he uses occupational data and the value of subscriptions to provide information about status; however, occupation is not a simple measure of status and amount subscribed point only to position within the society or subscription, not within the population at large, see Morris, *Class, Sect and Party*, pp. 213, 220-21, 236-7.

Birmingham's ratepaying population.

The limited information available means that it is difficult to do more than suggest the social status of subscribers. One way to create an impression of such status is to compare subscription or association membership to other forms of activity, notably participation in local government institutions. If we take the 1830 subscription sample and identify all the individuals who appear in the sample three or more times we can construct a group that represents a particularly active sample of subscribers. 63 such individuals can be identified. This group was heavily involved in subscriptions, associations, and local politics. It contains 25 Street Commissioners, eight people who served as Low Bailiff (the most powerful manorial office), five High Bailiffs (a key symbolic position and one who authorised and chaired all public meetings), five constables, Joshua Scholefield (who would be one of the town's first MPs in 1832) and ten local clergymen (including the most senior Anglican minister Edward Burn who had clashed with Joseph Priestley in the aftermath of the Riots of 1791 and who remained the key loyalist polemicist throughout this period, and John Angell James, the unofficial 'bishop' of Birmingham, whom Davidoff and Hall portray as the key evangelical clergyman in the town).[70] The group included names that were of continuing importance throughout this period in the public life of the town: Cadbury, Sturge, Phipson, Lloyd and Taylor. The majority of them (56 out of 63) appeared in the 1830 trade directory, 22 appear in Ballard's list of the richest Birmingham inhabitants. This combination of public activity and economic status suggests that these individuals were among the highest social status Birmingham inhabitants.

We can also compare the subscription data to Ballard's wealthiest Birmingham inhabitants. The results are shown in table 1.28. This comparison is not ideal as it involves comparing wealth at death with an activity possibly undertaken long before that wealth was accrued. Therefore, this data should be treated as only roughly indicative. Bearing this in

[70] Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, pp. 126-30.

mind, it suggests a growing involvement of wealthier individuals with subscriptions and associations over this period, though the majority of Birmingham's wealthiest individuals who were involved continued to be drawn from the first three wealth brackets (£10,000-39,999). As for the role of these wealthy individuals within the subscriptions and associations, the data does not reveal a great deal. However, it is clear that some of these wealthiest inhabitants were particularly active in subscriptions and associational activity. For example, in 1817 an Orthopaedic Hospital was established; George Freer (probate £20,000) was appointed its surgeon and John Welchman Whateley its secretary (probate £80,000).[71] This institution was also typical in having an aristocratic patron drawn from the local aristocracy, in this case the Earl of Dartmouth.[72]

Table 1.26, Assessed Values of all New St and Suffolk St Properties Compared with Assessed Values of Properties Inhabited by Subscribers, 1801.

Property value (£)	All New St properties	Property of New St subscribers	All Suffolk St properties	Property of Suffolk St subscribers
0-6	3	0	10	0
6-12	6	0	57	0
12-24	12	0	25	0
24-36	16	0	7	0
36-48	20	1	5	0
48-60	14	1	2	0
60-72	6	0	2	0
72-84	5	2	0	0
84-96	8	2	0	0
96-108	6	2	0	0
108-120	4	0	0	0
120-132	4	0	0	0
>132	4	1	0	0
Total	108	9	108	0

Sources: BAHS, CP/B/Birmingham Ratebook, 244512-3; subscription records (see table 1.25).

[71] R.K. Dent, *Old and New Birmingham* (3 vols., East Ardsley, 1973), ii, 365; Ballard, 'Commercial and Industrial Elite', ii, 985, 990.

[72] Morris, 'Voluntary Societies', pp. 96, 113.

Table 1.27, Assessed Values of all New St and Suffolk St Properties Compared with Assessed Values of Properties Inhabited by Subscribers, 1830.

Property value (£)	All New St properties	Property of New St subscribers	All Suffolk St properties	Property of Suffolk St subscribers
0-6	1	0	14	0
6-12	10	0	10	0
12-24	21	2	16	1
24-36	21	6	17	0
36-48	25	5	2	1
48-60	20	4	5	0
60-72	15	4	0	0
72-84	7	4	0	0
84-96	2	0	0	0
96-108	3	3	1	0
108-120	1	0	0	0
120-132	1	0	1	0
>132	2	1	0	0
Total	129	29	66	2

Sources: BAHS, CP/B/Birmingham Ratebook, 244524; subscription records (see table 1.25).

Table 1.28, Wealth at Death of Subscribers Worth Over £10,000, 1780-1830.

Wealth (£)	1780	1788	1801	1812	1818	1830
10,000-19,999	6	21	4	20	20	24
20,000-29,999	5	15	5	15	21	21
30,000-39,999	1	8	5	7	25	18
40,000-49,999	2	4	1	6	2	5
50,000-99,999	1	5	3	9	6	17
100,000-249,999	1	3	1	2	3	3
250,000-499,999	1	1	1	1	1	7
500,000>	0	0	0	0	1	2
Total	17	57	20	60	79	97

Source: Ballard probate data (see table 1.24); subscription records (see table 1.25).

Table 1.29 shows the number and proportion of women present in each sample year. The table shows a variation between 0.8 and 9 per cent. The reason for this variation is unclear. Part of it probably relates to the type of subscription data available for each year. For example, in

1801 one of the associations included is the Anacreontic Society, a social club that put on musical entertainments. This society had very few female members. Between 1793 and 1814 it had three female members and hundreds of male ones. However, while reinforcing the impression of subscription and association as a male-dominated world, table 1.29 does suggest that women could play a role in this aspect of public life. Indeed, these figures most likely underestimate the activity of women in Birmingham's public life. Censure, such as that offered by Birmingham clergyman John Angell James in 1852, of female involvement in associations suggests that such involvement was widespread enough to cause concern.[73]

Table 1.29, Female Subscribers, 1780-1830.

Year	Number of female subscribers	Women as a percentage of the total number of subscribers (%)
1780	27	9.3
1788	50	6
1801	2	0.8
1812	21	2.7
1818	93	7.3
1830	66	7.2

Source: see table 1.25.

Conclusion

All of the sources considered in this chapter contain elements of cultural construction, whether that is the political meaning of paying rates, the public reputation required for inclusion in a trade directory or the political and status implications of wearing hair powder. These issues all have implications for how we use them and limit their utility as measures of social reality. Furthermore, each source examined described a different section of Birmingham's population. However, arguing that these sources are not objective representations of Birmingham's society is not to suggest that these offer no information

[73] See the quotation from James in Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, p. 430.

about society. Instead, they offer multiple ways of looking at and describing the town's population. These different visions can be compared and, in particular, tracing individuals who appear in multiple sources illuminates issues not covered by one particular source. For example, comparing trade directories and ratebooks reveals information about the incomes of individuals included in directories. This allows judgements on the status of individuals included in trade directories to be made on the basis of evidence rather than conjecture and assumption.

Bearing in mind this need for subjective readings of quantitative material, what have the sources considered in this chapter suggested about propertied society in Birmingham? First, no clearly bounded 'propertied society' has been delineated. However, all the sources examined what might plausibly be termed describe propertied groups. Secondly, this grouping was dominated by manufacturers. Manufacturers formed the largest section of both the trade directory population (see tables 1.10 and 1.11) and of the wealthiest Birmingham inhabitants (see table 1.24). This is in contrast to other industrial towns such as Manchester where manufacturing made up only 41 per cent of the electorate in 1832.[74] Thirdly, a large number of individuals who can be included within the category of propertied society were active in public life in the form of association membership and subscriptions (see table 1.25). When combined with the information taken from the comparison of trade directories and ratebooks, this high level of correlation between trade directories and subscription records suggests that individuals with a wide range of incomes were active in the town's public life, even if the administration of such associations and subscriptions was dominated by the wealthiest inhabitants.[75] Fourthly, the very wealthiest individuals included here within propertied society were growing increasingly wealthy during this period; furthermore, the number of individuals

[74] This difference seems to have slowed decreased over the nineteenth century; in 1861 manufacturers made up 57.1 per cent of Birmingham's total population and 53.5 per cent of Manchester's, S. Gunn, 'The Manchester Middle Class, 1850-1900' (Manchester Univ. Ph.D thesis, 1992), p. 55.

[75] Morris, 'Voluntary Societies', p. 96; for the nature of the local governing elite see chapter 5.

who were substantially wealthy increased (see table 1.23). The slight decline in the number of individuals with high income in the poor-rate districts is probably explained by an increasing tendency to move out of the centre of Birmingham.[76] Fifthly, as well as the richest group increasing in size and wealth, the propertied part of Birmingham's population seems also to have increased in absolute size. This is suggested by the increasing number of properties worth more than twelve pounds. This growth was probably driven by the increasing number of individuals with smaller but qualifying incomes (see table 1.8). Birmingham's propertied society, therefore, grew in size and prosperity across this period, despite a number of trade depressions during this period. Further research is needed to discover whether this increasing prosperity was evenly spread throughout propertied society, or whether certain sections grew wealthier while others stagnated or declined.[77] Furthermore, though the section of the town's population I have described as propertied society grew in absolute terms, it seems to have been shrinking as a proportion of Birmingham's overall population, at least based on the poor-rate districts examined here. Thus, the higher-value property was in the hands of a group that represented an increasingly small section of the overall populace. Sixthly, all of the sources discussed in this chapter describe groups in which women are in a minority. This is despite the fact that other research has shown that women played important public roles in Birmingham.[78] This derives from the particular factors affecting the creation of these sources discussed at the start of this chapter and must be remembered when thinking about the particular picture of Birmingham's social structure derived and used in this thesis. Finally, these various sources suggest two different types of representation of society. Trade directories and the hair-powder tax records provide a fairly flat vision of society containing just one division, that between

[76] Ballard chronicles this movement in 'Commercial and Industrial Elite', ii, chs. 9, 10. She argues that the majority of Birmingham's wealthiest inhabitants resided in the town centre until c. 1800. After that date they increasingly tended to live in suburban and rural areas, a process that intensified from the 1820s onwards.

[77] Clive Behagg suggests that small producers grew less prosperous during the 1820s-40s, but his probate data is not presented in a way that allows chronological change to be judged and his account of the changing economy tends to be based on qualitative evidence, see Behagg, *Politics and Production*, ch. 1.

[78] For example, the importance of women to Birmingham's economy, for which see the works by Berg and Wiskin cited above p. 46 n.102.

those included in the source and those excluded. The poor-law, association and subscription records provide a gradated picture, with a series of different steps based on small changes in assessed value or value of subscription, though it must also be noted that both these sources also contain an important binary division between those who paid the rates or subscribed, and those who did not. These two representations of Birmingham society tell us something about how society functioned in this period and each can help explain certain phenomena. The binary division of society, for example, can help to explain the continuing importance of binary understandings of society; such understandings coincided with people's knowledge of prominent social divisions. The gradated structure suggested by the poor-law ratebooks helps explain the particular structure of power within Birmingham's governing elite (as discussed in chapter 5). Finally, thinking about the relationship and the discrepancy between these two representations of society can be useful. For example, the prominence of binary depictions of Birmingham's social structure helps explain the popularity of the Birmingham Political Union's rhetoric about the union between the middle and working class (it gave political importance to a popular way of understanding the town's population), while the finely graded distinctions helps explain why that BPU fell apart as different economic and political interests emerged and clashed. Thinking in terms of these two different ways of understanding Birmingham's social structure provides a useful heuristic approach.

Chapter 2: Describing Propertied Society.

This chapter turns from exploring the fluid character of 'social structure' to analyse how individuals within the loose group here termed 'propertied society' thought about society and their place within it. It looks at both vocabulary and discourses. This analysis is undertaken for two connected reasons. First, it contributes to the ongoing development of a history of 'the social'.[1] However, chronicling the changing understandings of the social is not adequate unless it is linked to the processes of social-group formation and this brings us to the second reason; this chapter describes the linguistic and discursive structures which shaped and limited the processes by which social groups formed. It builds on the work of historians who have suggested that social groups were formed primarily through language. The implication is not just that pre-existing social groups were bound together by a shared language; it is that social groups were formed through the use of languages which implied the existence of commonality. Thus for Dror Wahrman the 'middle class' was brought into existence through the political language of the late eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries which suggested that a coherent, unified middle class existed, independent of whether this was the socio-economic reality.[2] Social understandings could drive the creation of social groups in two main ways. First, shared conceptions could bring people together. As we shall see, a shared understanding of the 'industrious' nature of Birmingham's population seems to have played an important role in uniting large parts of Birmingham's population at the end of this period. Secondly, individuals' social understandings may provide a basis for broader social modelling. For example, one individual who considers himself a 'gentlemen' may be liable to categorize the rest of society using the concepts of 'genteel' and 'non-genteel', even if this

1 P. Joyce, 'The End of Social History?', *SH*, 20/1 (1995), pp. 73-91; J. Vernon, 'Who's Afraid of the "Linguistic Turn"? The Politics of Social History and Its Discontents', *SH*, 19/1 (1994), pp. 81-97.

2 D. Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class: The Political Representation of Class in Britain, c. 1780-1840* (Cambridge, 1995).

bears no relation to material reality or to how other individuals understood society.

Language and discourse in this chapter is conceived of as a type of structure. To adapt Giddens' definition of a structure, language is a set of rules and resources that constitute human agents' thoughts, motives and activities which are in turn reproduced by those individuals' actions. However, such reproduction is not perfect and innovation, mistakes and improvisation on the part of the actors can reconfigure the linguistic and discursive structures.[3] Language is not conceived of as the only structure but it is an important one to consider, especially when thinking about how individuals perceived and interacted with others individually or collectively.

The terms analysed in this chapter were chosen after having consulted a wide range of different sources: correspondence, newspapers, periodicals, sermons, political and non-political pamphlets, administrative documents, town histories and guides, memoirs, and diaries. Throughout the research for this thesis the vocabulary and discourses of social description used in the sources I consulted were noted, and the most interesting and important (in terms of quantity of uses) were chosen for detailed analysis.[4] This method of identifying language for analysis was chosen in order to allow the widest variety of sources and genres to be consulted. The sources available skew this study towards the wealthier parts of Birmingham's population; for example, Matthew Boulton and the Galton family were some of the richest individuals resident in Birmingham during this period. However, others figure too. For example, the radical printer James Drake in 1830 occupied a building valued at £45. This suggests a reasonable income, but a small one compared to Boulton. That value places him in the lower half of the ratepaying population discussed in chapter 1. Furthermore, individuals such as James Bisset, William Hutton and Charles Pye experienced changes in their social

[3] See the discussion of structure above, pp. 31-3.

[4] This method generates a large number of references. In order to ensure the footnotes are not overly long I have only included the document referenced directly or one or two examples of a particular use. The assumption is that each reference represents a common usage for which extensive references could be provided. A complete list of the sources consulted is given in the bibliography.

standing: Bisset experienced both ups and downs (discussed below), Hutton rose from poverty to significant wealth, while Charles Pye was forced into writing and publishing when an inheritance he had expected to receive was denied him by a lawsuit.[5] Furthermore, the sources include a wide variety of religious denominations: Anglicans, Quakers, Methodists Unitarians, Congregationalists and Baptists. The sources used in this chapter represent more than just the wealthiest part of the town's population, even if they are over-represented. What is lacking is a serious consideration of the many individuals who existed on the boundary between propertied and non-propertied society as defined in this thesis. This is a necessary consequence of the source record which is thin for such individuals.

The words which are identified operated in a similar fashion to the 'keywords' recently examined by Mark Knights and others. Like 'commonwealth' in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a word such as 'gentleman' was a '*keyword* in a *conceptual field* – that is to say, part of a network of associated terms – that was frequently invoked, in a variety of ways at any one time and over time, to legitimize or delegitimize' particular understandings of society.[6]

As this chapter is concerned primarily with language it must answer two questions. First, what does it add to current accounts of social languages in this period? Secondly, how does it answer the criticisms of language-based analyses and why does it not deal with performative understandings of social identity? Accounts of social language in this period have tended to focus on the issue of when a class-based language emerged.[7] This chapter does examine languages of class, but it also analyses other vocabularies and discourses, not least

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5 M. Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 201-03; J. Conlin, 'Pye, John (1782-1874)', *ODNB*.

6 M. Knights, 'Towards a Social and Cultural History of Keywords and Concepts by the Early Modern Research Group', *History of Political Thought*, 31/3 (2010) p. 428, see also pp. 429, 434.

7 A. Briggs, 'The Language of "Class" in Early Nineteenth-Century England', in A. Briggs and J. Saville (eds.), *Essays in Labour History: In Memory of G.D.H. Cole*, rev. edn. (London, 1967), pp. 43-73; P.J. Corfield, 'Class by Name and Number in Eighteenth-Century Britain', and G. Crossick, 'From Gentlemen to the Residuum: Languages of Social Description in Victorian Britain' both in P.J. Corfield (ed.), *Language, History and Class* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 101-30, 150-78; Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class*.

because these other ways of conceptualising society were more common in this period. Existing analyses of class and non-class languages are usually national in their focus.[8] This chapter analyses the languages of social description circulating in a particular place and tries to examine to what extent these terms and discourses were particular to Birmingham. The absence of similar locally-focused studies for other location means that these conclusions must necessarily be only starting points for the creation of a more sophisticated understanding of the geographical variation in social understandings.

A number of historians have questioned the extent to which language-based analysis can fully explain or describe past social identities because so much of identity is formed and expressed through non-verbal and non-textual activities – through what people owned and how they acted.[9] This was, and is, undoubtedly true. However, for historians, analysis of the meaning of objects and activities cannot be carried out separately from analysis of language for two reasons. First, most of the evidence for such performative social identities is found in texts. Secondly, even when the evidence is not text-based (for example, taking the form of artefacts) our understanding of what identity such objects or activities promoted is necessarily textual because our understanding of what a 'middle-class' or 'genteel' self-identity was in this period can only be based on our understanding of what those terms meant at the time.

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[8] All those cited in n. 7 are national in focus, as are those for other languages of social description see P. J. Corfield, 'The Rivals: Landed and Other Gentlemen', http://www.penelopejcorfield.co.uk/PDF%27s/CorfieldPdf9_Rivals.pdf (accessed 3/6/11), originally published in N.B. Harte and R. Quinault (eds.), *Land and Society in Britain, 1700-1914* (Manchester, 1996), pp. 1-33; M. McCormack, *The Independent Man: Citizenship and Gender Politics in Georgian England* (Manchester, 2005); A. Goodrich, 'Understanding a Language of "Aristocracy", 1700-1850', *HJ*, 56/2 (2013), pp. 369-98. For exceptions see A. Shepard, 'Poverty, Labour and the Language of Social Description in Early Modern England', *P&P*, 201 (2008), pp. 51-98; J. Smail, 'New Languages for Labour and Capital: The Transformation of Discourse in the Early Years of the Industrial Revolution', *SH*, 12/1 (1987), pp. 49-71; H. French, *The Middle Sort of People in Provincial England, 1600-1750* (Oxford, 2007), ch. 4.

[9] For identities expressed through material culture see P. Pickering, 'Class Without Words: Symbolic Communication in the Chartist Movement', *P&P*, 112 (1986), pp. 114-62; J. Epstein, *Radical Expression: Political Language, Ritual, and Symbol in England, 1790-1850* (Oxford, 1994), ch. 3; K. Navickas, '"That sash will hang you": Political Clothing and Adornment in England, 1780-1840', *JBS*, 49/3 (2010), pp. 540-65; Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure*, ch. 6; for social identities expressed through activities see J. Barry, 'Bourgeois Collectivism? Urban Association and the Middling Sort, 1550-1800' in J. Barry and C. Brooks (eds.) *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society and Politics in England, 1550-1800* (Basingstoke, 1994), pp. 84-112; R.J. Morris, 'Voluntary Societies and British Urban Elites, 1780-1850: An Analysis', *HJ*, 26/1 (1983), pp. 95-118.

Language has a much greater potential for reflexivity than other forms of expression as it is capable of being used to reflect upon itself. Therefore, it is through language that we most easily learn about the social meaning of objects and actions.[10] This is particularly important because the meanings of material objects and practices, as with language and rituals, are never unambiguous.[11] For example, we can usefully place individuals into particular categories based on the objects that they owned or the activities they undertook. But to determine what constitutes a coherent category and to pin a label on it, we need to have recourse to contemporary vocabularies of social description.[12]

Social Vocabulary

Members of propertied society used a wide variety of words to describe both their own and others' positions within society. These words had many meanings and were used in a wide range of contexts. Examination of social vocabulary can be undertaken in two main ways. First, by a careful reconstruction of the context and specificity of the use of particular terms by individuals. This necessitates an awareness that these specific examples are not 'representative'. Instead, they show how it was possible for individuals to think within the cultural structures of a particular period. Quite what an individual meant by using a given term will not always be obvious. Historians and other academics tend to search for specificity, but arguably it was the flexibility and the ambiguity of these terms which made them popular as terms for connecting people together and creating a sense of 'groupness'.[13] When a political actor appealed to the 'middle classes', or a group of petitioners referred to

[10] W.H. Sewell Jr., *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (Chicago, IL, 2005), pp. 344-6.
[11] Ibid., p. 142. W. Whyte, 'How do Buildings Mean? Some Issues of Interpretation in the History of Architecture', *History and Theory*, 45/2 (2006), pp. 153-77 offers a interesting account of the difficulties involved in interpreting architecture.
[12] For an excellent example see the discussion of working-class hobbies in R. McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain, 1880-1950* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 101-66.
[13] R. Brubaker and F. Cooper, ' Beyond "Identity"', *Theory and Society*, 29/1 (2000), pp. 19-20.

themselves as ‘gentlemen’ the audience and the actor may have disagreed over what was meant by the term. However, because these disagreements were rarely explicitly aired the terms served to unite individuals. In other words, it may be that each individual projected their own definition on a term, believing their experience and understanding to be shared even when it was not. A second approach that might be taken involves examining instances where vocabulary was contested and differing definitions debated. Once again, these conflicts were not necessarily ‘representative’ of wider shifts. Instead, they show how language, contingency and other structures interacted to produce changes in vocabulary, some of them specific to the particular conditions of Birmingham in this period while others reflected national trends.

The main terms used in this period were ‘gentleman’, ‘respectable’, ‘middle class/rank/order/sort’, ‘upper class/sort’, ‘higher rank/order’, ‘principal’, ‘prominent’ and ‘eminent’. The first point to make is that each of these terms had power. They divided society into sections in order to place some individuals at an advantage and some at a disadvantage. Secondly, they acted as proxies for larger discourses. Calling someone ‘respectable’ implied a number of characteristics. These characteristics may not have been the same for each listener, and some terms which were complimentary for one audience were derogatory for another, but much of their power came from these connotations.

Three common terms to distinguish between different groups within the propertied section of society were ‘eminent’, ‘prominent’ and ‘principal’. They had a number of meanings, but all were concerned with public renown. Sometimes they were used to describe the owners of the largest businesses. For example, in 1825 James Drake discussed clubs created to provide support for workers and praised the ‘principal manufacturers [that] have established clubs for their own workmen’.[14] However, sometimes it referred to a more diffuse set of characteristics that allowed individuals to influence the public life of Birmingham. Thus, William Hawkes Smith (a radical publisher and later Owenite socialist) had hoped that

[14] J. Drake, *The Picture of Birmingham* (Birmingham, 1825), p. 112.

some of those who 'are technically called our "principal inhabitants" would agree and take up the opposition of renewal [of the suspension of Habeas Corpus], but [that] didn't happen.'[15] The Guardians of the Poor referred to the 'principal' inhabitants as a group they had to address in order to continue to perform their duties successfully; they sought their support for new measures to improve poor relief, and released their accounts to be inspected by them.[16] The terms carried connotations about the right to exercise local political power like those which Henry French found associated with the term 'chief inhabitant' in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.[17] These were terms which had a local frame of reference; they situated people in respect to their position in Birmingham society rather than in reference to wider British society or more general social categories, such as 'gentility'. Whereas French found that 'chief inhabitant' and 'inhabitant' were closely connected to ratepaying, in Birmingham these terms tended not to carry that association, probably because of the prominence and importance of the term 'ratepayer' itself.[18]

'Gentleman' has been recognized by historians as a difficult term. There was no strict, legal definition of who was a 'gentleman' and so ascription rested on a combination of self-definition, power and behaviour. From the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, more diverse people used it for self-description. It was no longer taken to refer to just those landed individuals below the titled aristocracy.[19] However, it remained a vitally important term which people claimed and which had power. It did not sag 'into semantic limpness' appropriated by all and sundry as some historians have claimed.[20] Indeed expressions of fear over the number of inappropriate people calling themselves 'gentlemen' suggests the continuing importance

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15 *The Birmingham Inspector; A Periodical Work* (Birmingham, 1817), p. 250.

16 BAHS, GP/B/2/1/1, Board of Guardians Minutes, 1783-1806, 21 Apr., 20 Sept. 1784, 30 Aug. 1796, 22 Aug. 1797.

17 French, *Middle Sort*, p. 27, 93, 102, 106-12.

18 For 'ratepayer', see pp. 56-9 above.

19 Corfield, 'Rivals', pp. 3-6, 9-16; McCormack, *Independent Man*, p. 115; Crossick, 'Gentleman', pp. 163-5; French, *Middle Sort*, pp. 204-10.

20 L.E. Klein, 'Politeness for Plebes: Consumption and Social Identity in Early Eighteenth-Century England', in A. Bermingham and J. Brewer (eds.), *The Consumption of Culture, 1600-1800: Image, Object, Text* (London, 1995), p. 364.

and power of the term.[21]

Though it is difficult to create an overarching definition of a 'gentleman' which every propertied individual would have approved, we can identify a number of features which were frequently described as key 'genteel' characteristics. External appearance was thought important by some; this included both personal appearance and manner of living in terms of residence and diet. Thus, Charles Norton in his proposal for a Crescent in Birmingham (emulating the Royal Crescent in Bath) demonstrated that 'gentility' could be inferred from material possessions.

> It may be suggested by some, that the plan of the houses I am proposing renders them too small for the residence of genteel families; but as two houses may be laid into one at the time of building them (or at any future period) it will obviate that objection; therefore those gentlemen who have two shares, will always have it in their power to accommodate themselves or their tenants at any time.[22]

Similarly, certain leisure activities were felt to be 'genteel'. For example, William Hutton suggested that that the genteel population of Birmingham played bowls and took tea on the town's five bowling greens. In contrast 'The relaxations of the humbler class are fives, quoits, skittles, and ale.'[23] Others pointed to prominence within the town,variously defined by wealth, business success or other sources of renown.[24] Linked to this, though slightly different, was an emphasis on public service and the importance of 'gentlemen' taking a leading role in public affairs.[25] There is some evidence that this engagement with politics and local administration was a feature of gentility elsewhere.[26] Some acknowledged the importance of wealth, though often only if the individual used that wealth in a responsible manner.[27] Of similar importance

[21] Corfield, 'Rivals', pp. 21-2, 26-7.
[22] BAHS, ZZ71A 56766135, Notes on the Crescent, Birmingham by Benjamin Walker, c. 1935, pp. 3-4, citing C. Norton, *Proposals with the Plan & Specification, for building the Crescent, in Birmingham* (Birmingham, 1795).
[23] W. Hutton, *A History of Birmingham, to the End of the Year 1780* (Birmingham, 1781), p. 130.
[24] *Edmonds's Weekly Register* (Birmingham, 1819), p. 25, BAHS, MS1114/1, Autobiographical Notebook of Thomas Clark, 1812-14, pp. 112-13.
[25] *Aris'*, 29 Mar. 1819, 19 July 1819, 18 Oct. 1819; BAHS, GP/B/2/1/1, 21 Apr. 1784, 31 Oct. 1798.
[26] F.-J. Ruggiu, 'The Urban Gentry in England, 1660-1780: a French Approach', *Historical Research*, 74/185 (2001), esp. pp. 250-1, 257-8, 264-5, I am grateful to Evan Wilson for drawing this article to my attention.
[27] W. Hutton, *Courts of Requests: Their Nature, Utility, and Powers Described* (Birmingham, 1787).

were civility, trust and courtesy.[28] James Bisset emphasized this aspect in his broad definition of gentility in 1832:

> By a Gentleman we mean not to draw a line that would be invidious between high and low rank and subordination; riches and poverty the distinction is in the mind; whoever is open, loyal and true; whoever is of humane and affable demeanour, whoever is honourable in himself and in his judgement of others and requires no law but his word to make fruitful an engagement, such a man is a gentleman and such a man may be found among the tillers of the earth.[29]

It must be stressed that these factors were not all endorsed by every commentator and such criteria could be negotiated and circumvented. Elizabeth Anne Galton remembered in 1820 a 'by no means gentlemanly-looking man' gaining access to the best seats in St Philip's Church for a Music Festival by bribing the steward with £100.[30]

The term was frequently in Birmingham to describe groups who wielded significant political power. Thus both the Guardians of the Poor and the Street Commissioners referred to themselves as 'gentlemen'.[31] In this case its use seems to have been an attempt to strengthen the authority of these two bodies. This bolsters the suggestion made above that public service was key to what defined a 'gentleman'. To be a 'gentleman' was to serve one's community, and the ideal of the importance of civic activity to social status certainly had a longer life than some historians have suggested.[32] This view was not confined just to the members of these bodies. In 1819, the local radical leader George Edmonds decried the self-interested nature of the Guardians and the Street Commissioners. 'Let those gentlemen who have the local government of it [Birmingham] in their hands instead of attending to absurd etiquette, do

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28 BAHS, MS3101/C/D/15/5, Samuel Galton to William Bird, 24 Aug. 1780; C. Pye, *The Stranger's Guide to Modern Birmingham* (Birmingham 1825), advertisement.

29 BAHS, ZZ32, 263924, Reminiscences of James Bisset, 1828-32, inside back cover.

30 *Elizabeth Anne Galton (1808-1906): A Well-Connected Gentlewoman*, ed. A. Moilliet (Hertford, 2003), pp. 33-4.

31 For example see BAHS, MS2818/1/3, Street Commission Minutes, 1801-1812, 6 June 1803; GP/B/2/1/1, 20 Sept. 1784.

32 This supports Vanessa Taylor and Frank Trentmann's comments in, 'Liquid Politics: Water and the Politics of Everyday Life in the Modern City', *P&P*, 211 (2011), esp. p. 216.

what in them lies to further the ends of substantial justice.'[33] Edmonds suggested that their failure to attend to one aspect of their 'gentlemanly' duty was due to their over-attention to fashion and taste, which some historians have put at the centre of eighteenth-century definitions of the gentleman.[34]

Edmonds also points us towards the importance of 'gentlemen' to politics outside formal political structures. Throughout the period of post-war agitation for reform Edmonds sought to recruit 'gentlemen' to the cause of reform:

> In doing this I was actuated by two motives, viz. to unite the radical Reformers, and in the next place to obtain the attendance of the *Whigs* of this town, as well as of the *moderate Reformers*. I confess, also, that I was anxious to draw together a *large assembly*; and I knew that the presence of the gentlemen invited would be an additional motive to thousands to attend.[35]

Here we gain a idea of the limits of the expansion of term 'gentleman'. Edmonds did not think of himself as a 'gentleman' and felt this damaged the prospects of the reform movement.[36] Edmonds was the son of a Baptist minister who was a schoolmaster prior to taking up the radical cause. He appeared in the subscription data discussed in the previous chapter in 1830 and in the 1818, 1823 and 1830 trade directories and paid rates on various properties he rented during this period. In 1819 he was elected a Guardian of the Poor. He received 309 votes, so at least some of the town's ratepaying population felt he was of sufficient standing to hold that important public position.[37] He was imprisoned in 1821 for his role in the Legislatorial Attorney scheme. Upon his release he once again ran a school before becoming an attorney's clerk. After Birmingham was incorporated in 1838 he was appointed Clerk of the Peace.[38]

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33 *Edmonds's Weekly Recorder* (Birmingham, 1819), p. 57; he also attacked gentlemen and institutions which restricted access to the public stage, see G. Edmonds, 'Letter VII, 8 May 1819', idem, *Letters to the Inhabitants of Birmingham* (Birmingham, 1819), p. 98.'

34 L. Klein, 'Politeness and the Interpretation of the British Eighteenth Century', *HJ*, 45/4 (2000), pp. 876-7.

35 *Edmonds's Weekly Register*, p. 25, original emphasis.

36 *Town Meeting. A Report of the Proceedings of the Town's Meeting, Held on New Hall Hill, Birmingham, on Thursday, Feb. 26, 1818* (Birmingham, 1818), p. 20.

37 G. Edmonds, 'Letter VI, 1 May 1819', in idem, *Letters*, pp. 90-93; 309.

38 E. Edwards, *Personal Recollections of Birmingham and Birmingham Men* (Birmingham, 1877), pp. 140-54.

Edmonds was a well-educated individual. He received a classical education from his father and he wrote extensively on language, publishing a work that sought to create a universal language.[39] While not rich, he was reasonably affluent (for a time he employed a servant) and was a prominent figure who was active in the public life of the town. In short, he was certainly a propertied individual and one that fulfilled many of the criteria of a 'gentleman'. Why then did he doubt his own 'gentility'? The political and economic structures restricted Edmonds' ability to deploy the term 'gentleman'. The mode of politics restricted who could act politically and the radical movement was frequently criticized for lacking supporters of high social standing.[40] Edmonds' comments and efforts were part of an attempt to counter such criticism.[41] Furthermore, the Birmingham radical movement could not deny the standing of their opponents and hence sought to try and access the same reserves of political power. Edmonds knew that there were individuals with greater political and social power who could assist and bolster the reform campaign. His awareness of this suggests he had a developed understanding of the social structure of the town and that he and others were acutely aware of the political power associated with the 'gentlemen' of the town.

Edmonds may also have been reluctant to label himself a 'gentleman' because his opponents frequently mocked him for his supposed aspirations to gentility. One pseudonymous pamphlet ridiculed Edmonds in this manner:

> look what a half starved, weasel-gutted, threadbare reptile he was three years ago – as poor as a rat – this to be sure would have been no disgrace to him; but he was tired of labouring for his bread - … He wanted to be rich and fat, and yet was too idle to work for it – so he gives up his school … and out he comes, kicking up his heels and braying like an ass just turned out of his shed – he begins to flatter us up to the eyes – he tells us that he is the only friend we have in the world – don't read your Bibles – don't go and worship God; don't listen to your Ministers, they will only teach you to be easy, and quiet, and contented; but come and hear me – mind

[39] G. Edmonds, *A Universal Alphabet, Grammar, and Language* (London, 1856); C. Flick, *The Birmingham Political Union and the Movements for Reform in Britain, 1830-1839* (Folkestone, 1978), p. 25.

[40] For example, *Aris'*, 19 July 1819; C. Behagg, *Politics and Production in the Early Nineteenth Century* (London, 1990), pp. 162, 164.

[41] Edmonds was important in briefly uniting radicals of different social positions in the Birmingham Political Union, see Behagg, *Politics and Production*, chs. 4, 5.

> what I tell you, and I will get you your rights: you are cheated, and oppressed, and ill treated, but I'll manage to set you up. – So, when he thinks he has got us in a good humour with him, he says, now mind, buy all my books – subscribe when I tell you, and it will soon be right. ell, so far he has persuaded you, and has got up a bit – and wears a wou'd-be-dandy coat, because he gets cheek by jowl with *gentlemen* – and he gets good dinners, and (let him say or swear what he likes) something good and warm to drink after dinner.[42]

They felt Edmonds was playing at being a 'gentleman'; note that the passage did not use the term to describe their opponent. Such criticism may have served to cut down the options available for Edmonds and increase the need to find more genteel supporters. This understanding was not confined to the post-war years. It was a tactic used both in the 1790s, particularly in the aftermath of the Priestley Riots, and during the Reform Bill campaign in 1830-32.[43] 'Gentleman' was a term of considerable political importance and the political events of these years forced people to think about who was and who was not genteel. There were limits to who could claim to be a 'gentleman' and these limits did not coincide with those of the larger group I have termed propertied society.

The case of the word 'gentleman' highlights two important points which will recur throughout this discussion. First, even when definitions rested on personal, private values, judgement rested on public performance.[44] Secondly, the majority of these judgements were instances of individuals categorizing others, rather than self-identifying. With 'gentleman' the implication was often that the author felt a commonality with the individuals they were characterizing as genteel. The predominance of external categorisation can be seen in the discussion of George Edmonds above where the definition of who was and who was not 'genteel' was central to local politics in early nineteenth-century Birmingham. Such instances

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42 *An Address to His Fellow Townsmen by an Old Plater* (Birmingham, 1819), pp. 3-4, original emphasis.

43 Alexander Armstrong and Abel Sharp, *Very Familiar Letters Addressed to Mr. John Nott* (Birmingham, 1790), pp. 18-19; John Nott, *Very Familiar Letters, Addressed to Dr. Priestley, in Answer to his Familiar Letters to the Inhabitants of Birmingham* (Birmingham, 1790), p. 15; *Authorized Copy of the Resolutions Passed at the Meeting at Birmingham, Held on the 25th January, 1830* (Birmingham, 1830), p. 16; *Report of the Proceedings of the Third Annual General Meeting of the Birmingham Political Union* (Birmingham, 1832), p. 6.

44 See chapter 4.

forced people to explicitly address the implicit meanings of terms. However, we should note that circumstances encouraged a particular reading of 'gentleman'. In Edmonds' understanding, the key aspect of the 'gentlemen' he sought to attract was their political power. At a reform meeting in 1818 he distanced himself from 'the company of those Gentlemen' who were appointed a committee to ensure the resolutions of the meeting were carried out, in order to avoid tainting them with his less gentlemanly presence. Those 'gentlemen' were, according to Edmonds, 'men of the soundest political principles; they were, in short, staunch Reformers.'[45] Employing the term in this way also involved a bid to change the associations of 'gentleman' by rhetorically linking 'gentility' and radical politics; this was a connection which had always proved hard to maintain in Birmingham and elsewhere. Of the sixty-eight individuals appointed to the committee, fifty-seven were present in the 1818 directory. They ranged from grocers and small-scale manufacturers to merchants and larger manufacturers. Presence in the directory did not automatically denote significant wealth and standing, as we have seen in chapter 1. However, this does suggest that the majority of these individuals were at least well known and important enough in the town to merit inclusion. The fact that so many of these instances of the use of socially descriptive vocabulary were to define the position of others rather than oneself suggests the importance of external markers. People judged others' public faces and then placed them in particular social groups. Taking the example of Edmonds' 'gentlemen', we cannot know whether all sixty-eight of them would have described themselves as 'gentlemen'. However, Edmonds did and assumed that others would and therefore presented them in public as a group. The pamphlet displayed their shared status to the reading public of the town and beyond. Because of the political importance of the term some of those individuals would have gained in power but at the same time would have come under greater scrutiny from opponents of political reform. For some it would have confirmed a self-identification and their standing within the town. Here we have an example

[45] *Town Meeting, 1818*, p. 20.

of the importance of politics to the process of defining social groups, something that has been noted by a number of historians.[46]

The uses of the term 'gentleman' in Birmingham are similar to the national patterns noted by other historians. The focus on appearances, individual merit and manners are common to both national and Birmingham uses.[47] However, there was a much greater emphasis on prominence, civic activity and politics in Birmingham while the idea of 'decorative idleness' was absent.[48] The reasons for these similarities and differences is hard to discern. Partly it seems to reflect the multiple co-existing ideas of gentility that Corfield has documented.[49] It also might reflect a process by which national definitions are adapted and changed in local circumstances. So in this case the manufacturing and commercial nature of Birmingham's economy militated against a definition of gentility as involving idleness, while the lack of aristocratic influence and the broad nature of Birmingham's elite promoted the perception of gentlemen as people active in civic matters.

'Respectable' was an extremely common description used by and about propertied individuals in this period, though it has rarely been examined in any detail by historians of the eighteenth century.[50] In part this is because the term is frequently used by historians to describe particular activities or individuals. This can lead to confusion. It is often unclear whether the historical actors described themselves or the activities under consideration as

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46 See p. 41 above.

47 Corfield, 'Rivals', pp. 13, 15-18, 21-2.

48 Ibid., p. 15. McCormack suggests that politics was an important aspect of gentility but confines his attention to county and national politics, see *Independent Man*, pp. 115-17, 169-71.

49 Corfield, 'Rivals'.

50 For the eighteenth century see W.D. Smith, *Consumption and the Making of Respectability, 1600-1800* (London and New York, 2002), ch. 7; for the end of this period and beyond see S. Cordery, 'Friendly Societies and the Discourse of Respectability in Britain, 1825-1875', *JBS*, 34/1 (1995), pp. 35-58. For 'respectability' in a 'working-class' context, see the P. Bailey, '"Will the Real Bill Banks Please Stand up?" Towards a Role Analysis of Mid-Victorian Working-Class Respectability', *JSH*, 12/3 (1979), pp. 336-53; his conclusions about performance and the 'limited and situational' nature of much 'respectability' is useful for propertied individuals as well as for mid-Victorian 'working-class' men and women. Many other analyses of nineteenth-century 'respectability' are too committed to particular conservative political agendas to be of much use, see Miles Taylor, 'The Beginnings of Modern British Social History?', *HWJ*, 43 (1997), pp. 162, 166-7.

'respectable' or whether the historian has made that judgement themselves.[51] The term itself is rarely defined in historical sources. Even more so than the term 'gentleman', the meaning of 'respectable' is left implicit. The lack of detailed local or national studies of the term makes it difficult to judge to what extent the uses of 'respectable' described below were specific to Birmingham.

'Respectable' shared many of the characteristics identified above as forming aspects of 'gentility'. Thus 'respectability' was associated with prominence in the town, taking a lead in civic and political matters, civility and trustworthiness, and appropriate behaviour, appearance and possessions.[52] However, an important differences can be observed. The term could be used to refer to poorer individuals than 'gentleman'. Thus in in 1817 *The Birmingham Inspector* announced that it sought to address the 'respectable and valuable Artizans of Birmingham'.[53] Here and elsewhere it was applied to individuals who were skilled workers. For example at the end of the first decade of the nineteenth century Thomas Baker wrote to his cousin Lieutenant J. Harris and described the difficulties of one of Matthew Boulton's employees, a Mr. Webb, whom Harris had been assisting.

> Mr. B[oulton] had promised him if he would go home & remain there a few weeks he would find him work again – but when he return'd no work was to be had & even the promise was forgot. Thus then he remains without employment & has depended upon your exertions to provide him with a situation. – Let not his expectations be in vain use your utmost exertions to make him happy & never forfeit y^{e} friendship of a virtuous & respectable young Man rather than give yourself y^{e} trouble to serve him.[54]

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[51] Paul Langford frequently used the term 'respectable' in this way in his *A Polite and Commercial People: England, 1727-1783* (Oxford, 1998), e.g. pp. 51, 101, 108, 355, 480, 572, 613.

[52] For prominence see *Minutes of Evidence, taken before the Committee of the Whole House ... relating to the Orders in Council*, *PP 1812*, iii.1 (210), (http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&res_dat=xri:hcpp&rft_dat=xri:hcpp:fulltext:1812-002906), (accessed 24/2/12), pp. 16, 69, 106-7; for civic and political activity see BAHS, GP/B/2/1/1, 4 Dec. 1804; Baker Misc/2/32/7, Thomas Baker to J. Harris, nd. [1806-1808]; for civility and trust see MS3101/C/D/17/7/1, Thomas Mullins to Samuel Tertius Galton, 1820; IIR13, 486799, M. Russell, The Birmingham Riots, July 1791 (c. 1800), p. 14*; for appropriate appearance, manners and possessions see IIR21, 662441, Journal of a Visit to Birmingham by D.R. Thomason during the Christmas Vacation, 1822, pp. 9, 11, 23-4; J. Drake, *Picture*, pp. 23-4. 50, 68-9, 73-4.

[53] *Birmingham Inspector*, p. 1.

[54] BAHS, Baker Misc./2/32/5, Thomas Baker to J. Harris, nd. [1806-1808].

Here the employee was 'respectable' while the employer failed to honour or even remember a promise made. However, this instance also suggests that the power of these terms changed according to the social situation of the individual described. While Boulton's 'respectability' in other situations gave him the power to intervene in local and national politics, Webb's 'respectability' was insufficient to secure him Boulton's attention; all it could achieve was to increase his chances of receiving charity from an individual above him in society.

If 'respectability' could apply to more levels of society than 'gentility', it may have been because of the connotations of 'independence', which was more commonly articulated in Birmingham in connection with 'respectability' than with 'gentility'. For example, the fictional 'Joe Shrewd' linked 'respectability', 'independence' and the workers of Birmingham in 1819 when he stated '[w]e all know that old Brummagem is as respectable and independent a town as any in the united kingdom. The industrious working men are famous all over the world for their cleverness and ingenuity'.[55] He most probably meant an independence from political influence, rather than financial independence, though financial independence seems to linger hidden in many definitions of 'respectability'.[56]

Much like 'gentleman', 'respectable' could be used in a rhetorical strategy to either bolster one's own political position or to damage someone else. For example, in 1819 the fictional loyalist figure 'Job Nott junior' mocked the meeting held on Newhall Hill calling for parliamentary reform on the basis that it lacked 'respectability'.

> At last the main Orator plucked up his courage, and began his speech; and as I am told, expressed himself very sorry indeed, that the High Bailiff, and *respectable* people of the town, were not there. This, I'm told, seemed to gravel the company, and made them so glum, that it was a long time before the Scaffolders could get up a shout …[57]

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[55] Joe Shrewd, *A Few Words to My Neighbours, By Joe Shrewd, Die-sinker; With a New Song, Called the* Radical Dandy (Birmingham, 1819), pp. 1-2. For radical use, see *Birmingham Inspector*, p. 50.

[56] For the changing nature of 'independence' see McCormack, *Independent Man*, chs. 5, 7.

[57] Job Nott, Jun., *His Second Address to his Brother Artificers. The Britannia in Distress* (Birmingham, 1819), p. 3, original emphasis. For other similar criticisms see, see *Aris'*, 19 July 1819; Behagg, *Politics and Production*, pp. 161-3.

In contrast, in 1830 the Birmingham Political Union (BPU) repeatedly stated that the High Bailiff had acted incorrectly by refusing to give them permission to hold a public meeting to discuss the need for a Political Union to press the case for parliamentary reform. They went ahead and held the meeting anyway and justified acting outside of the formal structures of local politics because the High Bailiff had infringed on their rights by ignoring their requisition despite it being 'signed by 200 respectable inhabitants of the town'.[58] In 1817 Edmonds used 'respectable' both to negative and positive effect. In both cases he implicitly associated the term with conduct and not just social standing. He attacked the loyalists present at a meeting at the Shakespeare Tavern for claiming to be '*orderly, peaceable, and respectable*' despite denying the people access to political representation and processes. In contrast, he stressed that the meeting he chaired at Newhall Hill was 'respectable' despite being socially diverse.[59] 'Respectability' like many other positional terms, blended ideas of social standing and good conduct, its association with social standing offered political power. The presence of 'respectable' individuals bolstered the political legitimacy of an undertaking. Individuals who were 'respectable' could make claims to customary political rights, such as the right to call town meetings. Yet the claim to be respectable could be contested.

We find this term similarly employed in other source material. In 1812, when giving evidence against the Orders in Council, George Room, a Birmingham japanner, was asked why he had signed a petition against the Orders in Council despite having not read it. His answer reveals the importance of 'respectability' in the operation of politics.

> Do you mean to say, that you have signed a Petition which you never read, and of which you do not know the prayer? – I have; I took it upon the faith of those gentlemen that were employed in drawing it up; they are of the most respectable kind that Birmingham has amongst us.[60]

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[58] *Report of the Proceedings at the Meeting of the Inhabitants of Birmingham … For the Establishment of a General Political Union* (Birmingham, 1830), p. 3; *Aris'*, 25 Jan. 1830.

[59] G. Edmonds, *A Letter to the Inhabitants of Birmingham; Being a Vindication of the Conduct of the Writer, at the Late Meeting at the Shakespeare, Feb. 11, 1817* (Birmingham, 1817), pp. 7, 8.

[60] *Minutes … Relating to the Orders in Council*, p. 75.

Here then we have evidence for the power of the term 'respectable' (and of 'gentlemen'); it conferred on those so described an authority which meant they were perceived as trustworthy and politically knowledgeable, to the extent that individuals would accept their views as sensible without further reflection.

Similar statements can be made about the place of 'respectability' in local politics and administration. For example, in 1817 the organizers of a meeting to oppose an application made by the Guardians of the Poor to parliament for a bill to allow them to rate small houses bolstered their case by describing the meeting as a 'very numerous and respectable Meeting of Landlords and Owners of Houses in Birmingham'.[61] The Guardians themselves were receptive to representations from 'respectable inhabitants'. Both they and the Street Commissioners frequently recorded petitions they acted on and these usually claimed to originate from a group described by some variation on the formula 'very numerously and respectably signed by Ratepayers and Inhabitants'.[62] Similar use of the term to bolster the reputation of various charitable meetings can also be readily found.[63]

The Birmingham Police Committee provides an interesting case. It was formed in November 1789, and seems to have lasted no more than a few months. Joseph Carles, the most important local magistrate of the late eighteenth century, Samuel Garbett, a merchant who had close connections with the Earl of Shelburne and was the central figure in the creation of the General Chamber of Manufacturers, Matthew Boulton, James Watt, and other prominent local manufacturers and merchants were involved in its founding. Its main aims were to deal with the 'prostitutes & other disorderly persons who are great nusances [sic] to this Town'. They traced these problems to the large number of gin shops, alehouses and pawnbrokers in the town. The first two promoted criminal and indecent behaviour and the

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61 BAHS, MS1098, Papers Relating to a Petition by the Birmingham Landowners Against the Birmingham Poor Rates Bill, 1817.

62 For just one example see BAHS, MS2818/1/5, Street Commission Minutes, 1823-28, 3 Dec. 1827.

63 For example, *Aris'*, 9 Mar. 1812, 3 Aug. 1818.

latter encouraged theft from workplaces. They created a committee to shut down brothels and pawnbrokers, licence alehouses and gin shops, and suggested that all young men and boys convicted of crimes should be sent into the navy since prisons only corrupted them further.[64] Initially they sought to persuade the Street Commissioners to be more active in setting up and regulating a night watch; however, this proved unsuccessful. In December 1789 they divided the town into seventeen districts and appointed 'several gentlemen' to establish a Night Watch in each location.[65] In addition, they appointed 140 'constables' from 'the most respectable' inhabitants of the town to patrol the streets, visit public houses and regularly report to the magistrates.[66] James Bisset's reminiscences confirm that these patrols were created and claims they were successful.[67] They began to consider applying to parliament for a local bill to assist their efforts. This caused some concern in the town as the minutes recorded:

> Many persons from a misinformation objecting to any Bill being brought into Parliament until it has been first read at a Town's meeting, supposing that any alteration in the Bill after being read before the House of Commons for the first time will be attended with expence & difficulty and perhaps that it may not be possible to do it in time: This Committee therefore recommends to the general Committee that some proper steps be taken to satisfy the Town in that respect by printed information from respectable persons, who have conducted bills through Parliament, or otherwise.[68]

The object of deploying 'respectability' here was to bolster the committee's position in the face of the anger of the town's population. They also sought to deploy political experience: they felt the town would be reassured by the previous successes of the likes of Boulton and Garbett as political lobbyists.[69] However, this rather patronizing statement does not seem to have worked. Seventeen days later at another meeting they commented on this issue again.

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64 BAHS, IIR11, 386813, Birmingham Police Committee Minute Book, 1789-90, 19 Nov. 1789; see also MS3782/12/100/6, Notes Made by Matthew Boulton on the Criminal Problems of Birmingham, Their Results and Solution, *c.* 1780s, the similarities between this document and the Police Committee's minute book suggest Boulton was a key force behind the organization.

65 BAHS, IIR11, 386813, Police Committee, 10, 23, 28 Dec. 1789, 4 Jan. 1790.

66 Ibid., 28 Dec. 1789.

67 BAHS, ZZ32, 263924, Reminiscences of Bisset, pp. 100, 151-2.

68 BAHS, IIR11, 386813, Police Committee, 12 Jan. 1790.

69 For Boulton and Garbett as lobbyists see pp. 306-7 below.

> A misunderstanding having prevailed in the Town with respect to the mode of conducting the intended application to Parliament, to inform the Public in the next advertisement that the heads of the Bill when prepared, will before it goes to Parliament be laid before the General Police Committee to which every respectable Inhabitant will be publicly invited.[70]

'Respectable' is used differently here. Instead of referring to members of the police committee itself, they use it to mean the members of the town's population whose approval they now understand they have to secure in order to begin their application to parliament. In each case 'respectable' connoted public service and perhaps independence. The 'respectable persons' of the first quotation were members of the committee but as such they could not properly dictate to the 'respectable' members of the town's population who, of course, would have to bear the brunt of the expenditure needed to secure the parliamentary bill and fund subsequent activities. Indeed, the scheme failed because of this opposition.[71]

The term was also used in more informal contexts. Thus, James Bisset, remembering his life in Birmingham in the late eighteenth century, remarked, 'I lived most happily in Birmingham in the midst of my family circle blest with every domestic comfort, and in the society of most social and amiable friends of the first respectability'.[72] If we examine who Bisset was socializing with at that time then we see a group of prosperous individuals who were active in local affairs. He claimed friendship with William Hutton; Thomas, Samuel and John Ryland; Timothy Smith; Richard Pratchett; Harry and Homer Sylvester; Thomas and William Phipson; and Joseph Priestley. However, exactly who he was friends with was almost less important than the claim which Bisset was making about his position within Birmingham society. While he was a self-employed successful engraver, poet and ran a museum he was not among the most prominent or wealthy members of the town's population. He did not have the

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70 BAHS, IIR11, 386813, Police Committee, 29 Jan. 1790.
71 J. Money, *Experience and Identity: Birmingham and the West Midlands, 1760-1800* (Manchester, 1977), p. 14.
72 BAHS, ZZ32, 263924, Reminiscences of Bisset, p. 156.

political and cultural status of someone like William Hutton or Richard Pratchett (who was a leading Street Commissioner), or the wealth and economic power of major manufacturers such as the Rylands. However, in this account he wrote himself into a group that wielded considerable power in the history of Birmingham to demonstrate his own quality. Furthermore, by using the term 'respectability' he suggested that his group of friends was part of a larger 'respectable' social group of individuals with varied economic positions connected by shared qualities. This suggests that Bisset saw himself as part of a larger collective which was united by shared manners, prominence and activity. As we have seen invocations of this imagined collective could bolster political, cultural and economic activity.

To what extent did language itself determine the boundaries of a 'respectable' social group? This is unclear, but there seems to have been a process of mutual interaction and growth. Thus when local radical Thomas Clark Junior referred to T.J. Wooler or Charles Pendrill as 'respectable' he strengthened the association (in his own mind) between political radicalism and 'respectability'.[73] In that case Clark's agency helped create the series of particular qualities associated with the term. He could choose whom to apply it to; he was not simply trapped within a discourse handed down to him from above. This 'confined freedom', by which individuals could alter their own understanding of terms, can help to explain why terms and discourses change over time despite the apparent determinative power of language.[74] The expansion of the term because of public activity could in turn produce more permanent change in the social group described by the term 'respectable'. So the growth of a discourse of respectable political radicalism, linking discourses of patriotism, constitutionalism and peaceful behaviour, was an important factor in the growing strength of the reform movement in the town up to 1832 and beyond. The frequency and vehemence of

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[73] BAHS, MS1114/4, Autobiographical Notebook of Thomas Clark, 1816-17, pp. 391-6; Pendrill was one of McCalman's 'unrespectable radicals'; he was arrested in 1798 and had connections to the Despard conspiracy, *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries, and Pornographers in London, 1795-1840* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 14-15.

[74] Sewell, *Logics*, pp. 139-43, 339-41.

arguments over who was and was not 'respectable' suggests that this process was understood as important. These issues must always be kept in mind when considering the relationship between language and reality; the relationship is rarely one way. The rise and fall of particular phrases and the change in meanings of terms over time is the result of contingency and context. I take this to be Dror Wahrman's most important contribution in his *Imagining the Middle Class*; however, by limiting his gaze to the effect of *national political* contingency on social vocabulary he simplifies a complex story.[75] We must pay attention to changes in economic and cultural structures which could alter language in a local as much as in a national context. This can be seen in the use of 'middle' and 'higher' in Birmingham.

The development of tripartite models of society has been much studied by historians. Asa Briggs offered an account of the move from a social understanding based around words such as 'rank' and 'order' to a tripartite one based around 'class' because of the restructuring of English society caused by industrialization, filtered through the particular political history of the years 1789-1848.[76] This account was endorsed by Penelope Corfield, though she suggested that this linguistic change began to occur in the eighteenth century and gave more importance to the rhetorical appeal of particular linguistic formulations.[77] This narrative was challenged by David Cannadine, who suggested that three different ways of describing society persisted throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: a hierarchical vision of society as a seamless web; a tripartite vision of upper, middle and lower; and a dichotomous vision, often based around rich/poor opposition.[78] In Cannadine's account change in social languages occurred through a basically intellectual process whereby various models of society (based around the three different ways) were used, debated and discarded, with politicians playing a particularly important role in developing popular social understandings.[79] The model of social

[75] Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class*, pp. 10, 12.
[76] Briggs, 'The Language of "Class"', pp. 43-73.
[77] Corfield, 'Class', pp. 102-3, 117-21.
[78] D. Cannadine, *Class in Britain* (London, 2000), pp. 19-20.
[79] Ibid., pp. 21, 28-9, 31-4, 47, 59, 77.

language following social reality was also criticized by Dror Wahrman. He argued that national politics was the key determining force in the development of the idea of the middle class and the attendant tripartite understanding of society.[80] I do not want to substantially challenge the depiction of social language found in Wahrman and Cannadine's accounts, but I do want to examine the place of the words 'upper/higher' and 'middle' in discussions of social structure below the level of national politics.[81]

The first point to make is that these tripartite terms were used less frequently than the binary divisions between 'genteel' and 'ungenteel' and other equivalent pairs. Secondly, as Dror Wahrman has suggested, the important element was the adjective 'lower/middle/upper/higher', rather than the noun 'class/order/rank/sort'.[82] These nouns were used interchangeably in documents from various periods and genres, and for assorted purposes. If we examine the usage of the term 'middle' and the term 'upper/higher' we find a division in the geographical contexts in which each term was used. In Birmingham the term 'middle' could either refer to a local intermediate group or it could place a local elite in a national framework, either by describing a group as part of a national 'middle class' or by speaking in general about a national group without specific mention of Birmingham. The first usage was seen in a report in *Aris' Birmingham Gazette* in 1790 that 'The Poor Rates in this Parish having of late encreased in a very alarming Degree, and having become extremely burdensome to the middle Class of Inhabitants'.[83] When used locally it was either implicitly in contrast with a local lower or higher group, or explicitly placed a local middle class in a tripartite social structure; for example, the Birmingham merchant Joseph Shore remembered that in the scarcity of 1800 'the middling and higher orders having a good trade, they made

[80] Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class*, pp. 6, 8-10, 12, 18.
[81] Though see the important criticisms of Cannadine's emphasis on politicians and his problematic approach to popular understandings of class in J. Lawrence, 'The British Sense of Class', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 35/2 (2000), pp. 308-10.
[82] Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class*, pp. 14-15.
[83] Quoted in Langford, *Century*, i, 444.

subscriptions for the poor'.[84] The second use became more common. It is illustrated by John Harris writing to Lord Calthorpe in 1831, 'I think I may say … that the ministers in the project of Reform have gone beyond the expectations of the respectable and middle classes here who I believe in the first instance looked forward to Reform as the means of giving members to Birmingham'.[85] The first use existed earlier than the second, it was present in the 1790s.[86] The second use emerged in the second decade of the nineteenth century.[87] These two uses of the term 'middle' could appear side-by-side in the same work. In 1817 William Hawkes Smith implicitly contrasted a local and a national 'middle class' when discussing the imminent closure of his periodical *The Birmingham Inspector*. Of the local 'middle class' he wrote:

> I feel still stronger regret in the reflection on the obvious cause of this neglect, – the complete apathy of the middle and higher classes among us. Their indifference to the welfare of the country in every instance except where their own petty profits are concerned; their fixed determination not themselves to originate any action, which should assert the broad principles of moral and constitutional rights; nor to co-operate with, nor to support those who might commence any such proceeding, now prove the folly of expecting that a work on the plan of the *Inspector*, would excite any lasting interest.[88]

In contrast, in the next issue he spoke more generally about the 'middle class' as supporters of reform, 'The lower and middle classes – those who most feel the pressure of the times, have already used their utmost powers in the cause; they find them[selves], unbacked by wealth and influence, to be insufficient'.[89] The first quotation was set within a discussion of the place of free speech in Birmingham, whereas the second came during a general discussion of the desirability of parliamentary reform and constitutional rights available to all 'the people'. He

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84 *Minutes … Relating to the Orders in Council*, p. 47.
85 BAHS, MS2126/3/5/f/1831/1/4, John Harris to Lord Calthorpe, 4 Mar. 1831.
86 For example, BAHS, IIR87, 289314, Birmingham Town Book, 1788-99, 20 Oct. 1790; *An Appeal to Manufacturers on the Present State of Trade, &c.* (Birmingham, 1795), p. 15; *Aris'*, 4 May 1812.
87 For example, *Birmingham Inspector*, pp. 22, 311, 316-17.
88 Ibid., p. 310.
89 Ibid., p. 332.

was moving between two different discourses: the first was a local one about the corruption and sloth of the wealthier parts of Birmingham's population; the second was a national one about elite corruption and 'middle-' and 'lower-class' virtue.

Turning to the use of 'higher', we find that it continued to be used in a local context throughout this period to refer to a variously defined elite part of Birmingham's population, equivalent to the upper parts of a national 'middle class'. For example, the radical publisher James Drake, when speaking of the 'intellectual character of Birmingham', wrote that '[t]he lower classes all know *something*, and the upper, to keep their advanced post in society, are urged to an increase of knowledge in an equal ratio.'[90] The use of this term throughout this period suggests we should adjust the vision of the evolution of a vocabulary based around the term 'middle class' presented by Briggs, Corfield and Wahrman. The emergence of a 'middle-class' vocabulary in the first third of the nineteenth century reflected a change in the geographical orientation of a local elite, as well as the political factors identified by other historians.[91] In this period they began to describe themselves, and to be described, in relation to their place within a national social structure (where they occupied the 'middle') rather than in a local context (where they were the 'highest'). This conclusion is supported by contexts in which 'higher' (referring to a local elite) continued to be used. It was used in discussions of a non-political character and of local politics or institutions.[92] Thus, in the political agitation of 1815-20 one loyalist pamphlet, when discussing the once peaceful and cohesive nature of Birmingham's social structure spoke of the 'upper class of the population'.[93] This is in contrast to the national political discourses in which the term 'middle class' was used.

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90 Drake, *Picture*, p. 105.

91 The growing strength of a discourse stressing Birmingham's contribution to the nation was important to this, see pp. 160-62, 195-7 below.

92 For non-political uses see, S. Madan, *A Sermon Preached in St. Philip's Church, Birmingham, on Wednesday, March 12, 1800, being the Day Appointed for a General Fast* (Birmingham, 1800), pp. 21-2; for local politics see R. Jenkinson, *Abuses in Authority Exposed! In An Address to the Rate-payers, Overseers, Guardians, and Commissioners, of the Borough and Parish of Birmingham* (Birmingham, 1834), p. 5; for local institutions see BAHS, MS2126/3/5/f/1827/1/44, John Harris to Lord Calthorpe, 3 Dec. 1827.

93 Conciliator, *An Appeal to the Artisans of Birmingham* (Birmingham, 1819), p. 4.

However, we should not think that a national vocabulary replaced a local one, as the use of 'higher' continued throughout this period; clearly people could shift between different geographical frameworks of reference.

Women fit into the preceding discussion in three main ways. First, there were gender specific terms, most notably 'lady'. This was used in two main ways. First, as an equivalent to 'gentleman', in the common phrase 'Gentlemen and Ladies'.[94] Elsewhere, it was used on its own to refer to women of significant wealth and standing.[95] It was occasionally used with reference to the poor.[96] Similarly, the term 'women' was often imbued with particular virtues. For example, loyalists in the post-war period argued that 'good women … real Christians' had an important role to play in the maintenance of stability and prosperity.[97] Both terms were also deployed in pejorative comments about female characteristics or actions. Thus Thomas Clark Junior lamented the 'whims and caprices of the ladies in their choice of ornamental parts of their dresses', and 'William Nott' had one character in a dialogue say to another, 'why you a'nt half a women – any old women's a man to thee.'[98] Secondly, women were often not explicitly referred to but neither were they explicitly excluded. Thus phrases like the 'industrious', the 'respectable' or the 'genteel' could all include women. This usage is hard to analyse as it means interpreting silence. However, if we consider that women formed an important and visible portion of Birmingham's economy then the inclusion of women within definitions of the 'industrious' becomes entirely possible.[99] The final way in which women were referred to in public was through the explicit association of the word 'women' or 'ladies'

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94 Hutton, *History*, p. 130; BAHS, MS3782/13/71/63, George Barker to Matthew Robinson Boulton, 12 July 1821.

95 Job Nott, *The Life and Adventures of Job Nott, Buckle-Maker, of Birmingham* (Birmingham, 1793), p. 3; BAHS, ZZ32, 263924, Reminiscences of Bisset, p. 215.

96 Hutton, *History*, p. 62.

97 *The Searcher* (Birmingham, 1817), p. 13; Jemima Nott, *Jemima Nott, Old Job's Eldest Daughter, Her Address to Her Sister Artificers* (Birmingham, 1819), p. 1.

98 BAHS, MS1114/11, Memoir of Thomas Clark, 1794-1819, not paginated, entry for 1808; William Nott, *To His Brother Artificers* (Birmingham, c. 1819), p. 3.

99 For women's place in Birmingham's economy see, chapter 1; M. Berg, *The Age of Manufactures, 1700-1820: Industry, Innovation and Work in Britain*, 2nd edn. (London, 1994), pp. 276-8; Behagg, *Politics and Production*, pp. 48-9.

with the terms already considered in this chapter. It was common to have references to the 'respectable ladies' or the 'genteel ladies', but less common to see these terms paired with the word 'women'.[100] This suggests the possibility of a socially differentiated use of these two terms, with 'ladies' referring to those of higher standing and wealth and 'women' being a more general term – this is supported (though not confirmed) by the fact that 'ladies' is never used to describe recipients of poor relief in the Guardians' minute books, 'women' is the term used.[101] These terms, like 'gentleman' and 'respectable', served important roles in the public life of the town. The accusation that 'women' made up the majority of any gathering could be used to undermine its legitimacy or explain why something went wrong. Thus in 1800 Martha Russell, daughter of the prominent Unitarian merchant William Russell, suggested that the damage done during the Priestley Riots of 1791 was the work of 'chiefly Women and Boys'.[102] This was also used by loyalists in the post-war period to weaken the claims of the radicals. A letter to *The Birmingham Inspector* denied the reports in the *Birmingham Commercial Herald* that the crowd at the first Newhall Hill meeting for Parliamentary reform was mainly women and children.[103] This is not to suggest that women's role in public life decreased during this period. Instead I echo those historians who have suggested that women's place in public life was a contested issue, and that such negative portrayals of female participation in public represent one way in which women's status could always problematic.[104] Furthermore, it should be noted that a gendered attack on radical meetings was less common than a social attack. In other words the radicals were more often ridiculed for

[100] For 'respectable ladies' see BAHS, MS3101/C/D/16/4/1, J.F. Tuffen to Samuel Galton Junior, 27 Dec. 1819; MS3173/2/4, Minute Book of the Birmingham Female Society for the Relief of Negro Slaves, 1825-52, p. 1; for 'genteel ladies' see MS1114/4, pp. 416-20; for 'genteel women' see ZZ32, 263924, Reminiscences of Bisset, p. 79; MS466/299/6, Richard Tapper Cadbury to Elizabeth Cadbury, 26 Mar. 1837.

[101] For example, BAHS, GP/2/1/1, 22 Dec. 1783; GP/2/1/2, 25 Oct. 1825.

[102] BAHS, IIR13, 486799, Russell, 'Birmingham Riots', p. 25*.

[103] *Birmingham Inspector*, p. 45; see also, Jemima Nott, *Sister Artificers*, p. 13; Job Nott jun., *New Hall Hill Meeting*, p. 4; Job Nott, *Address from Old Job Nott*, p. 2. See also Catherine Hall's comments on the ambivalence of radicals to the political activity of women, 'The Tale of Samuel and Jemima: Gender and Working-Class Culture in Nineteenth-Century England', in H.J. Kaye and K. McClelland (eds.), *E.P. Thompson: Critical Debates* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 88-9.

[104] K. Gleadle, *Borderline Citizens: Women, Gender, and British Political Culture, 1815-1867* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 6, 9, 17, 25, 41-2, 46.

being too poor rather than for attracting too many women.[105]

The discussion in this section has focused on how these terms were used in Birmingham and has relatively little to say about the wider contexts in which we might place the terms considered. I have focused on the local contexts for these terms because the focus of this thesis is on propertied society in Birmingham yet these terms and the discourses did not exist in a vacuum and can be related to discourses and contexts beyond Birmingham. For example, the emphasis on the importance of morality, honesty, civic responsibility and hard work connected to the ideas of 'gentility' and 'respectability' can be related to wider debates over the cultural and moral worth of commercial and industrial towns.[106] Precisely what were the mechanisms that linked Birmingham and these larger contexts is not entirely clear and more work could be done on this topic both in terms of the reception of terms from elsewhere in Birmingham and the influence of the town on national discourses. Presumably some of the connections with the world beyond Birmingham discussed in chapter 3 raised awareness of similarities and differences between Birmingham and elsewhere and aided in the spread of such discourses. For example, the town had numerous booksellers and circulating libraries; these institutions, combined with debating clubs, itinerant lectures and newspapers would have exposed Birmingham's population to ideas and discourses from elsewhere in Britain and beyond.[107]

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[105] See pp. 116-18, 122-3 above.

[106] These debates and their effects in various locations are discussed in J. Wolff and J. Seed (eds.), *The Culture of Capital: Art, Power and the Nineteenth Century Middle Class* (Manchester, 1988), especially the essays by Seed and Gunn; R. Sweet, *The Writing of Urban Histories in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1997), ch. 6; idem, 'Topographies of Politeness', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 12 (2002), esp. pp. 363-6, 368-9; J. Stobart, 'Culture versus Commerce: Societies and Spaces for Elites in Eighteenth-Century Liverpool', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 28/4 (2002), pp. 471-85.

[107] Searching the British Book Trade Index (http://www.bbti.bham.ac.uk/, accessed 19/11/13) locates 220 booksellers active in Birmingham between 1780 and 1832; there were 46 circulating libraries in Birmingham in 1800, see S. Whyman, 'William Hutton's Missing Books', unpublished paper, I am grateful to Susan Whyman for letting me see a copy of this paper.

Industrious

These social keywords referred to and interacted with a number of discourses which played key roles in framing how propertied individuals thought about society. We have already observed some of these; for example, the emphasis on civic duty suggests either the continued influence of civic humanism or a context in which public service was vital to the functioning of public life such that civic humanism had a particular relevance. In order to understand propertied conceptions of society we have to analyse how these discourses and the vocabulary employed within them interacted. What follows focuses on the term 'industrious' and the discourse of social cohesion, a term and a discourse that had particular importance in Birmingham.

During the late eighteenth century, a common understanding of the character of Birmingham 'industriousness' developed, as part of the growing sense of a Birmingham identity.[108] A notable early expression of this concept came in William Hutton's *History*, first published in 1782. When he came to Birmingham in the 1740s he commented, 'I had been before acquainted with two or three principal towns. … I was surprised at the place [Birmingham], but more so at the people. They were a species I had never seen. They possessed a vivacity I had never beheld … The town was very large, and full of inhabitants, and those inhabitants full of industry.'[109] Hutton argued that this industrious nature perpetuated itself and was the basis of Birmingham's increasing prosperity and importance: 'By uniting also with industry, we become industrious. It is easy to give instances of people whose distinguishing characteristic was idleness, but when they breathed the air of Birmingham, diligence became the predominant feature.'[110] The argument was deployed in many histories

[108] See pp. 160-62 below.
[109] Hutton, *History*, p. 63.
[110] Ibid., p. 58.

of Birmingham throughout this period to explain the growth and success of the town. As George Yates put it in 1830: 'In the character of the people of Birmingham we find mechanical ingenuity, indefatigable industry, and habits of contentment, united to a free, active, and generous spirit.'[111] This industrious nature was often attributed to the town's lack of a corporation, and hence exemption from the Corporation and Five Miles Acts. William Hawkes Smith claimed that those acts served to:

> hedge in the advance of intelligence and enquiry, drove from cities and boroughs of chartered importance, the individuals possessing precisely the greatest share of energy and independence, who settled with their families in this inconsiderable town; bringing with them capital and industry to take advantage of the localities; and thus, eventually, producing the greatest benefit to the place to which they removed.[112]

This understanding of Birmingham's particularly 'industrious' character employed the term in ways similar to its interpretation elsewhere.[113] The concept of 'industry' made a general set of concepts available to the population which in turn were used to make a wide variety of different political and non-political points.

'Industry' was frequently used to describe a particular part of the town's 'poor' population.[114] In this use, it was utilized to divide the poor or the working population of the town into two categories. The 'industrious' and the 'idle'.[115] The term was also sometimes used in the period 1780-1815 in a broader fashion to include both the manufacturers,

[111] G. Yates, *An Historical and Descriptive Sketch of Birmingham; with Some Account of its Environs* (Birmingham, 1830), p. 72.

[112] W.H. Smith, 'The Town of Birmingham', in idem, *Birmingham and its Vicinity as a Manufacturing and Commercial District* (London and Birmingham, 1836), p. 2.

[113] Jean-Baptsite Say saw the concept of '*industrie*' as central to a system of ethics that was neither aristocratic nor religious and as a way to unite different forms of productive activity and depicted the 'industrious' as the only important group in society, see Stedman Jones, *An End to Poverty? A Historical Debate* (London, 2004), pp. 124-31, 134-43; M. James, 'Pierre-Louis Roederer, Jean-Baptiste Say, and the Concept of *Industrie*', *History of Political Economy*, 9/4 (1977), pp. 456-9, 466, 470-71. Attwood drew a similarly stark contrast between productive and non-productive groups. His conception was more political than that in Say's later writings, though he had less to say about the reduction of inequality and his interpretation of Britain's success was significantly different, see Behagg, *Politics and Production*, pp. 167-8.

[114] Hutton, *History*, p. 128; Job Nott, *Job Nott's Humble Advice* (Birmingham, 1792), p. 4; *Town Meeting. A Report of the Proceedings of the Town's Meeting, Held on Wednesday, January 22, 1817* (Birmingham, 1817), p. 7.

[115] BAHS, MS3782/12/100/1, *Birmingham Dispensary* ([1779?]), p. 1; J.N. Brewer, *A Topographical and Historical Description of the County of Warwick* (London, c. 1816), p. 338.

merchants, professionals and traders who made up a broad propertied section of society, and poorer individuals. This was usually used to point to the beneficial aspects of industry. Thus it was argued that it promoted contentment and peace among all the population,[116] and that wealth obtained by honest industry was superior to that obtained through deceit.[117] It was often thought to be central to effective learning.[118] Sometimes, however, it was used to refer to particular groups within the propertied population, with no reference to the poor, though this use was uncommon. For example, in 1785 instructions sent to the Warwickshire MPs by a Birmingham town meeting stated that 'the Landed Interest is so intimately connected with Commercial, that whatever affects the latter must ultimately affect the former … [therefore] you are not only serving a Multitude of industrious People … but also … the Landed Interest.'[119]

These non-political uses were common throughout the period considered by this thesis. Prior to 1815, political use of the term 'industrious' was confined to loyalist publications. In 1792 the fictional loyalist 'Job Nott' addressed the 'Wealthy Inhabitants' of Birmingham and reminded them that 'many of you have risen from the lowest situations' under the protection of the British constitution and therefore that they should support it so 'that other poor industrious men may be protected by it, whilst they rise in the world as you have done'.[120] Loyalists also argued that reformers aimed to deceive the 'industrious' majority; thus, Joe Shrewd claimed that George Edmonds was not 'industrious' and that he was trying to 'wheedle' the 'hard-working' poor out of their money.[121] The term was often linked by loyalists to an argument about the social cohesion which in turn was sometimes linked to a discourse of social mobility. In 1793 'Job Nott' published an account of his life. He

[116] Hutton, *History*, p. 86, 89; *Address to Reformers*, p. 7.
[117] *Searcher*, p. 78.
[118] BAHS, MS501/1, Transactions Relating to the New Meeting Sunday Schools, 1787-1807, entry for 1801; MS3101/C/D/10/9/13, Samuel Galton Junior to John Howard Galton, 23 May 1807.
[119] BAHS, MS3782/12/92/16, Instructions to Warwickshire Members, 1785.
[120] Job Nott, *Humble Advice*, p. 2.
[121] Joe Shrewd, *A Few Words*, p. 4; A Briton, *An Address to Reformers* (Birmingham, 1819), p. 7.

detailed his rise from starting work at the age of five to help his family after his father died, to becoming a reputable man who was a partner in the business he had started off working for. His ascent of the social structure was driven by education, piety and hard work. He learnt to write at an evening school and then was educated by his master's clerk.[122] This was a narrative to show the poor that they could become successful and rise to a position of comfort and importance by being 'industrious'. Though 'Job Nott' did not, in this context, use the term, this pamphlet contains frequent statements similar to 'I did all in my power to please and serve my master. I saw how he liked to have things done, and I strived to do 'em so. I was always early in the shop'.[123]

Celebrating social cohesion and mobility aligned with a religious and moral argument about the value of hard work and also with an argument associated with Adam Smith: that a consumer class created a market for luxury goods that created employment for the poor. As 'Job Nott' put it in 1820:

> In this great *commercial* country almost all the property in the land must absolutely pass, and is continually passing through the hands of the poor. To instance, almost all our manufactured articles are first ore in the earth, and there it would lie to eternity, but for the capitals of the rich men to set the poorer men to work. The iron, the copper, the tin, the lead, the coal, you know is raised from the bowels of the earth, and from the beginning to the end of manufacturing it is *all labour* … as to the immense *rental* of the kingdom, it nearly all passes through the working man's hands; the richest men can but eat and drink, and enjoy the same blessings you do, only in a more refined way; all the rest, and it is matter worth your serious reflection, when you are prompted to envy the rich men, I say, all the rest passes through the hands of the poorer men. … The rich man can scarcely enjoy one thing that has not passed through the hands of the poor; and out of which the poor man has not had a felling in the shape of wages for his labour.[124]

In the early nineteenth century radical reformers began to use the term and the associated discourse of social cohesion to promote political reform. Their adaptation of the

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[122] Job Nott, *Life and Adventures*, pp. 1-4, 14, 22-3.
[123] Ibid., p. 2.
[124] Job Nott, *The Late Addresses of Job and his relations with a Preface* (Birmingham, 1820), pp. 3-4, original emphasis. Similar statements can be found throughout the 'Nott' family pamphlets in this period.

vocabulary and the discourse offer a good example of how individuals can change the meaning of language to suit their own purposes. Radicals took the characteristics associated with 'industriousness' – hard work, honesty, prosperity and social cohesion among employer and employee – and adapted them to an argument in favour of parliamentary reform. Before 1815 those in favour of political reform tended to speak in two main languages. First, a discourse that mixed constitutional rights and criticism of 'old corruption'.[125] Secondly and less commonly, they used a discourse of natural rights.[126] During the post-war period radicals began to adapt the term 'industrious' and the discourse of social cohesion. Thus *The Birmingham Inspector* sometimes used the term to refer to a particular section of Birmingham society, for example, the 'ingenious and industrious artizans … wasting away their unprofitable existence within the unwholesome confines of a workhouse'.[127] However, 'industrious' was also used in a more general sense to refer to all levels of Birmingham society. For example 'our industrious and suffering people' and 'It is from the industrious class of the community, that the country owes its present wealth'.[128] This move was of a kind with Edmonds' and others' attempts to ensure that support for reform was as widespread as possible; he claimed that his *Weekly Recorder* was intended for 'every class of inhabitants'.[129] Some radicals would later blame the failure of the reform movement in 1815-20 on the lack of support received from the 'middle' and 'upper classes'.[130] To a certain extent this was the result of a radical failure to persuade the 'middle class' to see themselves as part of the 'industrious class' sharing interests with those who supported Parliamentary reform. The language of 'industry' failed to build politically important bridges in the period 1815-20. It

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[125] For constitutionalism see, *The Birmingham Society for Constitutional Information* (Birmingham, 1792); for 'old corruption', see John Nott, *An Appeal to the Inhabitants of Birmingham: Designed as an Answer to Job Nott, Buckle-Maker* (Birmingham, 1792), pp. 3-4; *Birmingham Society for Constitutional Information. First Instituted November 20, 1792* (Birmingham, 1792), pp. 4-5.

[126] By 1790 (at least) John Freeth had an explicit notion of 'natural rights', for example, *The Political Songster*, 6th edn. (Birmingham, 1790), pp. 174, 186-7.

[127] *Birmingham Inspector*, supplement to ii, 25 Jan. 1817, p. 7.

[128] Ibid., p. 15.

[129] *Edmonds's Weekly Recorder*, p. 1.

[130] Behagg, *Politics and Production*, pp. 91-3; see p. 130 above.

would be much more successful in 1830-32 when the radical movement contained a far higher number of 'gentlemen' and the 'respectable'.

It is not clear why the post-war radicals adopted this particular discourse. One possible reason is that the impact of the French Revolution meant that arguments based on natural rights became too dangerous to express publicly. Anti-reformers repeatedly attacked natural rights as the cause of the Revolution and the reason that it took such a bloody form – such arguments might have convinced some radicals that natural rights were a dangerous notion, or at least persuaded them to keep their belief in them secret.[131] 'Industriousness' provided an alternative basis on which demands for representation could be based. It was especially useful as it could be given a patriotic twist by portraying the 'industrious' united classes of Birmingham as the basis of the town's (and consequently the nation's) wealth and success.[132]

In Birmingham radical use of the term 'industrious' was most prominent in the agitation for the Great Reform Act. It was used repeatedly by radicals to express a unity of interest between the 'middle' and 'working classes'. In 1830 the BPU stated that its aims were to 'obtain by every just and legal means, such a *reform* in the *Commons House* of *Parliament*, as may ensure a *real* and *effectual representation* of the *lower* and *middle classes* of the *people*' and to 'enquire, consult, consider, and determine respecting rights and liberties of the industrious classes'.[133] It was stated that 'if the rights and interests of the industrious classes of the community had been properly represented in Parliament, a general state of distress attended with anomalies like these, would have commanded the instant attention of the House of Commons.'[134] Time and again Thomas Attwood and other leading members of the BPU stressed the need for unity between the 'classes' in order for reform to succeed. Thus, in 1830

[131] For loyalist criticism of 'rights' see, *Searcher*, pp. 47-8; Jemima Nott, *Sister Artificers*, p. 5.
[132] For the importance of patriotism to the renewal of the radical challenge see the works cited below p. 331 n. 121 below.
[133] *An Address to the Friends of Freedom* (Birmingham, 1830), p. 4, original emphasis.
[134] *Report of the Proceedings at the Meeting of the Inhabitants of Birmingham, Held on Monday, the 25th of January, 1830* (Birmingham, 1830), p. 8. It is also a development of the idea of 'virtual representation'; see, P. Langford, 'Property and "Virtual Representation" in Eighteenth-Century England', *HJ*, 31/1 (1988), pp. 83-115.

the Political Council of the Union urged those attending the mass meeting to unite behind reform.

> Let the master shake hands with the workman, and let the workman banish all distrust and animosity towards the master; let them unite cordially together in moderate and reasonable, but firm and determined operations … Of one thing the workman may be quite sure. It is the first interest of their masters to obtain a *good trade*, and when they succeed in this object, it is not possible for anything to prevent the workmen from partaking large in its advantages. When great profits attach to the employment of labour all men are willing to employ labour; and if one man refuses the workman his proper share, others are always willing to give it, for there is no other way in which they can themselves partake of the profits.[135]

There was a striking similarity between this statement and that made by 'Job Nott' quoted above, 'The rich man can scarcely enjoy one thing that has not passed through the hands of the poor; and out of which the poor man has not had a felling in the shape of wages for his labour.'[136] Or compare it with the comments from 'an Old Plater', 'fellow Townsmen, … You know that when there is work in the town, you have as much as you can do … you know very well that your employers and masters do not take three pence, or four pence, or seven pence, just as the maggot bites, from your weekly earnings, and give you nonsense for it.'[137] Both radicals and loyalists stressed that the rich helped the poor in times of distress and surplus, by charity and by employment. This rhetoric was present to a certain extent in the post-war radical movement, but only became prominent in their publications during the Reform Act agitation. This possibly reflected the changing composition of the radical movement and the previous political views of many of its members. The 1830s radical movement contained a greater number of individuals from the town's elite and so the language had to change somewhat; hence the greater emphasis on the unity of interests of separate social groups. This should also lead us to rethink the category of the 'people'. In 1830-32 the 'people' of Birmingham were not addressed as a homogeneous whole. Instead, they were spoken to as a

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[135] *Report of the First Annual Meeting*, p. 7, original emphasis.
[136] Job Nott, *Late Addresses*, p. 4.
[137] *Address by an Old Plater*, p. 6.

collectivity formed of separate social interests. The prevalence of the terms 'industrious classes' and 'lower and middle classes' suggest the limits of populist rhetoric, contrary to some accounts of that discourse.[138]

Clive Behagg suggests that 'industriousness' was a discourse adopted by Attwood and the BPU for *Realpolitik* reasons. In contrast, I would propose that it was a good choice, because this was an idea which was believed by many of the town's propertied population. Comments such as Matthew Boulton's in 1799 on the lowly origins of the town's great manufacturers and the prevalence of ideas of social cohesion based on social mobility in all manner of sources of different genres throughout this period suggest that it was widely believed to be true in some form.[139] The town's manufacturers and merchants seem to have held to the ideal of a cohesive society, even if they were aware that the reality was not always as clear cut. The strength of the discourse within the town might help explain why the reaction of Birmingham's propertied elites against the poor was so violent in the later 1830s, and in particular after the 1839 Bull Ring riots.[140] The rift caused by the breakdown of the BPU and the rise of Chartism made the ideas of a united population impossible to maintain. If the elites had believed in social cohesion this might have seemed like a betrayal.

The example of the 'industrious' provides an instance of the interaction of vocabulary and discourse. It also shows how these terms and ideas were contested and that this contest caused both terms and discourses to develop. We have seen repeatedly that the meanings of particular social keywords were variable and often left implicit. This reflects their imperfect connection to discourses. 'Industrious' could be appropriated and altered by the radicals in the

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[138] See G. Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History, 1832-1980* (Cambridge, 1983), ch. 3; P. Joyce, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class, 1848-1914* (Cambridge, 1991), ch. 3; J. Vernon, *Politics and the People: A Study in English Political Culture, c. 1815-1867* (Cambridge, 1993), esp. ch. 8.

[139] *Report from the Committee Appointed to Enquire into the State of the Copper Mines and Copper Trade of this Kingdom*, *PP*, 1799. x, (http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&res_dat=xri:hcpp&rft_dat=xri:hcpp:fulltext:rchc-000178:13) (accessed 19/3/12), p. 663, quoted in Behagg, *Politics and Production*, p. 10.

[140] Behagg, *Politics and Production*, pp. 184-5, 197-222.

1830s because it was not irrevocably linked to a loyalist discourse of a hierarchical social structure guaranteed by social cohesion; there was no coherent tradition of 'industriousness'. Instead, they could play on the existing connotations of the value of industry to society at large and existing ideas about social cohesion and social mobility to suggest that the 'lower and middle classes' had the same interests and the same enemy – the boroughmongers and 'Old Corruption'. The use of these social keywords directed audiences to certain discourses but it did not determine how the audience would interpret them. However, redefining terms was a difficult process and even successful appropriations of certain terms were not permanent, as the late 1830s and the breakdown of the BPU shows. All this means that keywords are useful tools for the historian seeking to understand how individuals thought of their own place in society, but they must not be thought of as consistent entities. The same word could have different meanings to different people; it could also have different meanings for the same person in different contexts. This is a reflection of the messy manner in which many people constructed their social understandings. In the final section of this chapter a number of case studies will demonstrate the processes by which individuals imagined their place in society, and suggest that what might appear inconsistent in hindsight was perfectly coherent to the individuals concerned.

Case Studies

Any examination of how individuals in the past thought has to be careful not to force historical ideas and discourses into forms which appear coherent to modern commentators. The preceding sections have examined vocabulary and discourses by taking examples of particular words and concepts from a range of sources and times and placing them into particular categories. However, contemporaries melded together different words and

discourses to understand their society. The ideas and terms they used were not 'coherent' or 'consistent' in the ways that historians tend to understand these concepts.[141] Instead they were capable of combining contradictory notions or using concepts in ways that differed from the normal use in order to understand the complex and fluid nature of society and their place within it; indeed, this is how the meaning of language changes.[142] Furthermore, they did not articulate ideas about society solely through explicit social theorisation or extended social description. Just as frequently, they expressed their understanding of the social order through statements about others, whether about the poor, servants or so on.[143] In this section I will examine how two propertied individuals conceptualized their society and their personal social identity.

Julius Hardy was a pious, medium-sized button manufacturer who left an account of five years of his life, 1789-1793. In relation to the sources discussed in chapter 1, he appears only once in the subscription data in 1812. He appeared in the 1801 and 1815 trade directories. He was elected a Guardian of the Poor in 1804 and so must have paid more than £20 a year in poor rates (he did not live within the area used as the ratebook sample in chapter 1). His diary is most comprehensive for 1789-90, and contains details of his business and social life. It described troubles with clients, the long tours taken by his brother and business partner, Joseph, to secure orders, the routine of visiting friends in Birmingham, and his regular attendance at Methodist meetings as well as those of other denominations. He did not explicitly discuss the nature of society, but he did spend a great deal of time considering his relationship with his family, workers and servants. These ruminations reveal some ideas about his place in society and some of the habits, activities and qualities that he felt distinguished different types of people.

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[141] For a useful discussion see W.H. Sewell, Jr., *Work & Revolution in France: The Language of Labor from the Old Regime to 1848* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 8-13

[142] Sewell, *Logics*, pp. 336-46.

[143] C. Steedman, *Labours Lost: Domestic Service and the Making of Modern England* (Cambridge, 2009) , pp. 13, 16, 222.

Hardy was certainly aware of differences between himself and other elements in Birmingham's population. Indeed, he presents a much more concrete picture of difference than some of the sources already considered. However, Hardy understood social difference in moral and cultural terms. For example, on a number of occasions he attempted to have a drink in a local pub. However, both times, he felt himself forced to leave by the 'obscene and wicked' conversation. The first time he added the comment, 'I gathered from this a condemnation in some degree to myself, in that it may be wrong for me to go there.' The second time he added that 'I hope by the assistance of divine grace to keep myself away from the company of the ungodly.'[144] Hardy used the cultural difference he perceived between himself and the patrons, filtered through his own moral and religious beliefs, to distinguish between different groups within society, the 'godly' and 'ungodly'. Hardy's description of the event is too sparse for us to be able to fully unpick the distinctions that made up Hardy and the patrons' understanding of their respective places in society. However, the account does suggest that Hardy was aware of a difference and that these differences and the rules of society (here it was about the restriction of certain social groups to certain spaces) created tension, even if only in Hardy's imagination.

He also struggled to deal with his workers. In September 1789 he gave a dinner to his workers in order to celebrate his birthday. The dinner finished at half three and Hardy decided to take a walk for two and a half hours. On his return he found some of his workman, who had continued to celebrate, dancing: 'a diversion I could neither like myself, nor feel an inclination to permit others to practice whilst I was present.' He claimed in his diary that they continued to dance despite knowing that Hardy disliked the practice. Thus he directed his clerk, Mr. Stansfield, to order the workers to stop dancing, which they did. Having halted the dancing Hardy stayed until half eight when he left.

[144] BAHS, MS839/53, Diary of Julius Hardy, Button-Maker of Birmingham (1788-1793), transcribed and annotated by A.M. Banks, April 1973, pp. 4, 10.

> [I] was glad to be gone: not that their company was disagreeable in the extreme, yet not at all entertaining or useful to me, so that whilst I staid, I sat rather in pain than otherwise; and the more so, as by this time two or three of the men had got rather concerned in liquor – to find fault with whom, it would not have been acceptable to me then, nor probably would it have done the parties any good.[145]

Here again then there was tension in a space occupied by two groups, and again Hardy saw the poorer group as disregarding and insulting him. Once again the differences were cultural: the enjoyment of dancing, excessive drinking and conversation that was not useful.[146]

Hardy did have a solution to uncomfortable situations he found himself in. On 12 January 1790 he began to hold meetings for his workers at his house for religious discussion and worship, at which they listened to him read a section from the bible, sang hymns and said prayers. Five of his workers attended the first meeting, and the meetings continued to be held each Monday until 15 March 1790. These meetings allowed Hardy to comfortably associate with his workers and he seemed to derive pleasure both from the social interaction and from seeing these men progress along the path to salvation. However, the meetings did not last long, and they seem to have ended because of the other temptations available to his workers. Indeed, in holding the meetings on Mondays perhaps Hardy was trying to combat the phenomena of 'Saint Monday' and the disreputable behaviour and waste associated with it. On 15 February he commented:

> Very few of the men came this evening, and how to account for it I know not at present: unless either my great freedom with them last week, or its being a sort of "holiday" so called this, should have disgusted, or diverted, them from coming. To their Master they either stand or fall. Still, I could wish to see more desirous of being instructed, so far as the little exercise practised as to night would conduce thereto.[147]

Religion had the power, Hardy thought, to transcend social divisions; all could and should be

[145] Ibid., pp. 25-6.
[146] He had bemoaned the lack of 'useful or profitable' conversation on the second of his unsuccessful trips to the pub, ibid., p. 10.
[147] Ibid., p. 37.

saved, but it was always in conflict with the cultural habits of the poor. It was only in such select, religious company that he felt truly comfortable; many of his close friends mentioned in the diary were Methodists like him, including his future wife.

If Hardy was awkward and uncomfortable in his dealings with those poorer than him, he was at times equally unsure about his reputation with his social equals and superiors. In November 1790 Hardy was informed by a friend that his maid was pregnant. Hardy, startled by this development, immediately determined to get rid of her, which he did so by the start of December. He was greatly affected by this incident, and he expressed detestation of the family of the man who 'is reported to have had criminal commerce with her'. He was appalled at the habits of this family who, he believed, permitted the maid and their son 'under their very noses or perhaps frequently in sight, to make freedoms with her, which a modest person should blush even to hear named.' So again we have Hardy constructing notions of difference through his own religious and moral categories. Even more pressing than his disgust at the activities of his maid, 'this abominable creature', was his fear of what it might do to his reputation, his social standing. He was worried that this event 'might have involved my reputation in *supposed* guilt beyond the power of remedy'. However, he felt that his past actions, his churchgoing and sober behaviour would protect him: 'I do not doubt by some bitter tongues may utter reproachful insinuations, yet I have reason to believe that most men who know me will, and do in their consciences, not only clear me from the reality but likewise any suspicions of guilt.' He resolved immediately that he had to marry, 'it produced a more considerable change in my ideas concerning marriage than I ever expected, or any other circumstance I think would have occasioned … from the moment I first knew how faithless and abominable the conduct of my servant had been, I was led to consider it equally my interest and duty to marry.' Indeed, his prospective bride, Nancy Gardner commented, on his asking her to marry him, that 'the voice of slander had not been silent with respect to my late

domestic affliction; but the breath of calumny or malice can do the innocent no harm.'[148]

Hardy was a pious man and gave a great deal of thought to the moral and religious implications of his actions. Therefore, it is unsurprising that the distinctions he made about people from different social groups were on moral and religious grounds; the patrons of the pub were 'filthy', their language was not 'useful', the workers' dancing offended him, and the depravity of his maid and her beau appalled him. Hardy did not regularly use the vocabulary examined so far in this chapter. However, he was concerned with many of the ideals which terms like 'gentleman', 'respectable' and 'industrious' expressed. Thus, his concern for utility and labour echoed many of the connotations of 'industrious'. At times he punished workers who did not conform to his ideal of an industrious employee; in 1789 he struck one of his workers, Edward Lingard, who went to the pub one afternoon rather than working.[149] His continual concern with the opinion of others and the judgements of others he himself made suggest that the public nature of social status, which is bound up in all the terms and discourses examined so far, was central to his understanding of society. Linked to this was an idea that trust and honesty were key to how society functioned and status was maintained.

Hardy was part of a group of Birmingham's population that were called upon to act in a civic role. In 1789 Hardy was nominated by one of the Overseers of the Poor, Mr Cheston, to be his successor. Hardy turned this opportunity down stating, 'I am obliged to this person, Mr. C., if he really thought of me, contrary to my own opinion, calculated for the office: but at the same time it is well for me that I am passed by, for it would otherwise have been very inconvenient, as well as expensive.'[150] Hardy does not seem to have known Mr Cheston; thus, his choice of Hardy to replace him suggests that Hardy had a reputation in the town as someone appropriate to hold the office of Overseer of the Poor. The fact that Hardy rejected the offer also suggests that the reality of life in the upper parts of propertied society could be

[148] Ibid., pp. 53-6, original emphasis.
[149] Ibid., p. 4.
[150] Ibid., p. 51.

rather different from the ideal of civic activity expressed in the terms examined above.[151] However, we should not overplay this aspect since Hardy later became a Guardian of the Poor, and was presented with a silver cup in 1807 in gratitude for his services to the town in auditing the poor-rate levy books. Perhaps Hardy felt better equipped to hold such office because he was eighteen years older.[152]

Turning to the end of this period, James Bisset's reminiscences offer a rather different basis for examining propertied understandings of society. Bisset came from a Scottish family of merchants. He moved to Birmingham in 1776 and began an apprenticeship to a japanner. He later invented a new finishing process for painting on glass, and this opened up many business opportunities. He became a successful young miniature painter and medal maker. Bisset later opened up his house as a museum and wrote a number of volumes of verse, most notably his *Poetic Survey Round Birmingham* (1800). He moved to Leamington Spa in 1813 and opened a museum, newsroom and picture gallery.[153] With regards to the sources consulted in chapter 1, he paid the hair-powder tax in 1795, appeared in the 1797, 1801 and 1812 Birmingham trade directories and in that year signed the requisition for a town meeting to oppose the Orders in Council.

His reminiscences, written between 1828 and 1832, were composed as a tale of social mobility, not of movement from poverty to wealth (though he acknowledged that could happen), but nevertheless movement up a social hierarchy enabled by the benefits of a good apprenticeship, ingenuity and hard work.[154] Thus he recorded with great pride his inventions and business success. He detailed how he overcame grief and debt when his brother and

[151] Part of the heavy emphasis on the responsibility of 'gentlemen' and so on might well have originated in a growing fear that an elite of society were not performing its role; for this, see pp. 278-9 below.

[152] BAHS, GP/B/2/1/2, 14 April 1807.

[153] Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure*, pp. 201-3; T.F. Henderson, 'Bisset, James (1762?-1832)', rev. M. Marker, *ODNB*; L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (London, 1987), pp. 416-19.

[154] Bisset acknowledged the possibility of dramatic social mobility when he recorded a trip to the Birmingham Theatre where two poor 'rude boys' disrupted the performance, he recorded that in 1828 one of these two was 'still alive, lives in high style at Birmingham' and the other 'was apprenticed to a wire drawer [and] carried on a successful business for many years, in the New St built an elegant villa … within these last 3 or 4 years worth at lest 30 or 40 thousand pounds.', BAHS, ZZ32, 263924, Reminiscences of Bisset, p. 52.

patron died during Bisset's apprenticeship, leaving him 'with only a few guineas in my purse to buy mourning.'[155] From this unfortunate position he worked his way out of debt, and managed to set up his own business on the back of his new method of painting on glass. He also struggled with marriage. The parents of the woman he sought to marry wanted her to marry 'an opulent' suitor from their 'immediate neighbourhood' (they lived about eight miles from Birmingham) rather than a Birmingham-based maker of semi-luxuries. However, he convinced them to let him marry their daughter, and the reminiscences make no further mention of any difficulties between him and his parents-in-law.[156] We have already seen that Bisset felt he was at the heart of 'respectable' society in Birmingham through his friendship with a host of prominent Birmingham men.[157] He gave details of how these friendships were maintained. He described a society of which he was a member that met every Wednesday afternoon to play bowls or whist at Vauxhall. He depicted this venue as 'a kind of recreation for the respectable families in Birmingham' and as a 'place of public resort and fashionable promenades.'[158] Bisset was proud of these connections, and he praised them highly. For example, he claimed that it was his 'intimate acquaintances' who set up the first public library in Birmingham, and he speaks of his 'extremely intimate' friendship with William Hutton. I am neither denying that he was close friends with these individuals, nor that they were key figures in the public life of the town; instead the important point is how Bisset writes the account of his life of moving towards success and prosperity. His reminiscences portray a society in which such progress was possible, where a man like Bisset could progress from someone who engaged in fights between men and apprentices of different workshops, to one who associated with men like Joseph Priestley and William Hutton.[159] Status was about more than wealth and Bisset understood the importance of friendship groups in establishing a place

[155] Ibid., p. 79.
[156] Ibid., pp. 87, 97.
[157] See pp. 126-7 above.
[158] BAHS, ZZ32, 263924, Reminiscences of Bisset, pp. 99-100, 126.
[159] For the fights, see ibid., p. 129.

in Birmingham's society.

This tendency towards viewing society through the lens of personal success was probably accentuated by the fact Bisset was writing his reminiscences at the end of his life, and in surveying his life it might have seemed that a narrative of progress and social mobility made sense. Bisset's reminiscences were an example of the discourse of social cohesion maintained through social mobility. In this case this discourse was not deployed for political reasons (as it was in the case of 'Job Nott' above).[160] Instead, it was used by Bisset to understand his life and to judge the quality of others. He recalled both his own apprenticeship and two apprentices he took on, and their contrasting outcomes reveal much about how Bisset understood society to function.

> our master was extremely kind to us as if we had been his younger brothers, we held him in great esteem, when I was first settled & in business and resident in Carolina Street I had an excellent boy in apprentice … I took another … a young American a son of James Jacks from Esq. North Caroline with whom I had a premium of two hundred guineas: he was an indoor apprentice, was a clever boy and Mrs Bisset and I were very fond of him, he would have been eminent in his profession but he unfortunately had formed an idea that when he was out of his time he would have a sufficiency to keep him without working he therefore was careless about his work and was not nearly so industrious as his fellow prentice. I ultimately lost considerably by him having taken the young Gentleman apprentice as his father became a bankrupt about eight years after and I never received a shilling out of a debt he owed of upwards of £120.[161]

The second apprentice shared a number of qualities with Bisset (a kind, caring master, great ability and financial trouble caused by a relative) but where Bisset became successful and content, the apprentice failed because of his lack of industry. Industry and hard work created social mobility (as in Bisset's own life), idleness only failure (as with his apprentice). In this context it is important that Bisset believed the Priestley Riots of 1791 (the only real moment of conflict in his reminiscences) were caused solely by religion. He acknowledged the decrease in trade caused by the decline of the buckle trade which historians have placed centre

[160] Bisset professed himself to 'belong to party whatever', ibid., p. 113.
[161] Ibid., pp. 129-30.

stage in explaining the Riots; however, he saw no link between this decline in trade and the rioting of 1791.[162] He set a 'bold and ungovernable' Church and King mob against the 'perfectly social' Dissenters.[163]

Where Hardy shows how the vocabulary and discourses discussed in this chapter were used and adapted in the day-to-day of Birmingham life, Bisset shows how these discourses and terms operated in the longer term. The discourse of social mobility and cohesion ran throughout his work and allowed him to understand his own life and success and the failure of others. Bisset's reminiscences also demonstrate how the use of vocabulary could change over time. In his *Poetic Survey* Bisset used the term 'gentleman' to refer to the elite of the town.[164] By the time of his reminiscences (thirty years later) he had adopted a more egalitarian definition whereby a 'gentleman' might 'be found among the tillers of the earth.'[165] Why did Bisset's understanding change? Probably partly because of the general trend towards more inclusive understandings of the term, and towards a definition based on character rather than wealth. However, perhaps the change was also a reflection of the importance to the discourse of social mobility to Bisset's reminiscences. The discourse had within it the potential to promote an understanding of people of all levels within society as equally capable of 'gentility' because it suggested that the poorest individual could become a successful businessman. This might have (perhaps subconsciously) pushed Bisset towards a more egalitarian understanding of what made a 'gentleman' as he reviewed his life.

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[162] BAHS, ZZ32, 263924, Reminiscences of Bisset, p. 127; for shoelaces, buckles and riots see Money, *Experience and Identity*, pp. 262-3.
[163] BAHS, ZZ32, 263924, Reminiscences of Bisset, pp. 102, 147.
[164] J. Bisset, *Poetic Survey Round Birmingham … Accompanied by a Magnificent Directory* (Birmingham, 1800), pp. 19, 23, 63-4.
[165] BAHS, ZZ32, 263924, Reminiscences of Bisset, inside back cover.

Conclusion

The vocabulary and discourses available to propertied individuals in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were varied. Terms like 'gentleman' and 'respectable' were open to multiple interpretations and there was a gradual move towards greater inclusivity in these definitions, especially of 'gentleman'. In terms of discourses, the idea of social cohesion (often linked to social mobility) was extremely common. Propertied individuals used the words and ideas associated with it to bolster all manner of different arguments. Part of the popularity of this notion was owing to it offering an explanation for how economic growth could occur and how it could be controlled. Indeed, its power can be seen in its continuing presence in interpretations of Birmingham's history up to the present day.[166] Whether or not it was a reality or a rhetorical reaction to social tension, this was the dominant discourse which limited propertied understandings of Birmingham's society during this period.[167] It promoted a political culture in which it was essential to be able to demonstrate broad-based support, whether the issue was creating a police committee or Parliamentary reform.

While the terms and the discourses offered scope for a wide range of interpretations and meanings there was significant overlap which can allow us to construct a list of qualities and characteristics which the propertied of Birmingham valued. These qualities were either

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[166] For example, E. Hopkins, *Birmingham: The First Manufacturing Town in the World, 1760-1840* (London, 1989), esp. 94-9, 149, 179-81. See my comments on this interpretation, pp. 47-8 above.

[167] Recent work on the histories of minorities in Birmingham during the later nineteenth centuries suggests that even if there was 'class cohesion' the town was increasingly divided along racial, ethnic and religious lines, see P. Davis, 'Birmingham's Irish Community and the Murphy Riots of 1867', *MH*, 31 (2006), pp. 37-66; A. Green, 'Remembering Slavery in Birmingham: Sculpture, Paintings and Installations', *Slavery & Abolition*, 29/2 (2008), pp. 189-201; idem, '"The Anarchy of Empire": Reimagining Birmingham's Civic Gospel', *MH*, 36/2 (2011), pp. 163-79; M. Dick, 'Birmingham Anglo-Jewry *c.* 1780 to *c.* 1880: Origins, Experiences and Representations', *MH*, 36/2 (2011), pp. 195-214; these divisions were probably less extensive in the period 1780-1832, but more work is needed to understand their exact nature; for a useful starting point see D.I. Callaghan, 'The Black Presence in the West Midlands, 1650-1918', *MH*, 36/2 (2011), pp. 180-94. The Priestley Riots of 1791 suggest that all was not was well in late eighteenth-century Birmingham, see Money, *Experience and Identity*, pp. 223-9, 261-3, 276-82; Jones, *Industrial Enlightenment*, pp. 188-200; R.B. Rose, 'The Priestley Riots of 1791', *P&P*, 18 (1960), pp. 68-88; G.M. Ditchfield, 'The Priestley Riots in Historical Perspective', *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society*, 20:1/4 (1991/1994), pp. 3-16; J. Atherton, 'Rioting, Dissent and the Church in Late Eighteenth Century Britain: the Priestley Riots of 1791' (Leicester Univ. Ph.D. thesis, 2012).

claimed by the propertied authors examined here or their absence was lamented. Furthermore, these qualities were used by individuals to divide societies up into various sections, though these divisions were imagined, subjective and temporary. Thus they valued correct appearances and possessions, morality, civility, honesty, trustworthiness, civic responsibility, hard work, correctly used wealth, business or commercial success, and other forms of local renown. All of the terms and discourses surveyed in this chapter referred to various combinations of these qualities.

It appears that the vocabulary and discourses used in Birmingham during this period were ones that had meaning throughout the country but national definitions were not perfectly reproduced in the town; instead the choice of terms and discourses, and their meanings are best understood in relation to the social and economic situation of the town. This picture is different from that suggested by Henry French for seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century rural parishes, where substantial individuals appropriated the extra-parochial language of gentility because they had no other discourses to use.[168] In Birmingham there were numerous alternative languages that the elite of the town could use to describe themselves and the social groups they perceived. The picture does not seem to have been one of individuals reaching out to national discourses; instead, these terms and discourses were embedded in the culture of the town. The process by which this occurred is unclear. It may be that a combination of the growth of the state from the sixteenth century onwards and the increasing integration of Birmingham into national networks of commerce and culture exposed the inhabitants to the languages described in this chapter, which were then changed through a process of interaction between local and national contexts.[169] However, this is a topic that requires more comparative study to better understand the relationship between local context and the particular types of

[168] French, *Middle Sort*, ch. 4.

[169] For the importance of the state to the spread of social discourses see M.J. Braddick, *State Formation in Early Modern England, c. 1550-1700* (Cambridge, 2000), ch. 8; for the increasing links between Birmingham and the rest of Britain see chapter 3.

language used.

The variation in social description, the prevalence of an understanding of the town's social cohesion and the general lack of any dramatic change over time is somewhat surprising. In part this was due to the fact that Birmingham was already a manufacturing town by 1780.[170] The propertied population already seem to have been aware of many of the problems of poverty and infrastructure which would dominate the first half of the nineteenth century. In addition, the structure of the economy does not seem to have changed dramatically. In Birmingham the nineteenth century saw an intensification of these problems (something that is reflected in the fact that the number of references to social cohesion and the frequency of the use of social vocabulary increased), but the understandings of these concepts and terms did not change dramatically. When combined with a discourse which stressed change and mobility as the normal condition of life in Birmingham, the context and the language combined to create a relatively stable understanding of an unstable society.

Birmingham's propertied population had strong understandings of society as composed of different social groups though there was great variety and fluidity in the terms used to describe such divisions. The definitions of these social groups seem to have been often left ambiguous and unfinished. It was only at moments of tension or explicit reflection that groups such as the 'gentlemen' or the 'middle class' were explicitly defined. For example, 'gentleman' received its fullest definition by James Bisset at the end of his life, and its meaning was shaped during the radical agitation after 1815 when Edmonds and his loyalist opponents clashed over the definition in order to claim or restrict political power. This accords with a model of historical explanation which suggests that politics is a particularly strong factor in the formation of social groups. However, we have seen that other, non-political, public or reflective activities could cause individuals to consider and define their own place within society; for example, Hardy's worrying about his servants. What is important to note

[170] Hopkins, *Birmingham*, pp. 1-22, 29-30.

here is that, for all the fluidity of terms like 'gentleman', they give the impression of the existence of concrete groups. These terms gave a sense of permanence to groups which in fact were often only temporarily formed around a particular issue. Thus the example of the group which formed around the campaign against the Orders in Council in 1812 used a language of respectability and gentility to describe themselves and a discourse of social cohesion to characterize Birmingham when addressing Parliament. These languages and discourses were uttered as if they contained timeless truths obvious to any observer, yet it is hard to know what made the manufacturers that Attwood consulted, to learn the state of the town's working men, the 'most respectable'.[171] These terms and discourses could be very effective in uniting individuals together, if perhaps only transiently. It was not necessary for all members of a group to share the same understanding of a particular term. Instead, language could dissolve differences in a solvent of inherent ambiguity. Individuals might have extrapolated out from their own understandings and experiences, assuming others felt and thought in the same way as they did. Furthermore, authors had a limited ability to control the meaning of their own texts; their readers may have read themselves into or out of social categories regardless of the intentions of the author.[172] This process could allow groups to form around events despite discrepancies in wealth, political views and 'experience'.[173] If we abandon the idea that groups of individuals acting together had to be permanent, then we do not have to worry that individuals within the group might have had different interpretations of the particular terms they used to describe themselves.

This brings us to the issue of the power of language and discourse to forge social groups. Much of the analysis of this chapter supports those historians who have suggested that social groups are forged through language. However, we should not exaggerate the power of

[171] *Minutes ... Relating to the Orders in Council*, p. 14.

[172] G. Stedman Jones, 'Anglo-Marxism, Neo-Marxism and the Discursive Approach to History', in A. Lüdtke (ed.), *Was Bleibt von Marxistischen Perspektiven in der Geschichtsforschung* (Gottingen, 1997), p. 203.

[173] This seems to me to be an aspect missing from Joan Scott's important critique of 'experience' as a motor for social group formation, see J.W. Scott, 'The Evidence of Experience', *Critical Inquiry*, 17/4 (1991), pp. 773-97.

discourse and language. For example, the rhetoric of 'industriousness' and of the union between the working and middle classes was vital to the creation of the BPU, a large-scale group of individuals from different social positions that united around political reform. However, those discourses were not sufficient to create a real and lasting unity between workers and employers. In the face of differing economic interests, continued periodic economic depression and the political and social effects of the Great Reform Act, what unity had existed broke down, something vividly demonstrated by the violence of the Bull Ring riots of 1839.

Chapter 3: Propertied Geographies.

This chapter moves from considering contemporary understandings of social structure to understandings of place and location. How propertied individuals understood their geographical identity was another important form of collective identity and a way of understanding divisions within society, albeit in terms of geography rather than status. Therefore, the place-based identities and concepts explored in this chapter represent another cultural structure without which our understanding of past social imaginaries is incomplete.[1] This chapter examines two main issues. First, how propertied individuals defined Birmingham both in terms of the extent of the town and the meanings and characteristics associated with it and its inhabitants. It also examines the extent to which Birmingham was geographically divided by examining how propertied individuals used the town before considering how such divisions affected contemporary descriptions of the town. Secondly, how they understood the relationship between Birmingham and the world beyond the town. Towns are always sites of mixing and connections and to ignore these links would give the mistaken impression that Birmingham was sealed off from the outside world and would ignore important aspects of the social imaginaries explored in this thesis.[2]

In both cases these issues are examined both through texts and practices. Thus, patterns of propertied residence and use of the town, and propertied connections beyond Birmingham are considered as much as texts discussing Birmingham. This reflects two important points. First, location-based identities are shaped by geographical practices as well as geographical concepts.[3] Considering both textual representations and geographical practices allows the two to be compared and the relationship between them to be investigated,

1 O. Zimmer, *Remaking the Rhythms of Life: German Communities in the Age of the Nation-State* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 6-9; R. Kingston, 'Mind Over Matter? History and the Spatial Turn', *CSH*, 7/1 (2010), pp. 112-13

2 Zimmer, *Remaking the Rhythms of Life*, p. 8.

3 C. Townsend, 'Town, County and Region: Spatial Integration in the East Midlands, 1700-1830' (Leicester Univ. Ph.D. thesis, 2006), pp. 14-15, 17; K. Navickas, '"Why I am Tired of Turning": a Theoretical Interlude', http://www.historyworkingpapers.org/?page_id=225 (accessed 1/12/11).

as the discussion of the absence of a Midlands regional identity below demonstrates. Secondly, considering the practices of individuals is one way of reconstructing the potential geographical understandings and experiences of individuals who left no explicit comments on such issues.[4]

This chapter's focus on place/location-based identities and relationships, on networks and distributions is partly a reaction to the focus on space by both historians and historical geographers.[5] That emphasis has produced much interesting scholarship on historical understandings of areas within locations, for example, taverns and coffee houses, hospitals, and streets.[6] The focus in this chapter is less on those issues and more on recreating individuals' identifications with certain places, in this case Birmingham. There are clearly connections between spatial understandings and place-based identities.[7] For example, an individual's understanding of the nature of Birmingham is related, to use Lefebvre's phrase, to the representations of space within the town: how urban spaces were shaped and controlled by elites.[8] However, such issues are not the only element determining the understandings of Birmingham and the world beyond that circulated in this period and this chapter explores some of the other factors involved.

As chapters 1 and 2 have stressed, propertied society was not a simple entity in which individuals understood the world in ways determined by their socio-economic position.

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4 B. Heller, 'Leisure and Pleasure in London Society, 1760-1820: an Agent-Centred Approach' (Oxford Univ. D.Phil. thesis, 2009), p. 87.

5 Navickas, '"Why I am Tired of Turning"'.

6 For some examples see, M. Ogborn, *Spaces of Modernity: London's Geographies, 1680-1780* (London, 1998); P. Corfield, 'Walking the City Streets: the Urban Odyssey in Eighteenth-Century England', *Journal of Urban History*, 16/2 (1990), pp. 132-74; C. Philo, 'Edinburgh, Enlightenment and the Geographies of Unreason', in D.N. Livingstone and C.W.J. Withers (eds.), *Geography and Enlightenment* (Chicago, 1999), pp. 372-98; M. Ogborn and C.W.J. Withers (eds.), *Georgian Geographies: Essays on Space, Place and Landscape in the Eighteenth Century* (Manchester, 2004); J. Barrell, *The Spirit of Despotism: Invasions of Privacy in the 1790s* (Oxford, 2006), chs. 1-2; K. Navickas, 'Moors, Fields, and Popular Protest in South Lancashire and the West Riding of Yorkshire, 1800-1848', *Northern History*, 46/1 (2009), pp. 93-111; B. Heller, 'Leisure and the Use of Domestic Space in Georgian London', *HJ*, 53/3 (2010), pp. 623-45.

7 Zimmer, *Remaking the Rhythms of Life*, pp. 8-9, 312 n. 33.

8 K. Beebe, A. Davis and K. Gleadle, 'Introduction: Space, Place and Gendered Identities: Feminist History and the Spatial Turn', *Women's History Review*, 21/4 (2012), 527-8; C. Townsend, 'Town, County and Region', p. 7.

Therefore, this chapter does not define a coherent propertied way of using and understanding space; instead, it discusses the geographical concepts and practices that were expressed and performed by individuals within the section of the population defined as propertied society in chapter 1. Interestingly, there was less variation in the geographical concepts documented below than there was in the understandings of the social order discussed in chapter 2. However, this does not mean that the geographical ideas discussed in this chapter should be thought of as expressing a coherent body of 'propertied thought'. The comparative uniformity of geographical concepts can be explained by contingent factors, as the discussion of the lack of a regional identity will demonstrate.

As in chapter 2, the sources available tend to favour the wealthier part of the propertied population. Individuals like Thomas Attwood and Barbara Spooner were from families that were both wealthy and very active in Birmingham's public life: Attwood was High Bailiff, leader of the Birmingham Political Union and one of Birmingham's first MPs; Barbara Spooner was Lord Calthorpe's sister and married Isaac Spooner, an iron merchant who founded a bank with Attwood's father. Isaac was a magistrate during the early nineteenth century. However, some of the evidence in this chapter comes from less eminent individuals; for example, James Bisset and James Drake whose position in society was discussed in chapter 2 or William McKenzie who appeared only in directories in 1812 and 1823, and once, in 1812, in the subscription data.[9]

Defining the Town

The idea of Birmingham as a coherent, self-contained geographical and social entity was commonplace in this period. It was invoked frequently in political, cultural and economic

[9] As in chapter 2 I will only cite a few examples for each point, the bibliography contains full details of the sources consulted.

discussions. In 1819 the radical politician George Edmonds berated Paul Moon James, then editor of *Aris' Birmingham Gazette*, for publishing an account of a Birmingham mass reform meeting that had been copied directly from a London paper, 'Are you not ashamed thus to insult your Fellow-Townsmen? You copy from a London Paper, an account of a Birmingham Meeting, as though it was a thing you had not heard of till the lying Courier came into your hands.'[10] Loyalists also used this idea of Birmingham. 'Job Nott Junior', the fictional loyalist, attacked the radical scheme to appoint Sir Charles Wolesley as Birmingham's 'legislatorial attorney':

> is it to be endured by the Inhabitants of such a Town as Birmingham, that such a man as orator George [Edmonds], should have the impudence to propose a foreigner to be member for Birmingham. He is completely a foreigner to us, we know nothing of him, he never laid out a Shilling in any of our Shops that we know of … what business has Sir Charles Woolsey, and Major Cartwright and Mr. Wooller [*sic*] at a Birmingham Meeting? Are not the men of Birmingham competent to manage their own concerns? Let them stay at home, petition in their own Parishes.[11]

This use of the idea of Birmingham in these political contexts was based on an understanding, expressed by residents and strangers, of Birmingham as a place of remarkable (possibly unique) industry and ingenuity. As Samuel Jackson Pratt put it in 1814:

> it is evident, that the brightest surfaces of society, as to form and fashion, and the splendours of life, are unquestionably derived from the application of talent to the darkest labours; and there is not, perhaps, on the space of the globe, a spot, of equal dimensions, that exhibits so much real integrity, both of design and execution, as the town of Birmingham: consequently there can be none in this, or in any other country more deserving of the attention of every order and class of travellers, who have leisure and opportunity.[12]

This sentiment was repeated in many histories of the town and other publications of this

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[10] *Edmonds's Weekly Recorder* (Birmingham, 1819), p. 34.

[11] John Nott junior, *New Hall Hill Meeting. John Nott, Jun. His Address to his Brother Artificers on that Subject* (Birmingham, 1819), p. 5.

[12] S.J. Pratt, *Local & Literary Account of Leamington, Warwick, Stratford, Coventry, Kenilworth, Hagley, the Leasowes, Birmingham and the Surrounding Country* (Birmingham, 1814), p. 154.

period. Some accounts of Birmingham stressed its freedom from guild regulation.[13] Some praised the lack of religious persecution.[14] Others just drew attention to the industrious nature of the town without explaining it.[15] These accounts used and spread the discourse of Birmingham's 'industriousness', which was discussed in chapter 2. Such arguments were part of a larger discourse of civic pride which was important throughout this period and stressed that Birmingham was not just economically vibrant but also independent, philanthropic and cultured.[16] This concept was vital in shaping how the inhabitants of Birmingham understood their own place within the nation.

This discourse emerged partly for political reasons, as we shall see below, but also for economic reasons. The idea of Birmingham as industrious, ingenious and tasteful was partly aimed at contesting the characterization of Birmingham as producing low-quality goods, 'Brummagem wares'.[17] It was all part of the process of forging a civic pride which would allow Birmingham to compete on the national scene with other towns and cities.[18]

What geographical location did the concept of 'Birmingham' apply to in this period? Two different official definitions of Birmingham existed in this period. First, the parishes of St. Martin's and St. Philip's. In matters related to the Poor Law these two parishes were combined and governed as one. The Poor-Law parish of Birmingham is shown in figure 3.1.

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13 For example, *A Companion to the Leasowes, Hagley, and Enville; to which is Prefixed, the Present State of Birmingham* (London and Birmingham, 1789), p. 16; J. Drake, *The Picture of Birmingham* (Birmingham, 1825), p. 12.

14 C. Pye, *The Stranger's Guide to Modern Birmingham* (Birmingham, 1825), p. 78.

15 For example, J. Bisset, *Poetic Survey Round Birmingham … Accompanied by a Magnificent Directory* (Birmingham, 1800), pp. 27, 30, 35; J. Shrewd, *A Few Words to My Neighbours, by Joe Shrewd, Die-Sinker* (Birmingham, 1819), p. 1.

16 For political independence see J. Freeth, *The Warwickshire Medley* (Birmingham, [1780?]), p. 76; *Sauce for the Geese* (n.p., [1820]), in BAHS, LF05.2, 413436, Collection of Broadsides Relating to Birmingham and District, c. 1800-1840, p. 43; for philanthropy see Job Nott, *Job Nott's Humble Advice* (Birmingham, 1792), p. 4; for culture see Bisset, *Poetic Survey*, p. 12, 38; W.H. Smith, 'The Town of Birmingham' in idem, *Birmingham and its Vicinity as a Manufacturing & Commercial District* (Birmingham and London, 1836), pp. 30-31. Such civic pride was evident elsewhere see H. Barker, *The Business of Women: Female Enterprise and Urban Development in Northern England, 1760-1830* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 24-38.

17 J. Money, *Experience and Identity: Birmingham and the West Midlands, 1760-1800* (Manchester, 1977), pp. 57-8; N. Stirk, 'Manufacturing Reputations in Late Eighteenth-Century Birmingham', *Historical Research*, 73 (2000), pp. 142-55.

18 J.M. Ellis, '"For the Honour of the Town": Comparison, Competition and Civic Identity in Eighteenth-Century England', *UH*, 30/3 (2003), pp. 325-37.

The second official definition came from the Street Commissioners. From 1807 they began to perambulate the boundaries of the town and created maps of the area within which they could exercise their powers. This area is shown in figure 3.2. In both cases we might speculate that the association of these areas with particular administrative bodies raised their profile. Conflicts (such as those over the rating of small houses in Birmingham) and rituals (such as the Street Commissioners perambulating the boundaries of their jurisdiction) helped to propagate these official definitions of the town.

These two definitions were not congruent. This is unsurprising since the definition of the parish was not determined by the size of the built-up area. The Street Commissioners' map by contrast does roughly cover the built up area of the parish of Birmingham.[19]

Birmingham during this period remained a relatively compact settlement. The shape of the town shown in figure 3.2 had been fairly consistent since 1788 and it would not change much in the next fifty years.[20] During the early nineteenth century, the main area of building was to the north and north-west of the town, in the yellow and blue areas marked numbers 3 and 4 in figure 3.1. However, if the town did not experience a particularly large expansion in terms of overall area, there was significant development of land within the boundaries of the town and property throughout the town became denser.

These two maps provide a reasonable guide to the outer limits of the town of Birmingham. The Street Commissioners' map provides a guide to the core of the town, while the parish map suggests that some of the surrounding land was included in broader definitions of the town, notably Birmingham Heath and Boulton and Watt's factory at Soho, which is included in figure 3.1 just on the boarder of the parishes of Birmingham and Handsworth. Soho was where Matthew Boulton built his house and manufactory on thirteen acres of land he leased in 1761 in the parish of Handsworth, 1¾ miles north-west of Birmingham. The

[19] Except the areas of the town in the north-east which fell within the parish of Aston.
[20] C.R. Elington and P.M. Tillott, 'The Growth of the City', in *VCH*, p. 9.

Figure 3.1, *Map of the Town and Parish of Birmingham* (Birmingham, 1810).
Figure 3.1 is not currently available in ORA.

Note: The right side is north.

Figure 3.2 is not currently available in ORA.

Figure 3.2, Boundaries of the Town as Set by the Street Commissioners 1807.
Source: BAHS, MS2818/1/3, Street Commission Minutes, 1801-1812, 31. Aug. 1807.

parish of Handsworth was not populous; in 1831 it had a population of 4944. However, Boulton and Watt employed a significant number of people. Between 1765 and 1810 it employed between 600 and 1000 people. After 1810 the workforce declined in size, by 1841 300 people were employed there.[21] Though separate from the town, Soho was always included in descriptions of the town and was certainly thought of as a Birmingham business.

Other descriptions of the extent of the town tended to be less inclusive. For example, the first edition of Hutton's *History* described two walks illustrating the boundaries of the town in 1741 and 1781. In the sixth edition the editor, James Guest, included an equivalent walk for 1836 (see figure 3.3).[22] Both Hutton and Guest specifically instructed the reader/walker not to include certain areas. Thus, in 1781 Hutton wrote, 'pass close to New-Hall, leaving it on the left … down Suffolk St … leaving two infant streets to the right'.[23] Guest did not include all of Edgbaston in his definition of the town, suggesting he saw it as somehow distinct. Only once an area had become both fairly substantial and was inhabited by a large number of townsmen did it become part of Hutton or Guest's definition of Birmingham.

We can understand these differences by considering the various intentions behind these definitions of the town. The Street Commissioners sought to be inclusive for their own self-interested reasons; Hutton and Guest were defining the limits of the town as lived in, not just as built. Despite these differences, these four sources operate with generally experience-based understandings of the limits of the town, either based on administrative jurisdiction or inhabitation.

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21 P.M. Jones, *Industrial Enlightenment: Science, Technology and Culture in Birmingham and the West Midlands, 1760-1820* (Manchester, 2008), pp. 49-60.
22 W. Hutton, *A History of Birmingham, to the End of the Year 1780.* (Birmingham, 1781), pp. 45-7; idem, *The History of Birmingham*, ed. J. guest, 6th edn. (Birmingham, 1836), pp. 88-9.
23 Hutton, *History*, p. 46.

There were two types of areas beyond the parish of Birmingham that can be included in a definition of the town. First, contiguous areas outside the parish of Birmingham, such as Deritend. Secondly, non-contiguous suburbs, most notably Edgbaston. On figure 3.3 below, Deritend is fully included only in the the 1836 definition of the town. This reflected the area's growth. Until 1767 Deritend was a hamlet of just one street. A number of streets were subsequently created, notably one leading to Alcester which became the main entrance to Birmingham from Coventry. These streets soon became populous and '[s]ince these changes, the increase in buildings and streets has been rapid and constant.'[24] Deritend became an important area for manufacturing in the town in the late eighteenth century. It therefore was

[24] Drake, *Picture*, p. 87.

Figure 3.3, The Limits of Birmingham, 1741, 1781, 1836. **Figure 3.3 is not currently available in ORA.**

1741 – blue

1781 – red

1836 – within the black line.

thought of as part of Birmingham; in 1830 George Yates wrote of 'the hamlets of *Deritend* and *Bordesley*, and of *Duddeston* and *Nechells*, all in immediate connection with the town of Birmingham, and into which a considerable portion of the town extends.'[25]

In 1831, John Harris, land agent for the Calthorpe Estate, offered Lord Calthorpe an analysis of which settlements near Birmingham should be included in the new constituency of Birmingham proposed by the Reform Bill. He drew Calthorpe's attention to the hamlet of Bordesley, writing,

> It is a very populous hamlet and indeed comprizes a considerable portion of what is now called Deritend: there are likewise in the hamlet a considerable number of respectable villas, inhabited mostly by persons in Business in Birm[m] of nearly the same class as at Edgbaston, there therefore seems no good reason for excluding the Hamlet of Bordesley from the Union. … The Manors of Saltley and Little Bromwich which adjoin Bordesley on the North may be considered as rural districts, the population not exceeding altogether 1350 persons, and they contain at present but few respectable inhabitants: Erdington Manor which adjoins Nechelles on the North is quite a large rural district containing about 1200 Inhabitants, and therefore neither of these seem to have a claim to be united to the Town. It has occurred to me that possibly the reason for excluding Bordesley might be to preserve a continuous line, as the South-Eastern Boundary of the Borough from Nechelles to Edgbaston.
>
> This however is not a sufficient reason for excluding so populous a Hamlet, containing so many Birm[m] people as residents…[26]

For Harris the key was whether these hamlets contained residents whose main interests were in the town of Birmingham. Thus Bordesley with its 'persons in Business in Birm[m]' merited inclusion in the constituency, while Erdington Manor 'a large rural district' did not. An important additional part of Harris' reasoning for including these locations was to help ensure the electoral situation in the newly enfranchised Birmingham would be acceptable to Lord Calthorpe: 'By this mixture of the rural Districts of Edgbaston and Bordesley, I certainly think some portion of the popular tendencies of the Bill will be abated.'[27] As with Hutton and

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[25] G. Yates, *An Historical and Descriptive Sketch of Birmingham; with Some Account of its Environs* (Birmingham, 1830), p. 235.
[26] BAHS, MS2126/3/5/f/1831/1/22, Draft Letter, John Harris to Lord Calthorpe, 9 Aug. 1831.
[27] Ibid.

Guest's definitions of the town, the key was whether the area was nearby, built up, inhabited and contributed to the public life of the town, though Harris and Calthorpe's interest was in a particular kind of contribution to public life.

The issue of Edgbaston is more complex. In 1780 Edgbaston was a small village based around the parish church, St. George's. Much of the parish was owned by the Calthorpe family, who had bought the manor of Edgbaston in 1717. They began to grant building leases in 1786, granting nine by 1796. The growth of Edgbaston took off from 1810.[28] Table 3.1 shows the change in the number of ratepayers in the parish of Edgbaston over this period.

Table 3.1, Ratepayers of the Parish of Edgbaston.

	1788	**1801**	**1831**
No. of ratepayers	128	137	606
Total rate collected	£75.6s.3¼d.	£79.10s.11½d.	£378.13s.10½d.

Sources: BAHS, CP/ED/2/1/1, Edgbaston Rate Book, 1788-1792; CP/ED/2/1/3, Edgbaston Rate Book, 1800-1810; CP/ED/2/1/7, Edgbaston Rate Book, 1831-2.

There are two main reasons for considering Edgbaston to be part of Birmingham, though probably only by the end of the second decade of the nineteenth century. First, by the 1820s there were a significant number of residents in Edgbaston who were strongly connected (by business or familial ties) to Birmingham. As John Harris stated in 1831, 'it is even more desirable for the Inhabitants of Edgbaston to have an interest in returning members of Birm^{m} than for the County, because nearly all of them have establishments at Birmingham, and are deeply interested in all its local concerns'.[29] Similarly James Drake wrote 'it [Edgbaston] has become a smart and fashionable appendage to Birmingham.'[30] Table 3.2 shows the increase in the proportion of Edgbaston ratepayers present in Birmingham trade directories. Secondly, by the 1830s Birmingham and Edgbaston were increasingly physically linked by the area known as Islington (figure 3.4).

[28] E. Hopkins, *Birmingham: The First Manufacturing Town in the World, 1760-1840* (London, 1989), p. 121.
[29] MS2126/3/5/f/1831/1/22, Harris to Calthorpe, 9 Aug. 1831.
[30] Drake, *Picture*, p. 97.

Table 3.2, Edgbaston Ratepayers Present in the Birmingham Trade Directories.

Year	Total no. of ratepayers	Ratepayers present in Birmingham trade directory	Percentage (%)
1788	128	44	34
1801	137	54	39
1831	606	348	57

Sources: BAHS, CP/ED/2/1/1; CP/ED/2/1/3; CP/ED/2/1/7; G. Hunter, *The Distant Traders Guide and Residents Local Directory, for the Mercantile Town of Birmingham* (Birmingham, 1788); *Chapman's Birmingham Directory, or, Alphabetical List of the Merchants, Tradesmen, and Principal Inhabitants of the Town of Birmingham* (Birmingham, 1801); *Pigot & Co.'s Commercial Directories of Birmingham, Worcester, and their Environs* (London, 1830).

Growth in the size of suburbs has been taken as evidence of the emergence of the middle class as they separated themselves, mentally and in terms of location, from their work and the poor.[31] Undoubtedly, an increasing number of Birmingham residents moved to areas like Edgbaston that were separate from the main area of the town. However, this process has too quickly been linked to a process of social-group formation. There are two reasons to doubt this link. First, individuals could move in the opposite direction, or move back and forth between the town centre and areas like Edgbaston. For example, Thomas Clark Junior lived his early life in Lionel St, in central Birmingham, before his father built a house in Edgbaston in 1815. When Clark married in 1822 he took a house in Frederick St, Edgbaston; however, in 1824 he moved back to Lionel St before moving in 1827 to Handsworth for health reasons.[32] Furthermore, as will be shown below, throughout this period, large numbers of propertied individuals continued to reside within the town centre. Such patterns of residence do not fit a narrative of class formation through geographical differentiation. Secondly, the geographical separation of home and work did not necessarily entail a mental separation. Such an assumption relies on an overly simplistic public/private divide. Work was not simply 'public' and home was not wholly 'private'. Indeed, much recent scholarship has stressed the

[31] L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850*, rev. edn. (London, 2002), pp. 24, 43, 365-69.

[32] BAHS, MS1114/2, Autobiographical Notebook of Thomas Clark, Apr. 1815-Oct. 1816, pp. 179-81; MS1114/16, Memoir of Thomas Clark, May 1821-Spring 1824, pp. 134-5; MS1114/16, Memoir of Thomas Clark, Apr. 1824-Oct. 1825.

Figure 3.4 is not currently available in ORA.

Figure 3.4, Islington.

link between private and public in business activities; for example, the importance of reputation to credit or the familial investment patterns used to manage financial risk.[33] If those who moved out of the town centre did not have an dichotomous view of public and private, work and home, town and suburb, then it is unclear how suburbanization entailed the creation of a middle-class identity. The issue of gentry residence and involvement in the town will be discussed later in this chapter.

Definitions of Birmingham in this period embraced the entirety of the built-up area which grew over the eighteenth century around the original nucleus focused on New Street, High Street and Digbeth. As areas not within the parish boundaries were built on and became populated by individuals with interests in Birmingham, they were brought within an understanding of the town as an environment linked by physical connections, shared economic activity and characteristics of industry and quality.

Using the Town

Having sketched the limits of the town both as an imagined concept and as an urban environment we now need to consider how propertied individuals used and moved through the town, and how this affected how they thought about and described the town. Stobart, Hann and Morgan have suggested that towns had internal hierarchies. Different areas were characterized by different activities and were thought of differently by the inhabitants.[34] Was Birmingham a geographically hierarchical town? Did propertied individuals only use and live in certain areas? Did they describe different areas in different ways, or did they tend to describe Birmingham as a town without division?

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[33] M. Finn, *The Character of Credit: Personal Debt in English Culture, 1740-1914* (Cambridge, 2003); R.J. Morris, *Men, Women and Property in England, 1780-1870: A Social and Economic History of Family Strategies Amongst the Leeds Middle Classes* (Cambridge, 2005).

[34] J. Stobart, A. Hann and V. Morgan, *Spaces of Consumption: Leisure and Shopping in the England Town, c. 1680-1830* (London and New York, 2007), pp. 78-83.

In order to map the areas used and resided in by propertied individuals two surveys have been undertaken. First, a set of luxury trades have been plotted on a series of maps. The trades chosen were high-order luxury trades designed to conform to a relatively limited definition of luxury; as Bob Harris puts it, '[t]rades that are indisputably markers of fashion in the early nineteenth century'.[35] The six trades were identified in the trade directories for 1780, 1801, 1818 and 1830 and then plotted on a map from 1839.[36] The results of this analysis can be seen in figures 3.5-3.8.[37] There was an obvious expansion of the luxury trades between 1780 and 1801. This twenty-year period saw significant growth in the physical environment of the town and, for the first thirteen years, in its population. After 1793 there was a depression caused by the outbreak of war with Revolutionary France. Recovery in Birmingham did not occur until 1811. This makes the increase in these businesses more striking. It seems most likely that it was driven by the considerable increase in population (from 48,253 in 1778 to 73,653 in 1791) and in building, which occurred in the period 1785-1793, when the town expanded extensively south of the River Rea, and when the development of the Colmore Estate (the area north and west of St Philip's church) was completed.[38]

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35 B. Harris, 'Cultural Change in Provincial Scottish Towns, c. 1700-1820', *HJ*, 54/1 (2011), p. 122. I have used Harris' 'high order luxury trades' as a basis for this analysis (see pp. 122, 124-5) but have removed jewellers and carvers and gilders as all were common trades in Birmingham rather than the rare luxury trades they were elsewhere; hairdressers were also very common. The trades identified were perfumers, upholsterers, confectioners, coachmakers and portrait painters.

36 The same map was used for each year to allow for an easy comparison. However, it is important to remember that the map represents a more developed town than that existing at the time each sample was taken.

37 The trade directories used are *The Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Dudley, Bilston, and Willenhall Directory* (Birmingham, 1780); *Chapman's Birmingham Directory*; *Wrightson's New Triennial Directory of Birmingham, Including an Alphabetical List of the Merchants, Tradesmen, and Respectable Inhabitants of the town* (Birmingham, 1818); and *Pigot & Co.'s Birmingham Directory.*

38 C.W. Chalklin, *The Provincial Towns of Georgian England: A Study of the Building Process, 1740-1820* (London, 1974), pp. 231, 274-5, 279-80, 285-8.

Figure 3.5, Luxury Trades 1780.
Figure 3.5 is not currently available in ORA.

Perfumers – purple

Upholsterers – yellow

Confectioners – blue

Coachmakers – green

Portrait painters – light blue

Figure 3.6, Luxury Trades, 1801.
Figure 3.6 is not currently available in ORA.

Figure 3.7, Luxury Trades, 1818.
Figure 3.7 is not currently available in ORA.

Figure 3.8, Luxury Trades, 1830.
Figure 3.8 is not currently available in ORA.

Birmingham underwent a partial economic recovery in the years 1811-15, before the end of the war caused another economic downturn. Recovery came only in 1819-20.[39] Despite these economic fluctuations, the total number of luxury trades between 1801 and 1818 increased from forty one to fifty two. The distribution of luxury trades in 1801 and 1818 did not change a great deal, apart from a slight growth in the concentration around St. Phillips. The impression is of concentration in a central area with luxuries slowly spreading outwards. The picture for 1830 suggests this process continued. Hannah Barker has argued that luxury consumption was clustered in town centres in this period; the evidence for Birmingham suggests that this picture was beginning to break down by the 1820s and 1830s.[40] Figures 3.7 and 3.8 both confirm and add to contemporary description. James Drake in 1825 commented,

> From the farther parts of Bull-street, and of Dale-End, down to the lower extremity of High-street, the sides have long-formed lines, almost unbroken, of shops; but late years and increasing demand have brought great part of New-street into requisition, as well as almost the whole of Digbeth, and portions of other streets connected with these.[41]

In 1829 William Smith wrote,

> The leading and principal streets in Birmingham are mostly of good widths, and contain the better description of houses and retail shops, the latter being most numerous in Bull Street, High Street, Digbeth, Snow Hill, Dale End, New Street, and several adjoining streets. The greater part of the best shops are situate in High Street, Bull Street, and New Street, the two former streets presenting an almost unbroken range of them on both sides from end to end.[42]

Figure 3.7 suggests that New Street, High Street, Dale End and Bull Street were indeed home to the most prestigious of Birmingham's shops. This concentration in the centre of the town meant that the propertied inhabitants of the town had to move through the centre of the town even if they lived elsewhere. This area was also the site of many of the town's major cultural

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39 Ibid., pp. 287-8, 292.
40 Barker, *Business*, pp. 90-4.
41 Drake, *Picture*, p. 69.
42 W. Smith, *A New and Complete History of the County of Warwick* (Birmingham, 1829), p. 311.

venues (the Theatre, the Royal Hotel, King Edward's Grammar School, and the Society of Arts) suggesting the area bounded by New Street, Colmore Row, Bull Street, Dale End and High Street was a vital one for propertied shopping and cultural activities throughout this period, even if later in the period it lost its monopoly of luxury commerce.

It is impractical to map the residences of every propertied individual residing in Birmingham. Instead the 1801 Guardians of the Poor and the 1818 subscribers to the Blue Coat School (founded 1722) were mapped (figures 3.9-3.10). The Guardians represent an element of Birmingham's governing elite.[43] 882 of the subscribers resided in Birmingham; 63 subscribers lived in locations beyond the area covered by the map, mainly in nearby settlements, such as Edgbaston, Harborne or Handsworth; only one came from further afield (Bath).

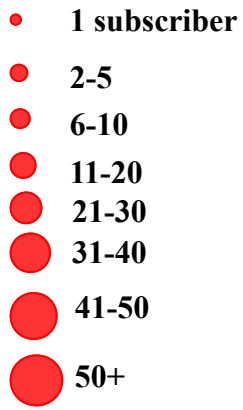
In 1801 there was a concentration of Guardians in the central area of the town bounded by New Street and High Street in the south and Newhall Street and Bull Street/Snow Hill in the north. Beyond this there were a number of outliers: four on the Crescent, two in St Mary's Row, and one each in Bristol St, Deritend and Caroline St. It suggests that this element of the governing elite was concentrated in the central area which contained so many luxury trades. While the Guardians were relatively concentrated, figure 3.10 suggests that propertied individuals more broadly could reside throughout the town. The largest concentrations were in High St (86), New St (45), Dale End (37), Bull St (37), Newhall St (34) and Snow Hill (32). This was the same central area inhabited by the Guardians. The map suggests there were few propertied individuals resident in the Digbeth and Deritend area in the south-east, perhaps because of the less salubrious environment (it was prone to flooding and had open sewers).[44] The fact that the Guardians were a governing elite based around civic activity perhaps explains why they were focused on the centre of the town, and did not include individuals

[43] They are discussed further in chapter 5.

[44] M.J. Wise and P. O'N. Thorpe, 'The Growth of Birmingham, 1800-1950', in R.H. Kinvig, J.G. Smith and M.J. Wise (eds.), *Birmingham and its Regional Setting: A Scientific Survey* (Birmingham, 1950), p. 221.

Figure 3.9, Guardians of the Poor Residences, 1801.
Figure 3.9 is not currently available in ORA.

Figure 3.10, Blue Coat School Subscribers, 1818.
Figure 3.10 is not currently available in ORA.



resident outside the town, unlike the 63 subscribers not included in figure 3.10. This reinforces the arguments I have made in previous chapters about the plural nature of propertied society. There was no one propertied residential pattern. Instead, residence depended on the particular nature of the group examined.

Describing the Town

Many descriptions of Birmingham by authors within propertied society appeared in histories, guides and trade directories and so were not simple descriptions of the town. However, the particular choices they made in describing the town reveal aspects of their perceptions of its geographical structure. In particular they tend to ignore or play down the variation and division suggested by the patterns of residence and use discussed above.

James Bisset accompanied his *Magnificent Directory* of 1800 with two poems; one was entitled 'A Poetic Survey Round Birmingham, &c.', the other 'The Ramble of the Gods through Birmingham'.[45] These two poems set the scene for the trade directory which followed, but they also served as descriptions of Birmingham. Bisset presented himself as a publicist for the town; he described a vibrant, contented industrial town driven by commerce and inhabited by industrious individuals.

Bisset's purpose was clear from the outset; in an 'Address to the Reader' he wrote,

> Engagements in business, fill most of my time,
> And little, indeed, can I trifle with rhyme;
> But having invented a mode grand and new,
> T'exhibit the *Birmingham Trades* at a view,
> I thought a Description, in brief, of the place,
> Some *Strangers* might please, to my *Townsmen* do grace,
> And, though it be told, in a plain, simple way,
> May act as a Guide, when they take a survey.[46]

[45] See p. 149 above for Bisset's social position.
[46] Bisset, *Poetic Survey*, p. vi.

This emphasized the industry of the town and author (so great he had little time to write). Furthermore he laid claim to a plain, simple style, rather than the grand eloquence of epic poetry. There is none of the danger and colour of a work like John Gay's *Trivia* (1716) in Bisset. This is a picture of a town where the greatest peril is being overcharged for a hackney coach.[47] The reader is presented with a rapid tour of the industrial and cultural highlights of Birmingham and the surrounding area, portraying it as a place of culture and industry united in the pursuit of progress.

Bisset's poetry was designed to promote Birmingham as a town where genius and industry worked hand-in-hand. This, of course, was linked to the main body of his publication: the trade directory. Throughout his poetry Bisset directed the reader to particular prints in the directory and so literally linked the 'genius' of Birmingham's industry to the 'art' of Birmingham's culture. It was a publication which expressed both great pride in the town and aimed at promoting Birmingham's economy.

Bisset adopted a literary method that required the urban landscape to be explored and narrativized. He used these two poems to construct a story in which Birmingham was free of confusion, blockages or inefficiency. The order in which Bisset described the notable buildings and industries of Birmingham is not one which would make any sense if you were using the poems as a guide for walking through Birmingham and the surrounding countryside. The first poem, the 'Poetic Survey', jumped around from considering places within the town to notable buildings in the locality and back again. For example, Bisset drew attention to the wharfs on the western side of the town, before moving on to Soho and the seats of a number of local gentry.[48] However, seven pages later he referred to the coal and timber wharfs, which stood only a hundred yards from the wharfs pointed out earlier.[49] The second poem made no

[47] For hackney coaches see ibid., pp. 25-6; for Gay see C. Brant and S. Whyman (eds.), *Walking the Streets of Eighteenth-Century London: John Gay's* Trivia *(1716)* (Oxford, 2007).
[48] Ibid., p. 10.
[49] Ibid., p. 17.

more geographical sense.

Why did Bisset not write a topographically correct account of Birmingham? His motive may have been similar to Gay's in his *Trivia*, where the impression of movement represented London in a particular way. Alison Stenton suggests that the act of moving through an urban space is intimately connected to the construction of an idea of a coherent urban environment.[50] Thus, in writing two poems in which movement is central to their structure, Bisset sought to create a understanding of the town bound together by the imagined act of moving through it. However, this was not simply a device to strengthen the image of the town as a coherent entity; it also created an idea of Birmingham as a town in which movement was easy for both people and goods. All aspects of Bisset's poems were aimed at creating the image of Birmingham as the ideal manufacturing town. This was reflected in the praise heaped upon Birmingham's manufacturers, most obviously in the description of Soho as 'where *Genius* and *Arts* preside,/*Europa's* wonder and *Britannia's* pride'.[51] The descriptions of Birmingham's other manufacturing trades were not as rapturous, but they left the reader in no doubt about the quality and brilliance of Birmingham goods and the ingenuity of the town's inhabitants. For example, Bisset pointed to the many patents issued to the inhabitants as proof of their manufacturing prowess.[52]

In addition to its containing industrious inhabitants, Bisset drew attention to other aspects eighteenth-century Birmingham which made it a successful manufacturing town. He wrote of the mail and other coaches '*Hourly* setting out/For ev'ry *Town* and *County* round about and safe conveyance had to ev'ry part'.[53] One of the few times Bisset was critical of the town was when describing aspects of the urban environment that rendered movement difficult. He criticized the Hackney coach drivers for charging what they liked, and he was

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[50] A. Stenton, 'Spatial Stories: Movement in the City and Cultural Geography', in Brant and Whyman (eds.), *Walking the Streets*, pp. 64-5.
[51] Bisset, *Poetic Survey*, p. 12.
[52] Ibid., p. 35.
[53] Ibid., p. 25.

critical of the streets, 'all the stones/Are set the wrong way up, in the shape of cones, and *Strangers* limp along the best pav'd street'.[54] Another key advantage was Birmingham's banks,

> Of *Banks* we've Four, - than which none in the land
> Upon a steadier, firmer basis stand.
> When *Stocks* were low, and discount's rapid force,
> Had almost drain'd *Old Abr'am's* grand resource,
> The Credit of our *Bankers* firmly stood,
> As sterling *Gold*, their *Notes* were full as good,
> Nor e'er were question'd – all throughout the land.
> The Reason's plain – they pay '*Upon Demand*.'[55]

These were the strengths of Birmingham: it was full of industrious and ingenious inhabitants, had excellent transport links ensuring movement through the town was easy and that goods could be transported beyond the town by road and canal to any part of the country, and it had reliable financial services which ensured that Birmingham merchants and manufacturers were as reliable Birmingham goods.

Bisset's understanding of the town was organized around commerce and manufacturing. His concern was not with workers, except to urge richer inhabitants to contribute to their relief through charity and purchasing Birmingham goods, or to point to the good relations between rich and poor in Birmingham. Instead, he was concerned with the goods produced by the manufacturers. Thus when the Gods visited gilders in Birmingham they made no comment on the workers; instead, they focused on 'Each *Stamp*, each *Lathe*, and *Press*', similarly when viewing the japanning process their focus was on 'th' improvements of the *Art*.'[56] There was no hint the town might include less salubrious areas or even areas where the poor lived.

James Drake's *Picture of Birmingham* (1825) used a rather different topographical

[54] Ibid., pp. 26-7.
[55] Ibid., p. 26.
[56] Ibid., p. 30.

technique to give a similar picture of Birmingham, though he was less concerned with industry than Bisset. Drake was a radical book seller and publisher. He supported the Birmingham Political Union, and later published some of William Hawkes Smith's Owenite writings. In 1830 he appeared in the trade directory, and his property had an assessed value of £45, suggesting that he had a reasonable, though not large income in the context of the ratebook data presented in chapter 1. He described five walks through the town (figure 3.11). In these, Drake described the major buildings and other landmarks in the town. He adopted this method in order to promote architectural improvement, which he thought was key to the commercial success of the town and to the improvement of inhabitants and visitors.

> Fair discussion of these subjects is not without its utility. Strangers receive their first impressions from the objects which strike their attention in the streets of the town they visit; and the residents have them perpetually before their eyes. To be *spectators of elegant forms*, improves the taste of all beholders; and if proprietors go to expenses for the purpose of ensuring profit to themselves, out of the gratification given to the public, there is every reason to wish that the same public should receive its instruction from *capable tutors*; should enjoy its "cheap pleasures" of sight, unalloyed by any unnecessary deductions, arising from erroneous combination, incongruities, or absurdities.[57]

Like Bisset, he sought to promote Birmingham as an important, impressive town. The use of topographically correct walks served a similar function to Bisset's imagined itineraries; they forged the town into a coherent form. This was not a picture of the real Birmingham; there were few mentions of the housing of the poor (save to remark on Birmingham's superiority to other towns in that regard) or of dirt, noise and smell. Instead the overwhelming majority of his mentions of buildings, events and people paint a picture of Birmingham's population as successful, hard-working and philanthropic. He described the charitable institutions of the town, its cultural institutions and events, the transport links (hackney coaches, canals etc.) and the most notable manufacturers of the town (Boulton & Watt and Edward Thomason). In describing Birmingham through the device of a number of walks

[57] Drake, *Picture*, p. iv, original emphasis.

Figure 3.11, Walks from J. Drake, *Picture of Birmingham* (1825).
Figure 3.11 is not currently available in ORA.

Drake was trying to give an account of the town that was (as he put it) 'livelier' than other descriptions.[58] This was, of course, partly about selling his work. However, his approach also made concrete as itineraries a progression of snapshots contained in other similar volumes. Most descriptions of towns in this period mentioned a series of 'principal buildings'.[59] By portraying the town through these Drake and other authors of accounts of Birmingham created an understanding of the town which was similar to the picture of the town's geography generated above through plotting propertied residences and high-order luxury trades; it privileged the centre of the town with occasional notable outliers. However, this did not change Drake's understanding of Birmingham as a unified town.

Figure 3.11 reveals that the comprehensiveness of Drake's account was imagined. The walks described by Drake did not encompass the whole town. Notably much of the north-east was not mentioned, despite the fact that this was the location of Birmingham's extensive gun industry.[60] Industry played a different role in Drake's work than it had in Bisset's. Whereas Bisset put industry front and centre in a work that sang the praises of Birmingham as an industrial town, Drake concentrated on the cultural aspects of the town. Drake put this emphasis down to the changing nature of the town:

> The magnitude and commercial importance of the Town of Birmingham, and the interest attached to its character, as the emporium of the mechanic and metallic arts, render a description of the place in the abstract, desirable;- while its rapid increase during the last few years, and the sudden advances made in the the hitherto almost neglected walks of *decoration*, render all previously-published descriptive works nearly useless, and call for a new and complete, yet succinct account of its present state.[61]

A growing, increasingly cultured town needed a guide that moved attention away from industry and towards the arts. Manufacturing was present in Drake's *Picture*, but it was in the

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58 Ibid., p. 31.
59 P. Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom: Liberalism and the Modern City* (London, 2003), p. 198.
60 Hopkins, *Birmingham*, p. 128.
61 Drake, *Picture*, p. iii, original emphasis.

background, providing the material goods and wealth necessary for the culturally improving town of Birmingham.

Both these authors understood Birmingham as a coherent, unified entity driven by industry towards growth and prosperity. Similar representations of the town can be found throughout the sources consulted in other sections of this thesis. Such understandings reproduced the more general discourse of Birmingham identity discussed above. However, this was in tension with the town's geographical divisions. Divisions which can be seen in the distribution of luxury retailers and in the variety of propertied residence patterns, both of which suggest Birmingham was geographically divided in complex ways which are not represented in Drake or Bisset's discussions, or other expressions of Birmingham's identity that stress unity in the successful pursuit of production and prosperity. However, these understandings of the town were not stable. They could change depending on the particular context in which individuals found themselves or their purpose in describing the town. For example, in his reminiscences, written between 1828 and 1832, Bisset showed an awareness of differences in status between various areas of Birmingham.[62] This suggests that Patrick Joyce rather over-reaches in suggesting that directories and town guides played a role as 'silent agents of … quasi-governmentality' creating and regulating the actions of those who read them, determining how they viewed the town.[63] While such publications may well have guided and shaped their readers' perceptions of the town (as they undoubtedly shape historians') we should be wary in suggesting they functioned as the 'silent agents' of a developing liberal understanding of the town.[64] Instead we should see them as reflecting individuals from particular sections of society trying to comprehend and convey to a particular audience an understanding of a changing urban environment. These accounts

[62] BAHS, ZZ32, 263924, Reminiscences of James Bisset, 1828-32, pp. 99, 126, 129, 152.
[63] Joyce, *Rule of Freedom*, p. 198.
[64] On this topic see Barrell, *Spirit*, p. 19; and A.F. O'Byrne, 'Walking, Rambling, and Promenading in Eighteenth-Century London: A Literary and Cultural History' (York Univ. Ph.D thesis, 2003), ch. 1.

sometimes coincided with other individuals' understandings or experiences of the town; sometimes they did not and they were reconfigured through use and reissue.

So far this discussion of these propertied authors' understandings of Birmingham has been solely concerned with the town and its internal organization. However, their Birmingham identity did not exist in a vacuum, it was linked to larger geographical concepts. It is to these extra-urban links that we shall now turn.

Beyond Birmingham: Concepts

Three concepts of the world beyond Birmingham were frequently used by propertied individuals in this period: the neighbourhood, the nation and the world beyond. Birmingham was understood in relation to all three and these concepts were vital to the creation of a particular Birmingham identity. These issues had important ramifications for local and national politics, and provided discursive structures which enabled disparate interests to coalesce at certain points forming temporary, broad-based social groups, most notably in the period 1830-32.

The term 'neighbourhood' was the most common phrase used to describe a geographical region related to, but separate from, the town. 'Neighbourhood' was a more flexible concept than 'Birmingham' in this period. Sometimes it was used, as we would use it, to describe a small area based on a place of residence; however, just as often, it was used to refer to larger geographical areas. Historians have rarely commented on this term, despite its frequent use in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[65] Katrina Navickas suggests that the 'neighbourhood' was defined by the distance that could be walked in a day.[66] In contrast, Alan Everitt argued that it was an upper-class notion based on the local visiting area of gentry

[65] A Google Ngram search for 'neighbourhood' suggests the term became increasingly prevalent from the 1740s onwards, peaking between the 1790s and 1830s, before slowly declining over the rest of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In comparison, 'region' only overtakes 'neighbourhood' in terms of frequency of use in the late 1840s, (http://books.google.com/ngrams) (accessed 30/7/12).

[66] K. Navickas, *Loyalism and Radicalism in Lancashire, 1798-1815* (Oxford, 2009), p. 19.

families and was therefore tied to the distance that could be covered in a carriage in one day.[67] I would suggest that both definitions are correct because 'neighbourhood' was a term whose definition changed according to the context it was used in. Thus, the neighbourhood of a carriage-owning gentleman was different from that of a labourer.

To illustrate this variation let us consider some examples. In 1812 propertied inhabitants of Birmingham were at the forefront of the movement calling for the repeal of the Orders in Council. Many in the town felt that the Orders were the cause of the recent commercial distress.[68] A petition was sent to parliament bearing 14,000 signatures.[69] In April and May 1812, twenty-three Birmingham manufacturers and merchants appeared before the committee of the Whole House and gave evidence against the Orders in Council. Thomas Attwood, the Birmingham banker and future MP, defined the economic 'neighbourhood' (a term he used) of Birmingham as everything within fifteen miles of the town.[70] He claimed this area was 'intimately connected together' through the commercial and industrial activities of Birmingham and the surrounding areas.[71] Within it, goods were manufactured and then transported to Birmingham in order for them to be exported. This concept of an economic area, with Birmingham at its heart as both a manufacturing centre and entrepôt, was corroborated by the other witnesses.[72]

This fifteen-mile area is illustrated in figure 3.12. It encompassed a number of other major manufacturing towns, notably Wolverhampton, West Bromwich, Dudley and Walsall. But it stopped just short Warwick, Coventry and Worcester, older towns with different economies and neighbourhoods of their own. This was a 'neighbourhood' based on a particular economic activity (the iron trades, particularly nail making) created for a particular

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67 A. Everitt, *Landscape and Community in England* (London, 1985), p. 12.
68 *Aris'*, 23, 30 Mar. 1812.
69 *Minutes of Evidence, Taken Before the Committee of the Whole House … Relating to the Orders in Council*, *PP 1812*, iii.1 (210), (http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&res_dat=xri:hcpp&rft_dat=xri:hcpp:fulltext:1812-002906) (accessed 24/2/12), p. 103.
70 Ibid., pp. 2, 5, 15.
71 Ibid., pp. 1, 13, 16, 18.
72 Ibid., pp. 20, 28, 43, 67, 100.

purpose (to demonstrate the economic consequences of the Orders in Council) and hence had a particular political charge. It represented this area as united and so sought to promote co-operation between the geographically disparate economic actors drawn together in the movement and also served to emphasize how widely the effects of the Orders in Council had been felt. This 'neighbourhood' was portrayed as a close-knit, mutually supportive area in which manufacturers and merchants exploited improved communications to their mutual benefit and contributed to the wealth of the area and the nation.[73] It was a different concept from the type of economic regions used by historians and historical geographers.[74] An economic region is a large-scale analytical tool imposed onto the past by scholars in order better to understand the nature of economic development and organization; Attwood's 'neighbourhood' was based on his own understanding and experience of Birmingham's economic connections in the ironware trades.

Figure 3.1 is not currently available in ORA.
Figure 3.12, The 'Neighbourhood of Birmingham' as defined by Thomas Attwood in 1812.

Historians' economic regions are general, neighbourhoods were particular to individuals. This can be demonstrated by considering a different economic neighbourhood. In 1816 John Reid of Fortrose wrote to William Mackenzie, a Birmingham cooper, requesting information about a resident of Loughborough. Reid assumed that Mackenzie would be able to provide this information because of his 'long establishment in Birmingham and likely acquaintance with the trading towns in the *neighbourhood* especially in the town of Loughborough which I understand is a town in one of your adjacent counties namely Leicestershire'.[75] This 'neighbourhood' was notably larger, Loughborough is forty-seven miles from Birmingham.

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[73] Ibid., p. 5.
[74] J. Langton, 'The Industrial Revolution and the Regional Geography of England', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 9 (1984), pp. 145-67; J. Stobart, *The First Industrial Region: North-West England, c. 1700-1760* (Manchester, 2004), esp. ch. 1.
[75] BAHS, MS2/1/3, John Reid to William Mackenzie, 19 Oct. 1816, my emphasis.

However, it was based on similar foundations: the economic relationships and knowledge of an individual.

'Neighbourhood' often referred to non-economic areas. Writing to William Withering Junior after his father's death, Barbara Spooner offered 'our sincere condolences upon your *irreperable* [*sic*] loss which is not *confined* to *yourselves* but extends to the *whole neighbourhood*'.[76] The term was also used in administrative sources. In 1796 a committee of the Guardians of the Poor reported that although the levies were unlikely to decrease:

> Yet the Committee has full confidence, if the Guardians in general would exert themselves in their own Neighbourhood, so as to prevent imposition, that the whole would soon be liquidated. Lists of the Poor have been made out in small districts, and put into the hands of the Guardians to visit …[77]

Elsewhere, the term was used to describe a cultural area. James Luckcock described a 'neighbourhood' which was defined by the publications produced and read.[78] Each of these examples are symptomatic of the casual way in which this term was used. They all have a basis in personal relationships. For example, Barbara Spooner referred to an area defined by those who knew William Withering and the Guardians referred to areas of Birmingham in which each Guardian's knowledge and connections would assist him in his duties.

The term also commonly appeared in the phrase 'town and neighbourhood'. In this case the neighbourhood was sometimes described as sharing characteristics which were attributed to Birmingham. For example, a broadside from 1817 described the 'happy Union of Patriotic Munificence and patient Endurance which eminently characterizes our own Town and Neighbourhood'.[79] It was also common in the titles of publications. In those instances it tended to indicate the constituency the work was aimed at. This served to group people together by suggesting shared interests.[80] Elsewhere it was linked to a particular individual or

[76] BAHS, ZZ35, 263548, Barbara Spooner to William Withering Junior, 14 Oct. 1789, original emphasis.
[77] BAHS, GP/B/2/1/1, Board of the Guardians Minutes, 1783-1806, 30 Aug. 1796.
[78] J. Luckcock, *Sequel to Memoirs in Humble Life* (Birmingham, 1825), p. 43.
[79] *Draft of a Declaration* (Birmingham, 1817), in BAHS LF05.2, 413436, Collection of Broadsides, p. 31.
[80] For example, *An Address to the Inhabitants of Birmingham, and its Neighbourhood* (Birmingham?, 1793);

group's contacts or knowledge. Thus, in 1816 the Guardians of the Poor resolved:

> that in the opinion of the committee it would be desirable in the first instance to fix upon Gentlemen of the Town and neighbourhood to officiate as Magistrates who would undertake the duties of the office without pecuniary reward and to wave the suggestion of a stipendiary Magistrate until there may appear an absolute necessity for such an appointment.[81]

Here it referred to an area small enough that the potential candidates for magistrates from the 'neighbourhood' would be sufficiently familiar with the town to act competently as a magistrate.

The key to the concept of the 'neighbourhood' was interest. Each of these definitions of a neighbourhood was linked to an individual's or a group's interest. These personal connections could then be imaginatively expanded (as with the economic neighbourhood) but personal connections remained at the heart of the definition.[82] It contrasts with our modern understanding of the region. Regions are not based on an individual's, or even a group's, experience or connections; instead, the are based on shared characteristics; for example, a shared economy.

The next concept in use to be considered is the nation. It appeared in two different forms in this period. First, there were appeals to particular characteristics of the English or British. This was particularly common in political contexts, most notably in appeals to the ancient constitution and the rights of 'free-born Englishmen'.[83] In this use of the nation, these Birmingham authors expressed similar ideas to many elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

The second version of the nation was more specific to Birmingham. As we have seen, during the late eighteenth century there developed an understanding of the particular qualities

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The Loyal Declaration of the Inhabitants of Birmingham and its Neighbourhood (Birmingham, 1819).

81 BAHS, GP/B/2/1/2, 24 Dec. 1816.

82 For the importance of imagination in extra-local identifications see B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983).

83 For a loyalist example see *A Letter to John Bull, Esq. Showing the Advantages of a Division of Land* (Birmingham, 1819), p. 6; for radical use see *A Correct Report of the Proceedings of a Meeting, Held at Newhall Hill, Birmingham, on Monday, July 12, 1819* (Birmingham, 1819), p. 8.

of Birmingham and its population.[84] This was in turn linked to the idea of the nation, in order to demonstrate Birmingham's importance to Britain's success and prosperity. This promoted a type of 'Birmingham Britishness' in which the qualities of the British nation were filtered through an understanding of Birmingham's characteristics and contribution.[85] Many of the examples given above in the discussion of civic pride fit this model. They portrayed the town as central to the commercial might which was at the heart of Britain's power. Thus, William Matthews in 1830 argued that Edmund Burke's description of Birmingham as the 'toy shop of Europe' was an insult to a place of such importance. He suggested he should have described it as,

> a favourite seat of the arts, a place celebrated for the perfection of its works of skill, - for its ingenious inventions without number, - for its prodigies of finished and sublime mechanism, - for productions which *gave a character to the country and the age*;- known and admired in every quarter of the globe, - famed for diffusing throughout the world the elegancies [*sic*] and conveniences of civilized life – the happy devices of modern ingenuity and refinement…[86]

Birmingham was understood not just as a remarkable town but as a vital part of the larger commercial and manufacturing nation of Great Britain. This dual identity (both Birmingham, and British) allowed individuals to express their attachment to the king and constitution while criticizing local problems, or Birmingham could be contrasted with other areas within Britain and portrayed as the pinnacle of 'Britishness'. 'Job Nott' expressed this well,

> There is not a Man, nor a Woman, nor a Boy, nor a Wench, that should not stick up for the Credit of the Town, both by exhibiting good *Manners*, and good *Wares*. When the poorest Labourer therefore is tempted to do wrong, let him start back; let him pause a moment --- and Reflect, that he is an *Englishman*, a *Birmingham Man*, answerable as far as he goes for his share of the good name of the Town.[87]

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84 See pp. 135-43, 160-62 above.

85 Here I am influenced by the notion of 'Lancashire Britishness' as defined by Katrina Navickas, see, *Loyalism*, pp. 3-4, 10-11, ch. 2.

86 W. Matthews, *A Sketch of the Principal Means Which Have Been Employed to Ameliorate the Intellectual and Moral Conditions of the Working Classes at Birmingham* (London, 1830), p. 4, emphasis added.

87 Job Nott, *Job Nott to His Cousin Mr. John Nott, Gent. Formerly Button Burnisher of Steelhouse-Lane, Birmingham* (Birmingham, 1798), p. 3.

This 'Birmingham Britishness' was the main lens through which the propertied authors who are discussed here understood their town, their nation and the relationship between the two.

The final geographical concept was the world beyond Great Britain. This concept was often expressed in terms of the characteristics of other nations, most common was a strong strain of anti-gallicism.[88] However, a more positive form existed as well. Key here were the commercial links between Birmingham and the rest of the world.[89] As William Hutton put it,

> The commercial spirit of the age, hath also penetrated beyond the confines of Britain, and explored the whole continent of Europe; nor does it stop there, for the West-Indies, and the American world, are intimately acquainted with the Birmingham merchants; and nothing but the exclusive command of the East-India Company, over the Asiatic trade, prevents our riders from treading upon the heels of each other, in the streets of Calcutta.[90]

The importance of the world beyond Great Britain to the town was frequently attested to by the witnesses from Birmingham when they gave evidence against the Orders in Council. They argued that the closure of the American trade had been disastrous to Birmingham. Attwood estimated the value of Birmingham's exports to America at between £800,000 and £1,000,000 a year. He claimed the collapse of this trade had led to the increase in the poor rates and the general suffering of the town's population.[91] This claim was echoed by the other witnesses.[92] Furthermore, they felt Birmingham was among the most successful and important places within this system. As Attwood replied to one question,

> Do you think that the manufacturers of Birmingham would fear the competition of any country whatever in their manufactures, where the trade was open? – Experience has shewn them there is no reason to fear that.[93]

His self-confidence was echoed by others.[94] Here, an understanding that Birmingham's

88 For example, *A Letter to His Fellow-Countrymen by an English Man* (Birmingham, 1819), p. 6.
89 Similar claims can be found in other industrial towns, see Barker, *Business*, p. 32.
90 Hutton, *History*, p. 70.
91 *Minutes ... Relating to the Orders in Council*, pp. 3-6.
92 Ibid., pp. 43, 57, 68.
93 Ibid., p. 17.
94 Ibid., p. 40.

prosperity was intimately linked to commerce throughout the world was combined with a self-confidence that Birmingham could compete with any other town or nation. This was a form of fierce nationalist localism, a 'Birmingham Britishness' brimming with confidence about the town's industrial prowess and international importance.

A Midlands Region?

This chapter has so far discussed the main geographical identities in this period: the town of Birmingham, and the concepts Birmingham's propertied inhabitants used to understand their town's and their own relation to larger contexts. However, there was one geographical concept that these propertied authors did not use: the region. Considering this absence demonstrates the extent to which the geographical concepts discussed above were shaped by propertied authors' experiences and understandings of Birmingham.

During this period there was no concept comparable to our understanding of the Midlands as a region: 'Midland' was rarely used, and 'West Midlands' never.[95] One common use was in reference to the Midland Circuit of the assizes. However, many of the counties we would define as part of the 'Midlands' (Worcestershire, Staffordshire, Shropshire and Herefordshire) were part of the Oxford, rather than the Midland, circuit.[96] Elsewhere when 'Midlands' was used it was usually subservient to the concept of Birmingham. For example, in 1831 there was a 'Grand Meeting of the Birmingham and other Political Unions of the Midlands Districts'. However, the Birmingham Union was differentiated from the others and

[95] P.M. Jones, 'The West Midlands: Searching for a Regional Identity', conference paper, 'The Emergence of the West Midlands: Culture, Communities and Change, 1779-1918', 31 Mar. 2012. Google Ngram (http://books.google.com/ngrams) (accessed 30/7/12) search for 'Midland', 'Midlands' and 'West Midlands' shows that 'Midland' was used occasionally in the 1790s and 1800, before becoming more common from the 1840s onwards. 'Midlands' began to appear in the 1880s, overtaking 'Midland' in the 1970s; 'West Midlands' trails far behind, registering on a small number of uses from the 1960s onward, though still fewer than the other two terms.

[96] *Aris'*, 7 Feb. 1780.

dominated the meeting.[97] Whenever 'Midland' or 'Midlands' appeared as a geographical term in this period it had no power. 'Birmingham', 'England', 'Britain' and other geographical concepts implied qualities or flaws and had a power in public discourse. In contrast 'Midland' referred solely to an area of the British Isles and was associated with no characteristics or stereotypes.

This absence is surprising. Many scholars have suggested that the region was the most important geographical unit in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[98] The reason for absence of a regional identity in Birmingham is not simply a case of anachronistic expectations. For example, Katrina Navickas has recently demonstrated the existence and importance of a particular Lancashire identity.[99] Thirty years ago Jack Langton argued that the national integration that accompanied industrialization served to heighten awareness of differences between regional cultures and economies.[100] Birmingham, which was undoubtedly tied into national networks of various kinds (as discussed below), suggests that this process did not necessitate the existence of a regional identity. In both this section and the next I suggest that, for Birmingham at least, the region, in terms of connections, practice and consciousness was not as important to contemporaries as some historians and historical geographers have suggested. In particular, scholars have suggested the the West Midlands did exist as a self-conscious region in this period.[101] The fact that no such identity was expressed in Birmingham during this period must cast doubt on such arguments. In Birmingham extra-regional links were just as important and the town itself remained the main focus for self-identity.[102]

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97 *Report of the Proceedings at a Meeting of the Inhabitants of Birmingham, Held on Newhall Hill, October 3, 1831* (Birmingham, 1831), p. 3.

98 Everitt, *Landscape and Community*, ch. 2; C. Phythian-Adams, 'Introduction an Agenda for English Local History', in idem (ed.), *Societies, Cultures and Kinship, 1580-1850* (London, 1993), pp. 1-23.

99 Navickas, *Loyalism*, ch. 2.

100 Langton, 'The Industrial Revolution'; Stobart, *First Industrial Region*, pp. 2-3; Townsend, 'Town, County and Region', p. 3

101 Townsend, 'Town, County and Region', pp. 5-6, 206; J. Stobart, 'Regions, Localities, and Industrialisation: Evidence from the East Midlands circa 1780-1840', *Environment and Planning A*, 33/7 (2001), p. 1321; Money, *Experience and Identity*, pp. 1-2, 24,27, 282-3.

102 This does not mean that region-based analysis is not helpful for examining certain topics, my point is that we

In explaining the absence of a regional identity among the inhabitants of Birmingham four main points must be made. First, the Midlands lacked the obvious geographical boundaries of an area such as Lancashire. The Irish Sea and the Pennines provided readily appreciable limits to Lancashire which did not exist in the middle of England. Secondly, the fact that the Midlands ranged over a number of counties also militated against a unitary identity. In what we term the Midlands, people looked in different directions, to a range of different institutions throughout each of the counties involved. Thirdly, the strong identity of the town of Birmingham tended to inhibit the development of rival identities. This reason was particularly important; the concept of Birmingham's identity examined above played a key role in the politics of this period. Fourthly, propertied individuals within the town had a wide range of connections with the world beyond Birmingham, but these were not restricted to the Midlands. These multiple connections reduced the possibility of propertied individuals thinking in terms of a Midlands region.

In relation to the political salience of place-based identities, a number of historians have suggested that politics is key to the creation of social identities.[103] A similar point can be made regarding geographical identities. Politics, particularly the politics of parliamentary representation, encouraged individuals to form perceptions about issues such as Birmingham's relationship to London and to other represented and unrepresented towns. This, in turn, reinforced discourses about Birmingham's importance. There were no political issues of similar importance pushing individuals towards identifying with a region in this period.

This can be seen in the leading role played by Birmingham in the agitation for parliamentary reform in the early nineteenth century. The Birmingham radicals argued for representation not just on the basis of natural rights or the constitution but also in terms of a

need to be careful we do not suggest that categories created by historians represent contemporary concepts. Even if we can identify groups of individuals acting in a regional area we should not assume this meant they identified with that region, or even articulated its existence.

[103] See p. 41 above.

discourse of valuable interests and economic success. The BPU expressed this idea in their frequent references to the political rights of the 'industrious classes' and an understanding of Birmingham as particularly (maybe uniquely) ingenious and hard-working. For example, though disagreeing with the need for a Political Union, Joseph Parkes agreed wholeheartedly that 'the population, intelligence, and opulence of the town of Birmingham and the spirit of the British Constitution, entitle Birmingham to send representatives to Parliament.'[104] Much of the power of the BPU came from its evocation of Birmingham's population as socially cohesive and industrious. These qualities were set against the corruption of metropolitan boroughmongers and it was claimed that, of properly represented in the nation's councils, they would lead to reform and prosperity.[105]

This argument about the value of Birmingham was not limited to the BPU. It was common throughout this period among both radicals and loyalists. Thus, in 1817 the radical W. Moore based a call for parliamentary reform on the value of Birmingham's ' once valuable Artizans hungry and in rags'.[106] On the loyalist side, 'Job Nott' argued that no reform was required because Birmingham's value meant it would always be virtually represented:

> Such is Birmingham, a place flourishing beyond all example, a place of that consequence, that its petitions and remonstrances are instantly attended to by the King and his Ministers. I have heard that Sir Robert Lawley should say, that when he waited on Mr. Pitt on Birmingham business he never was suffered to wait a moment it was only to announce the Warwickshire Member, & the doors flew open directly[107]

The fact that both sides of the parliamentary reform debate could appeal to a notion of Birmingham's unique identity to support their case illustrates just how common this concept

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[104] *Report of the Proceedings at the Meeting of the Inhabitants of Birmingham, Held on Monday, the 25th of January, 1830* (Birmingham, 1830), p. 14.

[105] For example, see *The Late Prosperity, and the Present Adversity of the Country, Explained; the Proper Remedies Considered* (London and Birmingham, 1826), p. 114; *Report of the Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting of the Birmingham Political Union, on Monday, July 26th, 1830* (Birmingham, 1830), pp. 4-6.

[106] *Town Meeting. A Report of the Proceedings of the Town's Meeting, Held on Newhall Hill, on Wednesday, January 22, 1817* (Birmingham, 1817), p. 10.

[107] Job Nott, *Job Nott's Humble Advice* (Birmingham, 1792), p. 5.

was. The loyalists argued that Birmingham's value to the country meant it would never need direct representation; the radicals stated that this value was the reason why the town deserved it. They might have been operating with different understandings of the British system of representation, but there was a consensus over the importance of Birmingham to the nation.

These moments of political crisis and conflict forced people to think about and clarify their identity. In these quotations we can see individuals thinking about the value and position of Birmingham within a national economic and political system. In each case they tended towards a Birmingham-based understanding of the world and of politics. Through the concept of 'Birmingham Britishness', the propertied inhabitants were able to move seamlessly between the four concepts discussed in this chapter and, in political terms, to think about their relationship with national politics without the need for a concept of the region.

Beyond Birmingham: Connections

If the politics of Parliamentary reform in the early nineteenth century suggest one reason why these propertied authors did not use a concept of a region, then another important reason was the extent of propertied individuals' connections beyond Birmingham. These connections did not conform to a Midlands region and thus militated against the emergence of that concept. These connections can be classified into five categories: personal connections, transport links, business and economic links, cultural and religious establishments and events, and political links. In Birmingham, the developments associated with urbanization and industrialization reinforced local identities rather than promoting larger geographical identities.[108] By including personal, political and cultural connections I hope to avoid the over-emphasis on economic connections found in most region-focused accounts.[109]

[108] For a similar process in the 'East Midlands' see Stobart, 'Regions, Localities, and Industrialisation', pp. 1305-25.

[109] See the criticisms of such accounts in Townsend, 'Town, County and Region', pp. 13-15; A.B. Murphy,

Personal relationships and connections can be traced by considering some of the correspondence networks from this period. Susan Whyman has recently highlighted the importance of letter writing to all levels of Georgian society, but especially to the propertied. She suggests that these letters were vital to the creation of personal and group identities, and I would add that they allowed both sides to begin to understand something of the world beyond their immediate experience.[110] Examining just a handful of correspondents resident in this period reveals how extensive the personal connections of propertied individuals could be. In 1780 Matthew Boulton sent 226 letters to 41 different locations. The most popular locations were London, Birmingham and Soho. 51 letters were addressed to London, 32 to Soho and 82 to Birmingham. The rest were spread throughout the country, some within the 'Midlands' such as Lichfield (three), Coventry (two), but many were outside that notional area, for example, three letters were sent to Bath, six to Bristol, seven to Sandleford and two to Manchester.[111] Furthermore, we can trace Boulton's movements in 1780. He began the year in Chacewater before travelling to Marazian, St Austall, Plymouth, Exeter, Bath, Bristol, Newport, Soho, Lichfield, Sheffield, Leeds, York, Newcastle, Durham, Matlock, Oxford, Richmond, London, Redruth, Cornwall and Cusgrove. Boulton was a special case and was linked into many national and international networks.[112] However, he reveals the possible extent to which propertied correspondence networks could stretch throughout the nation. The correspondence networks of less prominent propertied individuals tended to be less extensive but they could still cover large distances.[113] During the 1820s and 1830s William Sumner, a

'Regions as Social Constructs: the Gap between Theory and Practice', *Progress in Human Geography*, 15/1 (1991), pp. 24, 27-8. For studies that focus on economic connections see J. Stobart and and N. Raven (eds.), *Towns, Regions and Industries: Urban and Industrial Change in the Midlands, c. 1700-1840* (Manchester, 2005); Stobart, *First Industrial Region*.

110 S. Whyman, *The Pen and the People: English Letter Writers, 1660-1800* (Oxford, 2009), ch. 4, esp. pp. 112-15.

111 Stobart and Raven define the 'Midlands' in their 'Introduction: Industrialisation and Urbanisation in a Regional Context', in J. Stobart and and N. Raven, *Towns*, p. 11; the counties included are Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, Rutland, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Worcestershire and Warwickshire.

112 For these networks see Jones, *Industrial Enlightenment*, pp. 48-59, 82-109. For similar enlightenment connections elsewhere see C.W.J. Withers, *Placing the Enlightenment: Thinking Geographically about the Age of Reason* (Chicago, IL, 2007), ch. 2.

113 This was of course enabled by the improvements in transport and in the postal service, see Whyman, *Pen and*

grocer and druggist who married William Hutton's niece, Harriet, in 1821, received a number of letters from Grantham (73 miles from Birmingham) and from Bingham in Nottinghamshire (60 miles).[114] William Mackenzie, a cooper, received numerous letters from Fortrose, Edinburgh and Greenock in the period 1808-35. In MacKenzie's case these letters were from members of his family and it is probable that such familial links provided contacts beyond Birmingham for many individuals within propertied society.[115] It should also be noted that an individual might have personal links beyond Birmingham without extensive correspondence networks. In his memoirs Thomas Clark remarked that he had an unusually small number of correspondents. 'Few persons perhaps, in the same station of life, have had fewer correspondents than myself'.[116] Despite this he was linked into local and national radical political networks through his father.

The eighteenth century saw a tremendous growth in transport links throughout much of Britain, and Birmingham was no exception. Hutton wrote of the importance of roads in promoting social interactions over a long distance, 'According as a country is improved in her roads, so will she stand in the scale of civilization. … The manners and the roads of the English, have been refining together for about 1700 years.'[117] He also commented that,

> From Birmingham, as from a grand centre, issues twelve roads, that point to as many towns; some of these, within memory, have scarcely been passable; all are mended, but though much is done, more is wanted. In an upland country, like that about Birmingham, where there is no river of size, and where the heads only of the streams shew themselves: the stranger would be surprised to hear, that through most of these twelve roads he cannot travel in a flood with safety.[118]

Hutton's wish was fulfilled and the quality of the roads increased greatly during this period. In

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the People, ch. 2; M.J. Daunton, *Progress and Poverty: An Economic and Social History of Britain, 1700-1850* (Oxford, 1995), ch. 11.

114 BAHS, MS1749, Sumner Family Papers.

115 BAHS, MS2/3, Correspondence of William Mackenzie, 1808-34; MS2/4, Correspondence of William Mackenzie, 1821-35.

116 BAHS, MS1114/6, Autobiographical Notebook of Thomas Clark, Sept. to Dec. 1817, p. 660.

117 Hutton, *History*, p. 260.

118 Ibid., p. 263.

1751 it took 36 hours to make the 117 mile journey from Birmingham to London, by 1821 it took only eighteen hours.[119] Jon Stobart and Neil Raven describe the importance of the intensive turnpiking of roads from the 1740s onwards for tying together the area we now think of as the West Midlands into an integrated economic region.[120] The pattern of turnpiking suggests that Birmingham acted as a commercial centre, taking in goods from manufacturers close to the town before sending them to purchasers further away. By 1835 Birmingham was linked to 105 other centres; the majority of these were more than five miles distant. It was the most important transport node for the economic region of Warwickshire, Worcestershire and Staffordshire.[121]

Similarly important was the growth of canals in the West Midlands. The dense networks of canals played a vital part in connecting Birmingham to the Black Country and the Staffordshire potteries and were important to the industrial growth in Birmingham and the Black Country.[122] By 1835 Birmingham had 941 canal services per week to 41 destinations. These included a number to West Midlands towns, but more were to river ports on the Severn, Trent, Mersey and Thames. Liverpool was a particularly important destination, as the main port for Birmingham's American trade.[123] These dense local road and canal networks should be seen as links in chains reaching much further into international markets.

We have already seen how business and commercial activities were vital to the creation of an understanding of an economic 'neighbourhood', but commercial contacts stretched far beyond the fifteen-mile area suggested by Attwood and others. David Alexander used bankruptcy records to trace the origins of the goods sold by various types of retailers.

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[119] Daunton, *Progress and Poverty*, p. 308.

[120] N. Raven and J, Stobart, 'Networks and Hinterlands: Transport in the Midlands', in Stobart and Raven (eds.), *Towns*, p. 82; see also Jones, *Industrial Enlightenment*, pp. 25, 27; Money, *Experience and Identity*, pp. 30-32.

[121] Raven and Stobart, 'Networks and Hinterlands', pp. 83-6.

[122] Ibid., p. 83; by 1798 around 1,500 Black Country collieries and ironworks were linked by canals, and the Birmingham canal transported over 300 tons of raw materials to London, (p. 87); see also Jones, *Industrial Enlightenment*, pp. 25-6; Money, *Experience and Identity*, pp. 24-30.

[123] Raven and Stobart, 'Networks and Hinterlands', p. 87; *Minutes ... Relating to the Orders in Council*, pp. 7, 18.

Birmingham grocers generally purchased their stock from Bristol- or London-based wholesalers.[124] Drapers and haberdashers usually dealt with London-based wholesalers, though they sometimes dealt directly with manufacturers in Yorkshire and the West Country.[125]

The few account books that remain for Birmingham businesses in this period confirm Alexander's picture of the widespread transport of goods. In December 1792 Gough & Sons, hardware wholesalers, made 220 sales. 74 of these were to individuals residing outside of Birmingham.[126] Of those beyond Birmingham, 21 were to destinations outside Stobart and Raven's definition of the 'Midlands counties'. The destinations outside of the Midlands were all in south-west England or south Wales, except for one order from Jersey. The account book of Zaccheus Walker, brother-in-law, and senior clerk, of Boulton, shows him doing business with 37 separate individuals between 1769 and 1805, eleven of whom were from outside the Midlands. The majority came from Lancashire, particularly Liverpool. Most of the rest came from within the town itself rather than from the 'Midlands'.[127] An idea of change over time for merchants can be given by the wine merchants, Smallwood & Sons.

Table 3.3, Smallwood & Sons Customer Account, 1791 and 1832.

Year	Total number of accounts	Outside of Birmingham	Outside the 'Midlands counties'
1791	436	66	3
1832	764	320	37

Sources: BAHS, MS227/57, Customer Accounts, 1791; MS227/97, Customer Accounts, 1832.

Their business expanded during this period, but remained mainly within the counties surrounding Birmingham that were so well integrated in terms of transportation. The majority of their business outside of the 'Midlands' in 1832 was with south Wales. However, if their

[124] D. Alexander, *Retailing in England During the Industrial Revolution* (London, 1970), pp. 116-7.
[125] Ibid., pp. 131, 134.
[126] BAHS, IIR33, 498628, Day Book of Messrs. Gough and Sons of Birmingham, 1792-4.
[127] BAHS, ZZ32, 414757, Account Book of Zaccheus Walker Senior, 1769-1805.

customers were relatively confined geographically, their contacts and investments were not. A private ledger for 1828-53 reveals how they invested during that period. They invested in 114 separate companies, individuals and assets during this period. Of these, 89 were from outside the 'Midlands counties'. Furthermore, not only were they connected to places we have already seen linked with Birmingham businesses (London, Bristol, south Wales and south-west England) but they had extensive foreign connections. These took two forms: foreign wine and spirit merchants (unsurprisingly), and foreign investments. They had extensive contacts in Oporto, presumably for the importation of port, and invested in Belgian, Russian, Prussian and Dutch bonds during this period.[128] Thus, even a business with a geographically restricted customer base might have investments and commercial connections from a much larger area.

Unfortunately only one account book for a manufacturer has been located, that for Meredith & Co., who produced varnishes as well as being japanners.[129] Between March and December 1827, they took 578 orders in total. Of these 472 were from outside the town of Birmingham. Of those 340 were from beyond the 'Midlands counties'. Again many of these links were to London and the south-west of England. However, Meredith & Co had many contacts with the north of England, sending a large number of orders to Manchester and Liverpool and a smaller number to other towns in Lancashire and Yorkshire. They also sent numerous orders to Edinburgh, Glasgow and Dublin. What these account books suggest, in combination with Alexander's analysis of retailing, is that business (both commercial and manufacturing) tended to promote connections both within the nearest counties and beyond, not delineating a simple, stable economic region.

Commercial and manufacturing activities also promoted travel and thus direct experience of life outside of Birmingham. Julius Hardy, who ran a button-making business with his brother Joseph, had frequent cause to travel. Journeys to obtain orders were a central

[128] BAHS, MS227/5, Private Ledger, 1828-53.
[129] BAHS, Meredith & Co. Day Book, 1827-51.

part of their business. For example, between March 1789 and May 1790, Hardy's brother Joseph undertook seven commercial journeys: the 'Northern journey' three times; the 'Leicestershire journey' twice, and the 'Welsh journey' and 'London journey' once each.[130] Hardy does not specify where his brother or the travellers they employed visited on these trips; however, J. English & Sons, a firm of needle makers who moved to Birmingham in 1800, left itineraries undertaken by their commercial travellers. The southernmost point they travelled to was Plymouth and the northernmost was Ripon.[131] Commercial travellers and the journeys they undertook remained an important aspect of Birmingham's economy throughout this period, though increasingly factors were used instead.[132]

Commerce and manufacturing not only encouraged inhabitants of Birmingham to travel, but also brought a large number of travellers to Birmingham to see the town's manufactories. Most notable was the Boulton & Watt's manufactory at Soho. Peter Jones has suggested that Soho was the hub of an international network of knowledge exchange. During the period that Boulton was in control of Soho (1760s-1800s) thousands of people visited, both from Britain and abroad. Jones identified nearly 1,100 individuals who applied to visit the Soho manufactory. These visitors came from most European countries, the United States, Canada and the Ottoman Empire.[133]

Soho placed Birmingham at the centre of international networks of intellectual exchange; these networks were based not only on travel but also on the enormous correspondence networks of Boulton and the Lunar Society.[134] Soho was an extreme example, but evidence seems to suggest that Birmingham was a destination for many travellers on an

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[130] BAHS, MS839/53, Diary of Julius Hardy, Button-Maker of Birmingham (1788-1793), Transcribed and Annotated by A.M. Banks, April 1973, pp. 7, 12, 16, 18, 19, 27, 35, 43.

[131] S.R.H. Jones, 'The County Trade and the Marketing and Distribution of Birmingham Hardware, 1750-1810', *BH*, 26/1 (1984), p. 29.

[132] Yates, *Historical and Descriptive Sketch*, p. 82; Wise, 'Birmingham and its Trade Relations', pp. 62, 65, 68; Hopkins, *Birmingham*, p. 13; the number of factors grew from 85 in 1777 to 175 in 1815, pp. 68-9.

[133] Jones, *Industrial Enlightenment*, pp. 96-7.

[134] Ibid., pp. 94-97, 100-109, Jones' analysis is useful not only for his painstaking tracing of the origins of so many visitors to Soho but also for his discussion of the etiquette of knowledge exchange, pp. 98-100.

'industrial grand tour'. Most guides and accounts of the town mention the industrial highlights: Soho, Sir Edward Thomason's show rooms, Lloyd's paper mill, Francis Eginton's glass works and so on.[135] Figure 3.13 illustrates the manufactories mentioned in two editions of Drake's guide to Birmingham (1825 and 1831). The manufactories mentioned by Drake were concentrated on the north-west of Birmingham. That area included the main wharfs and hence a number of large factories that needed easy access to canal transport. It was also where Birmingham's jewellery trade was concentrated. Visitors focusing on manufacturing would gain a particular understanding of the town's geography, one that excluded large parts of Birmingham.

Further exposure to the world beyond Birmingham was provided by the broad category of cultural activities and institutions. Most notable among Birmingham's cultural events were the triennial music festivals. These began in 1768 as a means of raising money to fund the construction and, later, running, of the Birmingham General Hospital. They reached their apogee in the 1840s when Felix Mendelssohn was the festival conductor; his *Elijah* was premièred there in 1846. As John Money has commented, these festivals served to draw in aristocratic and gentry from the surrounding counties. In 1790 the festival was attended by the Earls of Aylesford and Warwick, Viscount Dudley, Sir Robert Lawley and Henry Clay (Sheriff

[135] For example, Drake, *Picture of Birmingham*, pp. 61, 63; Yates, *Historical and Descriptive Sketch*, pp. 225, 227, *Birmingham Directory* (1780), pp. xxxi-xxxv.

Figure 3.13, Notable Birmingham Manufactories, 1825 and 1831.
Figure 3.1 is not currently available in ORA.

of Warwickshire that year and a former High Bailiff of Birmingham). It formed, along with the race meetings at Warwick and Lichfield, part of the 'informal channels for the complex connections which were being formed between Birmingham, the region which surrounded it and the patronage on which the prosperity of both was felt to depend.'[136] However, the organizers did not just hope for regional importance, as George Yates put it, 'Mr. Joseph Moore['s] able and judicious management has raised them from the state of respectable county meetings to an almost unrivalled degree of *national* grandeur and celebrity.'[137] The music festivals did not mark the only attempt at cultural growth: between 1760 and 1800 the festivals began, the Vauxhall pleasure gardens prospered and the Royal Hotel replaced the previous assembly rooms which the Duke of York had dismissed as entirely inappropriate when he visited Birmingham in 1765. In 1807 a royal license was obtained for Birmingham's theatre. All of these events and institutions expressed the promoters' similar cultural confidence. They created and strengthened an understanding of Birmingham as a coherent, important location.

These cultural links raise the issue of the country gentry's interaction with Birmingham. There were a number of nearby gentry who were involved with Birmingham throughout this period. Individuals such as Lord Calthorpe and Sir Charles Holte owned significant areas of land within or near the town. Holte lived at Aston Hall, two miles north of the centre of Birmingham. Calthorpe moved from Edgbaston in 1796 to Elvetham in Hampshire. This meant they were closely involved in the expansion of the town. However, while Calthorpe took measures to control the type and design of buildings constructed on his land at Edgbaston, other gentry landowners, such as Sir Thomas Gooch, made little attempt to control building.[138]

The local gentry interacted in two other ways. First, as political actors. Lord Calthorpe

[136] Money, *Experience and Identity*, p. 85.
[137] Yates, *Historical and Descriptive Sketch*, pp. 146-7, my emphasis.
[138] Chalklin, *Provincial Towns*, pp. 82-9.

and the Earl of Dartmouth both frequently presented petitions from Birmingham to the House of Lords. Petitions to the Commons were presented by the Warwickshire MPs: Charles Holte, Robert and Francis Lawley, George Shuckburgh, John and Charles Mordaunt, and Thomas Skipworth. Secondly, they acted as patrons of Birmingham-based associations. For example, in 1787-9 gentry subscribers to the Birmingham General Hospital included the Earl of Dartmouth, Lord Calthorpe, Sir Thomas Gooch, Sir Henry Gough, Lady Holte, Sir John Mordaunt, Sir Roger Newdigate.[139] Therefore, there were a number of local gentry who were involved in various ways with Birmingham. However, this involvement was usually limited to patronage rather than active roles (this was the pattern in the case of the societies) or they provided the town with a service (for example, access to Parliament). It was as landowners and landlords that the local gentry had the greatest interaction with the Birmingham population. However, even in these respects the local gentry their interaction was limited, suggesting that, as with other manufacturing towns, the influence of the gentry on the town or the extent to which Birmingham inhabitants were connected to gentry networks should not be overestimated.

Religious connections could also expose individuals to the world beyond Birmingham. Religious affiliation could allow individuals access to extensive correspondence and friendship networks. For example, the Quaker Galton family were connected, often by marriage, to a number of the most prominent Quaker families in Britain.[140] Connections could also be made and maintained through religious associations. For example, the Unitarian New Meeting frequently sent money to aid other Unitarian congregations.[141] Furthermore they were connected with various regional and national Unitarian and dissenting organizations, for example, the Protestant Dissenting Ministers of Warwick and Neighbouring Counties, and the Unitarian Tract Society. Finally, connections could be made through the peripatetic nature of

[139] BAHS, HC/GH/2/5/2, Annual List of Subscribers to the General Hospital, 1787-1790.
[140] See pp. 227-8 below.
[141] BAHS, UC2/3/3/1/2, Vestry Minutes, 1792-1804, 9 July 1798, 13 Oct. 1800.

many dissenting organizational structures in this period. Most obvious in this regard was the Methodist circuit. The Birmingham circuit was established in 1782, and divided into two circuits in 1835.[142] Such extra-local modes of organization both brought individuals into Birmingham and allowed residents to leave the town, as in the case of the peripatetic Quaker Mary Capper who travelled extensively during her life as a minister.[143]

The final type of connection to be examined are political connections. These can be divided into three main categories: first, those created by formal political institutions; secondly, those originating in political associations; thirdly, personal political relationships. The first category was perhaps best represented by petitions from the town to Parliament. These were usually expressed in the form of 'the inhabitants of Birmingham'. Though the term the petitioners used to describe themselves (inhabitants, gentlemen, etc.) changed, they were always 'of Birmingham'. Not only did this act to tie the particular interest group's self-identification to Birmingham, we might also suggest that petitioning acted as a means of strengthening the idea of the coherence and importance of Birmingham on the national political stage.[144] Voting was another formal process which promoted an understanding of the national politics. 378 inhabitants of Birmingham cast votes in the 1774 election; in 1820 371 people voted.[145]

The second category encompassed semi-formal and informal political institutions. Associations such as the Birmingham Society for Constitutional Information (founded 1792), the Birmingham Church and King Club (1792), the Birmingham Association for the Protection of Liberty and Property (1792), the Birmingham Pitt Club (1814), the Birmingham Hampden Club (1816), the Union Society (1819), and the Birmingham Political Union (BPU,

142 R.B. Rose, 'Protestant Nonconformity', in *VCH*, p. 419.
143 *A Memoir of Mary Capper, Late of Birmingham, a Minister of the Society of Friends*, ed. Katherine Backhouse (London, 1847).
144 R. Sweet, 'Local Identities and a National Parliament, c. 1688-1835', in J. Hoppit (ed.), *Parliaments, Nations, and Identities in Britain and Ireland* (Manchester, 2003), pp. 48-63.
145 *The Poll of the Freeholders of Warwickshire: Taken at Warwick 1774* (Coventry, 1775); *The Poll of the Freeholders of Warwickshire at the election at Warwick 1820* (Birmingham, 1821). The total number of voters in 1774 was 3293; 1561 in 1820.

1829) all placed their members in wider political networks. For example, in February 1793 twelve members of the Birmingham Society for Constitutional Information were proposed for affiliation with the London Society. Such links developed in new ways in the early nineteenth century with the foundation of branches of national societies in Birmingham such as the Birmingham Anti-Slavery Society (founded 1826).[146]

Finally, political relationships could be forged through personal friendships or familial links. Thomas Clark Junior, a Birmingham manufacturer of greenhouses, met, spoke and dined with numerous members of local and national radical politics in the period 1815-20. Clark was not a member of the Hampden Club or the Union Society. Instead his introductions to T.J. Wooler, William Hone and others came via his father.[147] Matthew Boulton had extensive contacts with MPs, something he put to effective use in a number of political campaigns that I discuss in chapter 6.

This discussion gives an impression of the extent to which the propertied inhabitants of the town could be connected to, or aware of, the world beyond Birmingham. Many of these connections were to places beyond a putative Midlands region, and this provides an important reason why there was no Midlands concept in this period. The web of contacts described above suggests that propertied individuals would have struggled to construct a Midlands region from their own experiences.

Manufacturing Towns

The strong sense of Birmingham's industrious nature and the widespread links beyond Birmingham do, however, suggest another way that Birmingham's propertied inhabitants could conceptualize their place within the nation: through the idea of 'manufacturing towns'.

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[146] C. Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 316.

[147] For the Clarks' political connections, see pp. 321-2 below.

During this period, an increasing number of comparisons were made between Birmingham and other manufacturing towns: Manchester, Leeds, Glasgow and others. Such comparisons were particularly important in radical politics from the post-war period onwards. It became increasingly common to argue that a group of manufacturing towns deserved parliamentary representation because of their population and contribution to the national economy. Thus, in 1819 'Junius Junior' wrote that no one would dare argue that 'a rotten Borough of 4,5, 6 or 100 Burgesses ought to return a Member to Parliament, in preference to great and Commercial Towns; such as Birmingham, Manchester, &c. who are obliged to abide by the sold and pernicious principles of the former'.[148] This seems to have reflected a growing awareness of Birmingham's increasing population and that it was becoming one of the largest towns in the United Kingdom. This sense was occasionally backed up with figures, though more often it was simply expressed in statements about Birmingham's 'great and increasing population'.[149] Where figures were used, it is unclear where they have been obtained and they were not used comparatively to judge where Birmingham's population ranked.[150]

It is difficult to judge how far these expressions represented a fully developed conception of the 'manufacturing town' as a particular type of settlement or whether Birmingham's propertied inhabitants identified themselves as part of a wider population: residents of manufacturing towns. On the one hand, the references to Manchester or statements about Birmingham's increasing population were often vague. This gives the impression that the propertied authors discussed here used such references as rhetorical tools with which to bolster political claims based on arguments about Birmingham's industrious nature that I have already analysed in this chapter and in chapter 2.[151] On the other, there is an

[148] *The Selector; of Political Bouquet* (Birmingham, 1819), p. 139.
[149] BAHS, MS28/1030, Town Meetings, Records of Proceedings, p. 16.
[150] BAHS, MS1114/4, Autobiographical Notebook of Thomas Clark, 1816-17, p. 361; *New Public Journal, For Birmingham and the Adjacent Towns* (Birmingham, [1820]), in LF05-2, 413436, Collection of Broadsides, p. 141.
[151] For example, Philanthropos, *A Word of Advice to the Reformers in General and to those of Birmingham in Particular* (Birmingham, 1819), p. 7; *Report of the Proceedings* (January 1830), p. 4.

increasing use of the terms 'manufacturing town' and 'manufacturing interest'. This suggest that at least some propertied individuals had a geographical concept larger than Birmingham but smaller than the nation. For example, William Hawkes Smith wrote that Birmingham was 'a "*manufacturing town*", generally, and its inhabitants are competent to the design, as well as the execution of all articles that require the exercise of taste, skill, and science in the course of their conception and completion.'[152] In 1826 Thomas Attwood, when diagnosing the causes of Britain's economic problems, wrote that 'if the commercial and manufacturing interests had been as fully and fairly represented as the Landed Interest, how is it possible that delusions so gross as these could ever have prevailed?'[153] The uneven use of this concept of 'manufacturing towns' reflects the fact that it was an emerging concept, one that was also starting to be used elsewhere in Britain during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.[154] For example, the term 'manufacturing town' appeared with increasing frequency in *Hansard* from the 1803 onwards.[155] Even if this was only an emerging concept, it still reflected a tendency among some of Birmingham's propertied population to understand their position within the nation in terms of the town's essential contribution to the national economy and its consequent right to respect and representation combined with an awareness of the nature of the world beyond Birmingham.

Conclusion

There are three key points for our understanding of social-group formation that emerge from

[152] Smith, 'Birmingham', p. 2, original emphasis.
[153] *Late Prosperity*, pp. 115-16.
[154] A. Lees, *Cities Perceived: Urban Society in European and American Thought, 1820-1940* (Manchester, 1985), pp. 39-48; A. Briggs, *Victorian Cities* (London, 1990 [1963]), ch. 2; the idea of a 'manufacturing interest' emerged early than the idea of 'manufacturing towns', see V.E. Dietz, 'Before the Age of Capital: Manufacturing Interests and the British State, 1780-1800' (Princeton Univ. Ph.D. Thesis, 1991), pp. 94-111.
[155] In 1803-09 it appears 8 times, 44 in 1810-19; 54 in 1820-29, 262 in 1830-39. Data taken from a search of *Parliamentary Debates*, 1st ser. (41 vols., London, 1803-20), 2nd ser. (24 vols, London, 1820-30), 3rd ser. (356 vols., London, 1830-1891) at http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/ (accessed 20/8/2013).

this discussion. First, we should note the strength of a Birmingham identity in this period. The sense of civic pride that many authors demonstrated and used to bolster their arguments points to a vital source of collective identity in this period that could cut across socio-economic divisions and promote a sense of 'groupness'. The temporary grouping of Birmingham manufacturers and merchants that protested against the Orders in Council and the individuals from all levels of Birmingham society that formed the BPU were, in part, united by a shared belief in the 'industrious' nature and importance of Birmingham. We might speculate that the growth in the frequency of these appeals during the second half of the eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century were related to the increasingly connected nature of Birmingham to the world beyond the town. As its inhabitants became more connected to the world beyond their immediate urban environment, they began to understand how Birmingham was different from elsewhere and, increasingly, why it was an important town. This could be seen in William Hutton's comments on why Birmingham was different from, and superior to, Blackpool, or in the demands of George Edmonds and other radicals that Birmingham be represented in the same manner as other places with similar populations.[156] This growing sense of difference, combined with economic and political forces meant that those representing Birmingham to a national audience had to have an understanding of Birmingham as coherent, united social entity.

Secondly, the propertied seem to have continued to use and reside in the centre of the town throughout this period. An increasing number of individuals did live in areas such as Edgbaston that were not contiguous to the town centre. However, this led to Edgbaston and other areas being brought within the definition of Birmingham rather than a process of mental and geographical differentiation. This process should not be thought as contributing to the formation of a self-consciously distinct middle class.

[156] S. Whyman, 'A Tale of an Upstart: William Hutton of Birmingham, 1723-1815', seminar paper, Warwick University Eighteenth-Century Seminar, 24 Nov. 2011.

Finally, we must recognize the imperfect relationship of geographical realities and identities. Thus, the propertied population of Birmingham was tied into a wide variety of connections that might have suggested the existence of a Midlands region. However, there was no regional identity. Similarly, the Birmingham identity remained silent about division within the town, despite patterns of residence and luxury trades suggesting that propertied individuals experienced such divisions as an important part of everyday life. Such discrepancies should warn us against assuming easy relationships between reality and representation. Such discrepancies are historically useful because they reveal something of the contours of contemporary concerns. Thinking about the absence of a regional identity strengthens conclusions about the importance of a Birmingham identity. In the studying the geographical concepts circulating in Birmingham during this period we see material and cultural structures interacting, mediated by political contingency, to produce particular ways of understanding society. So the material growth of Birmingham, the desire for social and political stability, growing awareness of the nature of other towns, the structure of commerce and the particular political history of the period all combined to produce a discourse of civic pride that in turn fed back into individuals' self and group identities expressed in the idea of 'industrious' individuals and classes.

Part Two

Introduction: Case Studies.

The first part of this thesis has discussed the complex structure of propertied society as well as a number of the most important discourses and practices expressed and performed by individuals within that section of Birmingham's population. In doing so it has traced the outline of a group of individuals who shared particular attributes. The second part of this thesis moves from those more general observations to consider three case studies.

These three case studies examine a number of processes by which individuals come together to form groups focused on particular discourses, institutions and events; it shifts focus from attributes to actions. Chapter 4 uses the example of the Galton family to consider how social knowledge is transferred across generations. Much recent writing on social-group formation has suggested that individuals' social understandings played a key role in the formation of particular social groups and that the family was the most important body for creating such understandings. This chapter suggests that the process could be more difficult than many scholars have suggested. This means that models of social-group formation based on identifying individuals who shared particular self-identities (for example, the idea that we can establish a particular genteel social group based on those educated as gentlemen) are flawed. It argues that we need to think in terms of social education, a process that could easily fail for a variety of reasons. It also further complicates the relationship between attributes and consciousness. The Galtons understood themselves as genteel, yet the definition and practice of gentility varied between members of the family and their success in avoiding scandal owed more to their economic capital than either their connections or 'cultural capital'.

Chapter 5 returns to the issue of elites discussed briefly in chapter 1. It focuses on the governing elite, as defined by membership of the Board of Guardians and the Street Commission. It adopts a social approach to understanding the nature of this governing elite as

a particular type of social group; therefore, it traces the connections, attributes and representations of the members of these two institutions to show how they related to the rest of propertied society.[1] It also complicates the idea of 'elites' further by suggesting that any particular elite group might contain sub-groups (in this case, a symbolic governing elite and an active one). The relationship between these two elites affected the nature of local government in Birmingham. Once again this chapter stresses the plurality of social groups and the complexity of the relationship between different sections of Birmingham propertied population.

Chapter 6 turns to the relationship between social and political history. As the rest of this thesis has stressed, there is no simple relationship between attributes and actions. Thus, political activities or views cannot be simply assumed from economic position, connections, or discourses and thus much political history, even that by those historians who have supposedly rejected materialist determinism, remains wedded to a reductive form of political history. The chapter seeks to suggest an alternative conception of how social position (defined as an individual's economic position, cultural structures and connections combined with the particular political history of a place) related to their political activities and views by considering four case studies of individuals who were members of, or sympathetic to the Birmingham Political Union (BPU). In doing so, it considers the BPU as a social group, as a mixture of individuals united by a particular issue: parliamentary reform. However, rather than assuming that such individuals took up the cause of reform for material reasons (because their position in the economic structure of the town determined they would be sympathetic towards parliamentary reform) or for discursive reasons (that the cultural structures they inhabited made radicalism the logical outcome of political reasoning) it suggests that in each case a series of factors made political radicalism a possibility. This possibility became a reality because of the larger political context. The combination of the political history and the

[1] See my discussion of social history as the study of 'uneven connection', p. 30 above.

processes that made radicalism possible combined in 1829-32 to allow a group encompassing a large number of individuals from different backgrounds with varied political views to unite in the pursuit of one goal.

These three case studies all consider how we as historians should conceptualize and analyse the move from an individuals' attributes to their actions. Each stresses the difficulty of constructing determinative models, the plurality of experience, process and outcome; they suggests that there were significant forces which acted against the maintenance of active social groups over long periods of time. Thus, chapter 4 complicates the idea of a stable discourse of gentility; chapter 5 highlights the plural nature of elites and the breakdown of relatively harmonious local government in Birmingham; and chapter 6 suggests an alternative to determinist accounts of political behaviour. In doing so they begin to suggest how social historians might move from describing the attributes of particular societies, to using those descriptions to explain events.

Chapter 4: Learning to be a 'Gentleman': the Galton Family.

In 1999 the authors of *The Family Story: Blood, Contract and Intimacy, 1830-1960* wrote, 'It is often forgotten that children's first identities are almost always within a family context no matter how that is defined.'[1] This places the family at the heart of social history as the origin of social identities and this is increasingly becoming the orthodox view of how such identities are created. This has been driven by historical investigation, sociological theory and the growing engagement with psychology among historians.[2] Bourdieu's concepts of 'cultural capital' and 'habitus' have consequently assumed great importance.[3] Social historians have increasingly used them to understand the nature of social structures.[4] Bourdieu's focus on the conversion of economic capital into other forms of capital has meant that the family has become a particularly important area of investigation. It is seen as the space in which parents could transfer 'cultural capital' across the generations and where they could inculcate the 'habitus' relevant to their particular place in society. The family therefore becomes the key area for what Simon Gunn has termed 'social reproduction'.[5]

This approach can reveal a great deal about how individuals come to understand their social position. However, much of this work assumes that it is easy to transfer social values across the generation divide. This may partly derive from the use of the word 'capital', a term

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1 L. Davidoff, M. Doolittle, J. Fink and K. Holden, *The Family Story: Blood, Contract and Intimacy, 1830-1960* (Harlow, 1999), p. 55.

2 For recent historical studies that stress the importance of parenting to the creation of social identities see H. French and M. Rothery, *Man's Estate: Landed Gentry Masculinities, 1660-1900* (Oxford, 2012); J. Bailey, *Parenting in England, 1760-1830: Emotion, Identity and Generation* (Oxford, 2012); A. Fletcher, *Growing Up in England: The Experience of Childhood, 1600-1914* (New Haven, CT, 2008). For historical engagement with psychology see M. Roper, 'Slipping Out of View: Subjectivity and Emotion in Gender History', *HWJ*, 59 (2005), pp. 57-72.

3 See P. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. R. Nice (Cambridge, 1977), esp. ch. 2; idem, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. R. Nice (Abingdon, 2010 [1984]).

4 S. Gunn, 'Translating Bourdieu: Cultural Capital and the English Middle Class in Historical Perspective', *British Journal of Sociology*, 56/1 (2005), esp. pp. 54-60.

5 S. Gunn, 'Between Modernity and Backwardness: The Case of the English Middle Class', in A.R. Lopez and B. Weinstein (eds.), *The Making of the Middle Class: Towards a Transnational History* (Durham and London, 2012), pp. 65, 67-9.

that has connotations of free markets and easy exchanges, so that social reproduction is conceptualized as being as easy as transferring capital.[6] The assumption that social and cultural values can be easily transferred between individuals and, in particular, generations is common to much work on social-group formation and not just among historians who have adopted Bourdieu's approach to social class. For example, it is implicit in Davidoff and Hall's discussion of class formation, in which the 'domestic ideology' was spread quickly and easily in the early years of the nineteenth century by clergymen, education, conduct literature and through its realisation in the bourgeois family.[7] In fact we lack a complete understanding of the processes and routes by which cultural and social knowledge was spread. But Bourdieu's conceptualization of power was also inadequate. As Latour points out, power is not a resource, it cannot be stockpiled.[8] Instead, it is a process, existing only in human interaction. 'Cultural capital' suggests that power, in the form of knowledge about society, can be accrued by individuals and then passed on. This chapter questions historians' tendency to think of social reproduction in terms of transferring units of capital across generations and instead suggests we should understand it in terms of social *education* rather than reproduction.

This chapter examines one particular family, the Galtons of Birmingham, to illustrate the processes through which two parents tried to teach their youngest son how to behave in society. The difficulties encountered by the Galton family highlight the need for a sophisticated understanding of the difficulties involved in parenting and the potential for rebellion and failure, and raises an important question regarding assumptions that underpin

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6 This problem seems to stem from Bourdieu's economistic explanation of the nature of culture, as he puts it in *Distinction*, 'the mode of expression characteristic of a cultural production always depends on the laws of the market in which it is offered.' *Distinction*, p. xv. This statement expresses a tendency to economic reduction that, as Richard Biernacki points out, becomes cruder in the main body of the work, *The Fabrication of Labor: Germany and Britain, 1640-1914* (Berkeley, CA, 1995), pp. 21-5.

7 L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850*, rev. edn. (London, 2002), esp. chs. 2, 3. This tendency towards assuming the easy spread of values often affects cultural approaches to social-group formation, pp. 37-8 above.

8 B. Latour, 'The Powers of Association', in J. Law (ed.), *Power, Action and Belief: A New Sociology of Knowledge?* (London, 1986), pp. 264-80.

writing on social reproduction.[9] The family is an important vehicle for social education, but parents were not always successful.

I have chosen to focus on one family because studying social education necessarily requires a detailed source record and a single family with a rich archive is ideal. Focusing on a single case inevitably leaves this approach open to criticism that it is not representative. This chapter makes no claims to being representative in the way a statistical sample claims to be.[10] Further comparative scholarship is required to map more systematically the issues of social reproduction raised in this chapter.[11] I do not want to suggest that this was how such issues always played out but I do want to suggest that the problems faced by the Galtons constitute, to use Bourdieu's phrase, a 'particular case of the possible'.[12] Another way of putting it would be to adopt the insights of microhistory and suggest that the Galton family offer an 'exceptionally normal' case that provides clues to understanding how micro and macro relate.[13] Such approaches suggest that the particular offers a different perspective on historical problems, one that can reveal new explanations or highlight problems with other approaches.[14]

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9 For an important starting point see C. Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives* (London, 1986), esp. pp. 13-14, 83-97.

10 This chapter explores, as Susan Whyman puts it, a 'documented … reaction to common elements that affected other … families', *Sociability and Power in Late Stuart England: The Cultural Worlds of the Verneys, 1660-1720* (Oxford, 1999), p. 11.

11 For scholarship that uses single case studies well see M. Finn, 'Family Formations: Anglo India and the Familial Proto-State', in D. Feldman and J. Lawrence (eds.), *Structures and Transformations in Modern British History* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 100-117; J. Innes, *Inferior Politics: Social Problems and Social Policies in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 2009), ch. 7; and Carolyn Steedman's remarkable *Landscape for a Good Woman*. For studies of social education that offer examples of similar processes, successes and failures see Fletcher, *Growing Up*; French and Rothery, *Man's Estate*; Bailey, *Parenting*; N. Phillips, 'Parenting the Profligate Son: Masculinity, Gentility and Juvenile Delinquency', *Gender and History*, 22/1 (2010), pp. 92-108; P.M. Jones, 'Living the Enlightenment and the French Revolution: James Watt, Matthew Boulton, and their Sons', *HJ*, 42/1 (1999), pp. 157-82; T.L. Broughton and H. Rogers (eds.), *Gender and Fatherhood in the Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke, 2007); C. Hall, *Macaulay and Son: Architects of Imperial Britain* (New Haven, CT, 2012), ch. 3.

12 Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. xiii.

13 M. Peltonen, 'Clues, Margins and Monads: The Micro-Macro Link in Historical Research, *History and Theory*, 40/3 (2001), pp. 356-8.

14 Peltonen, 'Clues', pp. 349-51; Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (London, 1980 [1976]), p. xxi; idem, 'Microhistory: Two or Three Things I Know about It', *Critical Inquiry*, 20/1 (1993), pp. 23-8, 33; J. Brewer, 'Microhistory and the Histories of Everyday Life', *CSH*, 7/1 (2010), pp. 89, 96-9; G. Levi, 'On Microhistory', in P. Burke (ed.), *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 93-4, 97-8; D. Bell, 'Total History and Microhistory: The French and Italian Paradigms', in L. Kramer and S. Maza (eds.), *A Companion to Western Historical Thought* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 269-72; R. Chartier, 'Intellectual History or Sociocultural History', in D. LaCapra and S.L. Kaplan (eds.),

Studying the Galtons does not suggest a new generalisation that replaces the existing historical consensus, one case study cannot do that. Instead, this chapter raises a question about a key assumption that informs much writing on the family and social history. This question suggests that we need to complicate our understanding of the processes of 'social reproduction'. More studies of the ways and means by which social identities were transferred and how they were altered in the process of transference are necessary to test whether the picture of imperfect transfer revealed by the case of the Galtons is applicable to other families.

This chapter also examines the processes and mechanisms linking attributes to actions and so develops a general theme of the second part of this thesis. If social identities are not easily transferred across generations then we need to adopt a more sophisticated approach to understanding the role of an individual's family in the creation of their social imaginary and thus in the process of social-group formation.

The Galton Family[15]

The Galtons were one of the most successful and prominent Birmingham families in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Samuel Galton Senior arrived in Birmingham in 1743 to become a partner in his brother-in-law's gun-making business. After his brother-in-law's death in 1773, Samuel Galton and his eldest son Samuel Galton Junior ran the business together as partners. The wars against Revolutionary France and then Napoleon seem to have substantially bolstered the business. Between 1788 and 1799 Samuel Galton Junior's personal

Modern European Intellectual History: Reappraisals and New Perspectives (Ithaca, NY, 1981), p. 32; B.S. Gregory, '*Is* Small Beautiful? Microhistory and the History of Everyday Life', *History and Theory*, 38/1 (1999), pp. 102-3, 105-6, 109.

15 This section is based on B.M.D. Smith, 'The Galtons of Birmingham: Quaker Gun Merchants and Bankers, 1702-1831', *BH*, 9/2 (1967), pp. 132-50; S. Lloyd, *The Lloyds of Birmingham, with Some Account of the Founding of Lloyds Bank* (Birmingham, 1907), pp. 120-32; and the BAHS catalogue for MS3101, the Galton papers.

wealth increased from £43,049 to £139,007. In 1807 Richard Rathbone, a school friend of John Howard Galton, wrote to him, 'I shall expect to hear of your having as much money as fat soon – for if we have an American war (which wise men say we shall) there will be, I suppose, an immense demand for Guns'.[16] This public association of the Galton's success and warfare caused them problems. In 1790 the Yearly Meeting of the Warwickshire Friends resolved that 'If any be concerned in fabricating, or selling Instruments of War, let them be treated with in love; and if by this unreclaimed, let them be further dealt with as those we cannot own.' Nothing came of this minute until 1795 when at a Monthly Meeting of the Birmingham Friends it was resolved to send three individuals to visit Samuel Galton Junior in order to judge whether he could continue as a member of the Birmingham Quaker Meeting. Samuel Galton retired from the gun trade in 1795, perhaps persuaded by the disapproval of his Quaker friends. Though Samuel Galton Junior offered an eloquent and interesting defence of his involvement in the gun trade, he was disowned by the Birmingham Quakers.[17] He continued in the gun trade until 1804, when he retired to set up a bank.[18] His eldest son, Samuel Tertius Galton, continued the gun business until 1815 before working in the bank, where he had been a partner for some years. The bank of Galton and James was in existence from 1804 to 1831, when Samuel Tertius Galton decided to close it after the instability caused by the financial crisis of 1826-7.[19] Samuel Galton Junior's two other sons, Hubert John Barclay Galton and John Howard both became partners of the bank in due course. These business activities were successful, and Samuel Galton Junior died a rich man, leaving £300,000.

From the middle of the eighteenth century the Galton family emerged as an important family in the public life of Birmingham. In addition to their economic importance, as one of

16 BAHS, MS3101/C/D/65/1, Richard Rathbone to John Howard Galton (JHG), 4 Oct. 1807.

17 BAHS, MS3101/B/16/2, Samuel Galton Junior (SGJ), Address to the Friends of the Monthly Meeting at Birmingham, 1795.

18 His first partner was Joseph Gibbins, he was later replaced by Paul Moon James, both men were Quakers.

19 *Elizabeth Anne Galton (1808-1906): A Well-Connected Gentlewoman*, ed. A. Moilliet (Hertford, 2003), p. 53.

the largest gun-making firms in the town and then as a key banking firm, the family were prominent as Street Commissioners, Overseers of the Poor, and as manorial officers. Furthermore they were active as subscribers and played important, informal roles in the town's political and cultural events.[20]

The Galtons were involved in three networks which stretched beyond Birmingham. First, the gun-making business gave Samuel Galton and Samuel Galton Junior extensive contacts in London and Liverpool. Secondly, Samuel Galton Junior was a member of the Lunar Society. This group of manufacturers, physicians and clergymen engaged in philosophical enquiry of all kinds, including educational thought.[21] Samuel Galton Junior was an active member of this society, and a proficient natural philosopher. Thirdly, the Galton family were connected, often by marriage, to a number of the most prominent Quaker families in Britain. Samuel Galton Junior married Lucy Barclay, sister of the banker David Barclay, and through this connection they were linked to the Gurney family who played an important role in the development of nineteenth-century Quakerism, through Elizabeth Fry (nee Gurney) and Joseph John Gurney, who were key in the growth of evangelical Quakerism.[22] These

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[20] Examining the subscription data collected for chapter 1, Samuel Galton appears in 1788 subscribing to the General Hospital; in 1812 the bank opposed the Orders in Council; in 1818 Samuel Galton Junior and Samuel Tertius Galton subscribed to the Blue Coat School and in 1830 Samuel Tertius Galton contributed to subscriptions to relieve the town's poor, for a Deritend and Bordesley soup charity and to promote free trade with India and China; he also signed a document expressing support for the Warwickshire MPs. Samuel Galton Junior was a member of the Birmingham Police Committee. Samuel Tertius Galton and John Howard Galton were members of the Birmingham Philosophical Society. Barbara Smith records Samuel Galton Junior and Samuel Tertius Galton's interest in canals, see 'The Galtons', pp. 139-41,147; Clive Behagg points to Samuel Tertius Galton's importance in local popular politics, see *Politics and Production in the Early Nineteenth Century* (London and New York, 1990), pp. 164-5, 176.

[21] For the Lunar Society in general see R.E. Schofield, *The Lunar Society of Birmingham: a Social History of Provincial Science and Industry in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1963); J. Uglow, *The Lunar Men: The Friends who Made the Future, 1730-1810* (London, 2002); P. Jones, *Industrial Enlightenment: Science, Technology and Culture in Birmingham and the West Midlands, 1760-1820* (Manchester, 2008). For the Lunar Society and education see Uglow, *Lunar Men*, pp. 182, 185-6, 314-16, 320-22; idem, 'But What About the Women? The Lunar Society's Attitude to Women and Science, and to the Education of Girls', in C.U.M. Smith and R. Arnott (eds.), *The Genius of Erasmus Darwin* (Aldershot, 2005), pp. 163-77; Jones, *Industrial Enlightenment*, p. 92; R. Watts, 'Joseph Priestley and Education', *Enlightenment and Dissent*, 2 (1983), pp. 83-100; idem, 'Some Radical Educational Networks of the Late Eighteenth Century and their Influence', *History of Education*, 27/1 (1998), pp. 1-14; idem, 'Joseph Priestley and his Influence on Education in Birmingham', in M. Dick (ed.), *Joseph Priestley and Birmingham* (Studley, 2005), pp. 50-53.

[22] See P. Dandelion, *The Quakers: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2008), pp. 29, 43, 58, 93-5; J.M. Price, 'Barclay, David (1729-1809)', rev. L. Hannah, *ODNB*. For Quakers in Birmingham see W. White, *Friends in Warwickshire, in the 17th and 18th centuries* (Birmingham, 1873), pp. 84-103; Jones, *Industrial*

Quaker connections remained strong even after Samuel Galton Junior was disowned by the Birmingham Friends.

Turning to their domestic life, Samuel Galton Junior and Lucy Barclay had eight children (see fig. 4.1): Mary Anne (later Schimmelpenninck), Sophia, Samuel Tertius, Adele, Theodore (who died of the plague at Malta in 1810 aged 26), Hubert, Ewan (who died aged 9) and John Howard.

The Galtons were a successful family. In the three generations from Samuel Galton to Samuel Tertius Galton they grew wealthier and more important in the town, acquiring extensive property elsewhere in the country. They were among the wealthier members of propertied society. They diversified their wealth in a manner similar to the processes Bob Morris has termed the 'property cycle'.[23] They played an active civic role through political and cultural participation and subscriptions to charitable and other bodies. They fit within many definitions of the 'middle class', yet they did not refer to themselves, or anyone else, as 'middle class'. Instead they saw themselves as 'gentlemen' and as part of an elite, and Samuel Galton Junior and his wife schooled their children to be 'gentlemanlike'.

The youngest child, John Howard, is the focus of the remainder of this chapter. He was born in 1794 and educated first at a small school run by the Reverend Rogers in Oxford from 1804-1810. From about November 1810 to August 1811 he attended Glasgow University. After returning to Birmingham he began to work at the bank. In December 1819 he married Isabella Strutt, daughter of the cotton manufacturer Joseph Strutt. The Galtons had known the Strutt family since at least 1810.[24] After marriage they moved to Spring Hill, on the outskirts of Birmingham. In the late 1820s they constructed a new house on an estate in Hadzor, near Droitwich in Worcestershire. With the closing of the Bank in 1831, John Howard's links with

Enlightenment, pp. 167-99, Jones estimates there were 62 Quaker households in Birmingham in 1791-1800 and 66 in 1811-20, see p. 171.

23 R. Morris, *Men, Women, and Property in England, 1780-1870: A Social and Economic History of Family Strategies Amongst the Leeds Middle Classes* (Cambridge, 2005), ch. 4.

24 BAHS, MS3101/C/E/5/7/1, Samuel Tertius Galton (STG) to Joseph Strutt, 4 June 1810.

Figure 4.1, Galton Family Tree.

Birmingham were largely cut. However, he occupied an increasingly prominent position in Worcestershire society. He served as an officer in the Worcestershire Yeomanry Cavalry from 1832-4, was sheriff of Worcestershire in 1834, and was an unsuccessful candidate for Droitwich at the election of 1837.[25]

Financially, the picture is complicated by the arrangements made by Samuel Galton Senior. John Howard's grandfather directed the distribution of large parts of the family property in his will and this restricted what Samuel Galton Junior could do for his children. Samuel Galton Senior had left all of his property, after Samuel Galton Junior's death, to Samuel Tertius Galton, meaning that John Howard's prospects were limited. At the time of his marriage to Isabella Strutt he estimated himself worth £1700. In order to provide for his youngest son, Samuel Galton Junior planned to leave him £30,000, a figure matched by Joseph Strutt.[26] Before this John Howard seems to have received an income from his position as a partner in the family bank, and from share dividends. He certainly did not receive a substantial allowance until the age of twenty-four.[27] By the time that his father died, John Howard's inheritance had increased. In 1832 it totalled £60,000. This included £20,000 of land in Somerset, and £11,000 of canal shares. £23,000 of this went to pay off the mortgage on an estate in Oddingley in Worcestershire and £6,000 went on the building of his house at Hadzor, maintenance of the estate and the local church.[28] John Howard had money problems in both 1830 and 1840 which, in 1830, forced him, Isabella and their children to leave Britain for the continent until their fortunes improved. John Howard's inheritance seems to have been smaller than either of his two elder brothers. Samuel Tertius Galton received of most of the family's land and Hubert Galton was luckier in the land which he received. Whereas Hadzor and the Somerset estates caused John Howard only grief, Hubert's inheritance made him a

[25] BAHS, MS3101/C/D/10/60/1, J.S. Packington to JHG, 28 Jan. 1836.

[26] BAHS, MS3101/C/D/16/5/1, SGJ to Joseph Strutt, 12 Oct. 1819; MS3101/C/D/16/5/2, Joseph Strutt to SGJ, 17 Oct. 1819; MS3101/C/D/16/5/4, Joseph Strutt to SGJ, 12 Nov. 1819.

[27] BAHS, MS3101/C/D/11/4/1, JHG to [H.G. Lewis], [1816].

[28] BAHS, MS3101/C/E/5/6/5, Isabella Galton to Joseph Strutt, 23 Oct. 1840.

handsome profit. Also, for reasons not known, Hubert received an annual gift of £1,500 from his father until his death, which John Howard did not.

John Howard Galton was an individual who was active in both civic and political roles. However, his life was not without trouble, financial and social. His early education and these difficulties provide a means of understanding how social reproduction occurred among the wealthier part of the propertied population.

Education[29]

Samuel Galton Junior and Lucy Galton had definite aims for their children. They sought to give them an education based on ideas of gentility that they themselves held and performed. It is unclear whether these originated in Samuel and Lucy's childhoods, though there are hints that some of the ideas and practices they recommended did.[30] However, it should be noted that they made significant changes to the education they provided for their children from that they had received. For example, Samuel Galton Junior attended Warrington Academy until the age of 17, before returning to Birmingham to work in the family firm. In contrast, Samuel Tertius was sent to Reading Grammar school and then Trinity College, Cambridge and Edinburgh University. Hubert and John Howard were both sent to a private boarding school in Oxford with John Howard going to Glasgow University; Hubert did not attend university, probably because of his ill health.[31] It was, therefore, an education that mixed innovation in methods with continuity in aims and ideals.

Contrary to the impression given by Mary Anne Schimmelpenninck's memoirs and the historiography on the Lunar Society's approach to education, Samuel and Lucy's aims were as

[29] I have cited only a few examples in support of the points made in this section, many more could be provided.

[30] For example, Lucy Galton recalled learning all of the *Oeconomy of Human Life* 'by heart' as a child, something she recommended to John Howard, BAHS, MS3101/C/D/10/6/23, LG to JHG, 11 Sept. 1806.

[31] H. Smith, 'Samuel Galton Junior (1753-1832), *ODNB*; Smith, 'Galtons', p. 147.

much about training their children to succeed socially as intellectually. They provided John Howard with detailed instructions on how to act and what practices or tendencies to avoid. For example, in 1808 Samuel Galton Junior wrote to his son and signed off his letter with a detailed discussion of how he should behave,

> from this Moment let the memorable Era begin of active Exertion on your part of a punctual observance of Duty & the consequent claim & privilege of well earned Gratification that you may, dear Howard, in your behaviour to your Inferiors may be humane, kind, considerate & affable, to you Equals Gentlemanlike, frank & dignified – to you Superiors respectful & honourable … that your temper may be amiable, your manner correct, gentlemanlike & superior – that your physical and your intellectual & moral capacities may be highly cultivated & improved but above all that you may be pious Religious, [motivated] by a just sense of the Value & Importance of Religion of which I hope you will [be supplied] with liberal enlightened & comprehensive views, that you may pass through this life honourable, happy, Respectable & Respected, deriving wisdom & happiness from every Event…[32]

These were the social values which they sought to instil in John Howard, and they were just as important as the knowledge of natural philosophy and the classics which Mary Anne Schimmelpenninck described as central to her childhood.[33] Furthermore, they were convinced that the way to inculcate them in their son was to combine experience of the world (obtained through leaving home) with family supervision (achieved through friendship with his schoolmaster, Rev. Rogers, and frequent correspondence).[34] Thus, in 1811 Lucy Galton wrote to John Howard in Glasgow sending him *The Life of Edward, First Lord Herbert of Cherbury Written by Himself* (1764). She wrote that the life of Lord Herbert, a diplomat, philosopher and poet, would be a 'model for you … & will tell you in what a gentleman ought, & in what accomplishment he ought <u>not</u> to excell.' She particularly recommended this book as the

[32] BAHS, MS3101/C/D/10/9/28, SGJ to JHG, 1-2 Oct. 1808.

[33] M.A. Schimmelpenninck, *Life of Mary Anne Schimmelpenninck*, ed. C.C. Hankin (2 vols., London, 1858) , i, 6, 104, 260-64; the second volume contains extracts from letters sent to Schimmelpenninck by Lucy Galton that often contain similar social advice to that given to John Howard, see ii, 10-11. Historians of education have focused on the intellectual education provided to the Galton children, see Watts, 'Education in Birmingham', pp. 50-53.

[34] H. French and M. Rothery, '"Upon Your Entry into the World": Masculine Values and the Threshold of Adulthood among Landed Elites in England, 1680-1800', *SH*, 33/4 (2008), pp. 402-22, much of what they have to say for the landed elites applies to parvenu families such as the Galtons.

author believed 'that the maxims of Philosophers will never serve him [a gentleman] half so much as those of his father and grandfather – for they were placed under circumstances similar to his own; their experience is therefore of more value, than that of men of different characters, who have been born moreover in a different age – one may almost say, in a different world!'[35] Both these quotations suggest that John Howard's parents were aware that success required more than skill and intellect. Samuel Galton Junior urged his son to understand the nature of the social hierarchy and how he fitted into it, while Lucy Galton emphasized that the appropriate 'accomplishments' and knowledge for a gentleman changed according to social context, and that the family was the most useful body for preparing a child for the world.

John Howard's parents, however, went beyond these general comments on the qualities required in a 'gentleman'. They, and other members of the family, offered concrete advice on specific problems.[36] These related to six main areas: accounting, industriousness, appropriate areas of knowledge, social habits, friendship, and religion. All these areas were vital to the maintenance of a good 'character', which would allow him to succeed in his future life.[37] 'Character', as Lucy Galton wrote in 1815, was of the utmost importance, 'Everybody who knows the world, knows the value of character, tho' he may not have honor, or virtue, or strength to acquire it – Character – one of the worst men in the World declared that, could it be purchased, he would give ten thousand pounds for a character.'[38]

Samuel Galton Junior, Lucy Galton and Lucy Ann Patterson (their most important servant) constantly urged John Howard to keep regular and accurate accounts. This practice

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35 BAHS, MS3101/C/D/10/6/90, LG to JHG, 16 Apr. 1811, original emphasis.

36 In their willingness to provide specific advice for specific problems the Galtons differ from the gentry families who French and Rothery claim tended to restrict advice to generalities, *Man's Estate*, pp. 2-3, 134.

37 More work could be done on the concept of 'character' in this period; though see M. Finn, *The Character of Credit: Personal Debt in English Culture, 1740-1914* (Cambridge, 2003); and for a later period Stefan Collini offers an important argument about its political meaning, S. Collini, 'The Idea of "Character" in Victorian Political Culture', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., 35 (1985), pp. 29-50.

38 BAHS, MS3101/C/D/10/6/131, LG to JHG, 4 Aug. 1815, original emphasis. The reference is to Colonel Francis Charteris, see Earl of Chesterfield, *Letters to Sis Son and Others* (London, 1969), p. 148.

was viewed as vital to the creation of a good character. It was important because accurate accounts would ensure he avoided debt, allowing him to live within his means. As Lucy Patterson put it, 'I hope my dear fellow you keep an account how you spend your money as it is by an examination of that account we can tell if you deserve to be called extravagant or not, & by that account that you can fix upon the things or expences you must avoyd [sic] in future.'[39] Note once again the social context of this advice; it not only allowed John Howard to regulate his own activities, but allowed the family to judge his quality. The practice was vital to domestic life in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Accurate accounts ensured the avoidance of debt, the regulation of the household and the maintenance of reputation.[40] As Samuel Galton Junior put it, accounts helped maintain 'that Self Government w^{ch} is essential to Respectability of Character, & to real Happiness & Self-Approbation'.[41] He requested that John Howard send him his accounts at the end of every week. Samuel Galton Junior worked hard to inculcate in his son this vital habit: he threatened, he admonished and he pointed to the discrepancy between John Howard's theoretical knowledge and his practical application.[42]

John Howard was also urged to be industrious in his studies. Samuel Galton Junior in 1808 wrote, 'I expect that you make a point of employing yourself diligently in the attainment of your literary pursuits. Remember that this is the time, when the foundation must be laid & the superstructure proceeded upon, of these attainments which are to render your useful, & respectable in future life.'[43] Their urging on this subject again went beyond generalities, and proposed concrete measures to improve his education and to allow them to oversee him even when away at school or university.

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39 BAHS, MS3101/CC/D/10/61/73, L.A. Patterson (LAP) to JHG, nd. [1804-10].

40 For the widespread importance attached to keeping accounts, see, K. Harvey, *The Little Republic: Masculinity and Domestic Authority in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 25, 72-7, 81-5, 87, 91, 97-8, 111-12, 174, 182.

41 BAHS, MS3010/C/D/10/9/27, SGJ to JHG, 26 Sept. 1808.

42 This letter was just one of many sent by members of the family urging John Howard to keep regular accounts. Mary Anne Schimmelpenninck recalled Samuel Galton Senior encouraging his grandchildren to keep accounts from the age of seven, and her own shame when her father inspected her accounts in 1804 and found £50 missing, see Schimmelpenninck, *Life*, i, 52-3; ii, 33-4.

43 BAHS, MS3101/C/D/10/9/26, SGJ to JHG, 17 Sept. 1808.

John Howard was encouraged to give accounts of his studies in his letters. His parents sent him tasks to undertake and books to read. In 1809 Lucy Galton regularly sent lines of Homer (in both Greek and English) for her son to memorize. She explained the reasoning behind this in a letter from February of that year:

> There, you see, are the first line of the Odyssey – they contain nothing remarkable; nonetheless you should know them – & why – because every body knows them! Let me know that you have learnt them perfectly, by heart. I shall send six lines more? But why does Homer talk of the "heaven-built wall" – do you know? Have you got a Bibliotheca Classica? – that will tell you all these things.[44]

Once again note the social purpose of this exercise. I do not want to suggest that his parents saw no value in classical and other learning apart from the necessity for a 'gentleman' to have such knowledge, but it is nevertheless an important part of their motivation. Lucy Galton seems to have promised to pay her son according to how much he learnt, and she required him to copy the lines out in his replies to her letters, trusting him to do it from memory.[45] They did not limit their encouragement of John Howard to the classics. The range of books (excluding the classics) recommended, bought for, or sent to John Howard included travel accounts: Priscilla Wakefield's *Excursions in North America* (1806)[46]; one of Jean-Baptiste Du Halde's works on China[47]; Jon Windus' *Journey to Mequinez* (1725)[48]; and John Barrow's *Travels in China* (1804)[49]; religious works: John Logan's *Sermons* (1807)[50]; Hannah More's works[51]; Philip Doddridge's *Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul* (1745)[52]; literary and legal texts:

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44 BAHS, MS3101/C/D/10/6/58, LG to JHG, 11 Feb. 1809. Schimmelpenninck suggests Lucy Galton had a rather more positive view of the quality of Homer than this quotation might suggest, see, *Life*, i, 328-9; Schimmelpenninck also notes her mother giving her passages to read and consider, see, i, 332-7.

45 For payment see BAHS, MS3101/C/D/10/6/63, LG to JHG, 14 May 1809.

46 BAHS, MS3101/C/D/10/9/18, SGJ to JHG, 20-21 July 1807.

47 BAHS, MS3101/C/D/13/1/12, JHG to LG, 30 Apr. 1809.

48 BAHS, MS3101/C/D/13/1/4, JHG to LG, 5 Mar. 1809.

49 BAHS, MS3101/C/D/10/2/13, Sophia Galton to JHG, 24 May 1807.

50 BAHS, MS3101/C/D/10/9/22, SGJ to JHG, 22 Nov. 1807.

51 BAHS, MS3101/C/D/10/6/18, LG to JHG, 27 Apr. 1806.

52 BAHS, MS3101/C/D/10/9/41, SGJ to JHG, nd. [1804-10].

Shakespeare's works[53]; Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726)[54]; and Blackstone's *Commentaries*[55]; history and philosophy: Charles Rollins' *Ancient History* (1730-38)[56]; and an unspecified work of David Hume[57]; and the ubiquitous Robert Dodsley's *The Oeconomy of Human Life* (1751).[58] What is striking here is the range of subjects covered, and the large number of travel accounts sent to him.[59] John Howard's scientific education was not neglected. In 1806 Samuel Galton Junior encouraged him to collect minerals, and to consider the subject of mineralogy so that his 'collection shall become rather a matter of science than mere ornament.'[60] Samuel Galton Junior felt that for John Howard to succeed in his adult life he required knowledge of all kinds; a sentiment he expressed through Bacon's famous saying, 'songez-y mon cher Howard, Knowledge is Power'.[61]

When John Howard was studying in Glasgow, his father urged him to improve his character, as he put it:

> Mr Jeffrey [editor of *The Edinburgh Review* and friend of Samuel Galton Junior] observed that he owed every thing to Professor Jardine's Lecture, to his Discipline, & the habits he had induced. These are golden Moments, employ them well, your future character will now be formed. Men never change after 20, the

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53 BAHS, MS3101/C/D/10/6/41, LG to JHG, 22 Sept. 1807; MS3101/C/D/10/6/42, LG to JHG, 22 Sept. 1807.

54 BAHS, MS3101/C/D/10/61/22, LAP to JHG, 12 Dec. 1806.

55 BAHS, MS3101/C/D/10/6/67, LG to JHG, 11 Feb. 1810.

56 BAHS, MS3101/C/D/10/6/86, LG to JHG, 15 Jan. 1811.

57 BAHS, MS3101/C/D/10/6/67, LG to JHG, 11 Feb. 1810.

58 BAHS, MS3101/C/D/10/6/23, LG to JHG, 11 Sept. 1806; for *The Oeconomy* see Harvey, *Little Republic*, pp. 48-50.

59 This eclecticism is echoed by Mary Anne Schimmelpenninck's recollections, though she records that she was left to read what she wanted. This might reflect a gender difference in their parents' attitudes to their children or it could be a reflection of the differing nature of the sources. Letters are more likely to reveal a reading pattern structured around recommendations and prescription, see Schimmelpenninck, *Life*, i, 260-61, 280; for Lucy Galton directing Schimmelpenninck's reading see ibid., i, 27, 155, 271-2, 329.

60 BAHS, MS3101/C/D/10/9/11, SGJ to JHG, 14 Dec. 1806; see also MS3101/C/D/10/9/8, SGJ to JHG, 3 Oct. 1806. Samuel Tertius Galton recorded that in 1805 John Howard was studying Euclid, MS3101/C/D/10/10/1, STG to JHG, 5 Mar. [1805].

61 BAHS, MS3101/C/D/10/9/49, SGJ to JHG, 10 Feb. 1811. This understanding of the importance of a wide-ranging education ran in the family. In 1832 Samuel Tertius Galton asked his brother John Howard for assistance in ensuring his son Darwin received a proper education while staying in Geneva. Tertius required his son to study chemistry, natural philosophy, moral philosophy, French, Italian (and to read histories in those language), Latin and Greek. See MS3101/C/D/10/10/28, STG to JHG, 19 Sept. 1832; he also ensured his daughters received tutoring in modern languages, arithmetic and natural philosophy, see *Elizabeth Anne Galton*, pp.16, 21, Elizabeth Anne Galton (Tertius' daughter) also recorded being taught to keep accounts, and mentioned Lucy Galton 'direct[ing]' her reading, see pp. 16, 20.

> same proverb continues – their habits only become confirmed – & their Destination is fixed then.[62]

Indeed, as Samuel Tertius Galton noted, Samuel Galton Junior chose to send his son to Glasgow rather than Edinburgh because he felt 'that habits of regularity & industry are more assiduously cultivated in the College there, and are more prevalent out of it than at Edinburgh – and as business is the ultimate object in view he considers it important those habits should be inculcated at that age.'[63] Obtaining knowledge was just one reason for sending John Howard to Glasgow. He was also sent to form his adult character and this was just as much about discipline, honesty, and credit as it was about intellectual advancement. Something Lucy Galton echoed in 1811, 'You are placed at Glasgow to learn Greek and Philosophy – that is true; – but there is something to be learnt of still greater importance – it is practical good sense – that will be manifested, if you keep good accounts.'[64]

With regards to social habits they encouraged him to improve his dancing.[65] They also promoted physical exercise in general to 'improve your Health, & the Powers of your Body' through 'useful activity, [such] as swimming &c &c.'[66] They urged him to ensure his conversation was appropriate and improving and to avoid 'every thing that is bodily & unimproving, still more those subjects that tend to encourage levity, in your own mind or to disparage others – Redeem the time & leave no Society without having derived Improvement yourself, & endeavour to contribute to the Improvement of others.'[67]

Samuel Galton Junior had a clear idea of what was age-appropriate for his son to be interested in. John Howard had a large collection of animals, most exotically a tortoise, and his letters home from Oxford and his family's replies are full of news of his animals' activities

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62 BAHS, MS3101/C/D/10/9/45, SGJ to JHG, 4 Nov. 1810; see also MS3101/C/D/10/9/43, SGJ to JHG, nd. [1809-10].
63 BAHS, MS3101/C/E/5/7/1, STG to Joseph Strutt, 4 June 1810, original emphasis.
64 BAHS, MS3101/C/D/10/6/89, LG to JHG, 10 Mar. 1811.
65 BAHS, MS3101/C/D/10/9/34, SGJ to JHG, 25 Apr. 1805; MS3101/C/D/10/9/42, SGJ to JHG, nd. [1804-10].
66 BAHS, MS3101/C/D/10/9/24, SGJ to JHG, 27 Dec. 1807.
67 Ibid.

and health. However, Samuel Galton clearly felt that his son was rather too focused on these pets. In 1808 he wrote,

> I must object to any enlargement of the catalogue [of animals] You are making what should be a mere amusement, & under regulation, you are making it something like the serious business of life & very oppressive to others. You are now of an age to employ the Energies of your Mind to nobler pursuits.

He compared the amount John Howard had made him spend on goldfish (£9.11.0.) 'with the £10 cost of the Education of 40 Poor Children in reading, writ^{g}, arithmetic … upon Mr Lancaster's Plan.' The emphasis was on cost, but also on utility and being 'respectable': 'Remember that this is the time, when the foundation must be laid & the superstructure proceeded upon, of these attainments which are to render you useful, & respectable in future life.'[68] While animals were a diversion for youth, Samuel Galton Junior clearly believed that his son was at the age (fourteen) when he had to turn to the 'serious business of life'.

The Galtons' were concerned about their son's friends and acquaintances.[69] They repeatedly stressed to John Howard the danger posed by inappropriate friendships. He was to beware those who only 'seemed' to be his friend, and to form connections only with 'the best informed, & the most respectable for Morals'.[70] In 1807 Samuel Galton Junior illustrated the danger of ill-chosen friends by relating a story about an acquaintance of David Barclay (the nephew of Lucy Galton).

> David Barclay at Liverpool has been very kind to a young man from Scotland, who was put apprentice at Liverpool, unfortunately he became acquainted with some dissipated young Men, & was learning [to] intoxicate himself, & getting every bad habit, & in short time would have lost his Health & Character, & perhaps his life – David knew his Connexions, he took the young man to his own boarding house, secur'd apartments for him there, and has prevail'd upon him to give up this former acquaintance & will probably induce him to become a

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68 BAHS, MS3101/C/D/10/9/26, SGJ to JHG, 17 Sept. 1808.

69 French and Rothery note that gentry parents often saw school friends as bad influences and sought to counter there influence, see French and Rothery, *Man's Estate*, pp. 43-4, 52, 69-70; see also Jones, 'Living'.

70 BAHS, MS3101/C/D/10/9/40, SGJ to JHG, 14 July 1810.

diligent, a virtuous & a happy young man.[71]

The message was clear; a man's connections determined the kind of man he was and the 'character' he had.

Finally, they stressed the importance of religion. It was vital both to maintain his reputation and to ensure he lived a happy life. Samuel Galton Junior wrote that:

> The Happiness arising from religion is preeminently that which will bear … every possible Test. Pure Religion includes the purest Morality, the most active benevolence, & beneficence towards others, Purity of Mind, Humility, a Sense of conduct, dependence upon God, of Gratitude to him, & devotedness of Will to every article both of Faith, & Conduct which we believe to be true, & acceptable to him.

Central to such religious belief and practice was a thorough knowledge of the Bible. Samuel Galton Junior emphasized this in the same letter. 'In proportion my dear Howard as we read that Revelation of his Will, & our Duties as to faith & practice, which we shall find in the Bible, & Testament, & which we shall find on our Minds if we read & study both with a pure & simple desire of practical Instruction'.[72] The centrality of scripture to their vision of appropriate religious activity was reflected in the lengths to which Samuel and Lucy Galton went to ensure John Howard read the Bible, and read it correctly. Thus Samuel Galton Junior promised his son a 'gold Chair' if he expanded his knowledge of scripture and proved it by sending home abridgements of passages.[73]

They also offered John Howard extensive advice on how to read the Bible. Samuel Galton Junior advised him to read the Bible every morning and evening.[74] Lucy Galton commented that '[w]hen you read the Bible, I hope you read so as to endeavour to understand

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71 BAHS, MS3101/C/D/10/9/12, SGJ to JHG, 8 Mar. 1807.

72 BAHS, MS3101/C/D/10/9/53, SGJ to JHG, 11 Dec. 1815.

73 BAHS, MS3101/C/D/10/9/5, SGJ to JHG, 8 Mar. 1806.

74 BAHS, MS3101/C/D/10/9/5, SGJ to JHG, 8 Mar. 1806; MS3101/C/D/10/9/41, SGJ to JHG, nd. [1804-10]. Lucy Galton required him to inform them by letter which chapters of the Bible he had read each week, MS3101/C/D/10/6/58, 11 Feb. 1809.

it – otherwise it can be of no use to you.'[75] In order to encourage understanding, she advised him not to read too much at once, and to send her queries and passages he did not understand.[76] She also offered him advice on how to cope with the particular style of the Bible.

> Remember … that the bible is written by people who lived in asia – and all eastern people speak in poetry; wch expresses more than is literally meant – as the River Nile is call'd, in the east, "The father of Waters." That only means, that the Nile is a very large river. The Grand Sultan, is call'd "Brother to the Sun & Moon" wch only means, that he is to be exalted above other monarchs. The Bible is full of poetry of this kind. You must learn to distinguish between what is express'd - & what it is intended we sh[d] practice.[77]

This section has described the concerns and aims of Samuel and Lucy Galton in educating their youngest son. Before considering the efficacy of their approach three observations can be made. First, they went to extensive lengths to mould and improve John Howard's behaviour, and these attempts continued throughout his childhood and early adult life. This suggests a belief in the importance of social education but also a realisation of how difficult it was to inculcate social habits across the generations. Secondly, correspondence was central to their activities. They used regular letters to instruct and to request him to perform certain actions; for example, requiring him to list what he read or to send his accounts with his letter home. The importance of correspondence is shown by the anxiety when either side of the relationship failed to reply promptly. The Galton archive is full of letters expressing disappointment that one party has not written recently or apologies for failure to do so.[78] Indeed, Adele Galton admonished John Howard for having not replied to one of Samuel Tertius Galton's letters, she stated he had 'behaved in a most ungentlemanlike manner', note

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[75] BAHS, MS3101/C/D/10/6/27, LG to JHG, 31 Jan. 1807.

[76] BAHS, MS3101/C/D/10/6/28, LG to JHG, 15 Feb. 1807.

[77] BAHS, MS3101/C/D/10/6/30, LG to JHG, 14 Mar. 1807.

[78] For example, BAHS, MS3101/C/D/10/6/1, LG to JHG, Nov. 1803. They also offer particular guidance on the processes involved in letter writing and on the form letters should take; for example, MS3101/C/D/10/6/10, LG to JHG, 8 Feb. 1806.

that this criticism is couched in terms of social status.[79] Letters clearly formed an important mechanism by which to superintend behaviour, but they were also played a vital emotional role in ensuring familial relationships were strong and healthy.[80] Thirdly, though the archive is generally silent on the education of the other Galton children, there are letters in the Galton archive which suggest Samuel and Lucy Galton used similar processes of social education to instruct their older children on how to behave.[81] The question remains, how effective were these tactics were in moulding John Howard into the 'gentleman' his parents wanted him to become?

Success and Failure

Two examples shed light on the efficacy of John Howard's parents' actions. One was a moment of crisis and the other a long-running problem. Both reveal the imperfect nature of John Howard's social education and the means available to a family of significant wealth to circumvent social difficulties.

The first example came when John Howard was 19 to 21 years old, on the cusp of adulthood. In 1815 John Howard began a relationship with a woman called Mary Freer who lived in Malvern. By 1816 John Howard seems to have proposed to her, despite his mother's warnings in six letters sent during 1815 that he should end his connection with Mary Freer. His parents refused to allow John Howard to marry before his twenty-fourth birthday.[82] This delay was an insurmountable obstacle for Henry Greswold Lewis, Mary Freer's guardian. He

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79 MS3101/C/D/10/1/6, Adele Galton to JHG, 30 Nov. 1810.

80 S. Whyman, *The Pen and the People: English Letter Writers, 1660-1800* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 13, 33, 36-7, 59, 113-15, 118, 131, 133.

81 For example, BAHS, MS3101/C/D/6/3/1, SGJ to JHG, 18 June 1802.

82 Samuel Galton Junior later described marriage 'as the Event which is to decide your future fate', when combined with their stress on the need for John Howard to have 'experience' of the world and society in order to avoid social mistakes this perhaps points to one reason why they imposed an age limit on his marriage, see BAHS, MS3101/C/D/10/9/56, SGJ to JHG, 18 Oct. 1817, original emphasis.

forbade them to meet, '"as a marriage at such a distant period can never be considered as a marriage the intercourse between you and Miss Freer must be nearly limited to correspondence."'[83] John Howard's account of the events presented his actions as innocent and sincere. He claimed he had never visited Malvern without an invitation, that his promise to marry Miss Freer upon attaining his majority was sincere and that he would have more than enough income at that point to provide for her.[84] However, he seems to have been rather disingenuous. This was suggested both by Lewis' 'astonishment at my [John Howard's] not having made an advance towards the arrangements necessary for an immediate marriage saying that "I was found in honor to marry Miss Freer immediately"'[85] and in the fact that, according to his mother, 'Reports, highly injurious to your character, are circulating – every body talks of you to your disadvantage.'[86] It is difficult to know what caused such reports to circulate, though it seems to relate to John Howard continuing to visit Malvern, even after his situation became generally known. Thus Lewis wrote to him in September 1816 to express the neighbourhood's 'surprize at the frequency of your visits to Malvern, circumstanced as you are, … it became not long since, a subject of discussion, in which you & Miss Freer, & myself I suppose, were subjects of their animadversion. … The impropriety is apparent to lookers on, and … particularly so, to servants, in this house'. Though not opposed to a marriage, Lewis refused to let Mary Freer's 'fortune, & prospects, to be tramelled with engagements, incompassed with never ceasing objections, & difficulties'.[87] A week later he pointed out that 'No parent will say, it is right you should pass three days a week in intimacy, with a young woman, you cannot marry for two years & a half. – Will your mother, your sister, & Miss Patterson, not think as I do'?[88]

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83 BAHS, MS3101/C/D/11/4/1, JHG to [H.G. Lewis], [1816], original emphasis.
84 Ibid.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid.; BAHS, MS3101/C/D/10/6/131, LG to JHG, 4 Aug. 1815.
87 BAHS, MS3101/C/D/10/52/1, H.G. Lewis to JHG, 4 Sept. 1816, original emphasis.
88 BAHS, MS3101/C/D/10/52/2, H.G. Lewis to JHG, 11 Sept. 1816.

Samuel Galton Junior wrote to his wife that the event and John Howard's attitude towards it had caused him 'more Grief than I can express.' Again the emphasis was on his character: 'My earnest hope & Prayer is that Howard, so dear to us both, may not shut his Eyes to the Disadvantages under which he is placing himself. I devoutly hope that he may become fully aware of this; in order that it may induce him by a future unvarying Respectability of Conduct to retrieve his Character; in this I most cordially offer my best advice, & assistance, but I can never sanction such a Connexion.'[89] Lucy Galton wrote to her son urging him to 'fix your attention – upon a good name! … do not, dear Howard, multiply evils, unnecessarily upon your head – you have enough to support!'[90] John Howard clearly ignored the impassioned pleas from his mother. He only gave up on Mary Freer in late 1816 when it became obvious that his parents' objections would prove an impossible barrier for Lewis. In this episode Samuel and Lucy Galton were confronted with their failure to instil in their son the correct social mores to succeed in his early adult life. Despite their repeated exertions to ensure that he moved in reputable circles and to ensure that he understood the value of his character and how to maintain it, he did not understand the social codes he was contravening by continuing to visit Mary Freer.[91]

Even though he stopped visiting Malvern in late 1816 there remained the problem of the stains on John Howard's reputation. At a point in 1817 it was decided that John Howard would take a tour of Europe to allow him to escape the disadvantages caused by his involvement with Mary Freer. The importance of this trip can be seen in comments that Margaretta Throckmorton addressed to Lucy Galton, which she quoted in a letter to her son.

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89 BAHS, MS3101/C/D/13/3/1, SGJ to LG, 24 July 1815. It was during this period that Samuel Galton sent his son a letter giving him detailed instructions on how to behave in order to live a happy life and preserve his character, see MS3101/C/D/10/9/53, SGJ to JHG, 11 Dec. 1815.

90 BAHS, MS3101/C/D/10/6/131, LG to JHG, 4 Aug. 1815.

91 BAHS, MS3101/C/D/11/4/1, JHG to [H.G. Lewis], [1816]. Davidoff and Hall suggest that there were rumours of an illegitimate child circulating but I have found no such evidence, see Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, pp. 324-5.

> "– It is one subject which calls forth my attention more than any other, and that you will be at no loss to conclude is the joyful emancipation of JH. from a prospect appalling to his family, and I can fully conceive the lightness of heart which must be the result of such a change in your [Lucy Galton's] prospects, in a case, of all other the most important, for it is not the happiness or misery of a day, but it is what can end but with life, and even then may be productive of consequences to future generations. … it is a circumstance not the less satisfactory that as Sophia [Galton] says, he is free in a manner perfectly honorable to himself. He certainly cannot decide better than the going abroad, and he has mine and our best wishes during his absence"…

Lucy Galton agreed and urged John Howard to 'let her [Mary Freer] die in every bodies mind & be buried in oblivion'.[92] Samuel Galton Junior claimed to be 'really better than I have been for two years & I am sure you will hear with pleasure and it is to you my dear Howard that I am indebted for it more than to all medical attentions – I thank you again & again for your affectionate attentions to your honorable & magnanimous Conquest over yourself, the Regard you have show to your Mother, myself, Happiness, Honor & Respectability.'[93]

This incident which caused such concern marked a moment of real crisis in the education of the Galtons' youngest son. This was despite Samuel and Lucy's deployment of great effort on their part and the use of a variety of rhetorical and supervisory tactics. They praised John Howard, criticized him, observed him, threatened him and even used Lucy Galton's memory (after her death in 1817) to try and put him on the correct track. Whilst this failed, their efforts at crisis management were successful. John Howard broke off his connection in Malvern, and his trip to the continent shielded him from the worst criticism. By the time he returned in January 1819 the rumour and criticism of his conduct seems to have disappeared and he had no trouble marrying Isabella Strutt. John Howard was by this time 25, and a partner in the bank. Presumably Samuel Galton Junior felt this financial responsibility and the added experience of a year and a half travelling in Europe had given John Howard sufficient knowledge to choose an appropriate wife.

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92 BAHS, MS3101/C/D/10/6/140, LG to JHG, [3 Oct.] 1817.

93 BAHS, MS3101/C/D/10/9/55, SGJ to JHG, 2 Sept. 1817.

The second problem was John Howard's long-running inability to manage his finances successfully. This has already been touched on above with reference to his continual trouble in keeping accurate accounts.[94] This tendency to live beyond his means and his inability to keep accurate and regular accounts were the first signs of money trouble which would, on at least two occasions, cause John Howard serious trouble. In 1830 he and his family had to leave Britain and to travel on the continent for a few years. In 1832 John Howard's inheritance from his father solved that particular problem. As noted above he inherited £60,000. This amount allowed their house at Hadzor to be finished and provided John Howard with the capital to bolster his public status within Worcestershire. His expanded public role in the 1830s (as an officer in the Worcestershire Yeomanry, sheriff of Worcestershire, and when he accepted the Droitwich Whigs' invitation to run for Parliament) was combined with a growing understanding of how a man of his standing should behave, something that had been missing in 1815-17; however, his resources did not allow him to fulfil his obligations. When she wrote to her father for financial aid in 1840, Isabella Galton diagnosed the problem.

> Howard ever since the shrievalty, the yeomanry, & the electioneering affairs has been introduced to the whole [of] the county as a magistrate – which if we are to continue to reside in this beautiful place he feels that our present position can only be maintained by keeping up occasional intercourse among the country families – It is above a year & half since most of those who have been now invited here – therefore he has done as little as possibly could be required: & on account of the expence he has declined the … yeomanry at present.[95]

Why was John Howard able to understand the particularities of this dilemma, when he had failed to do so in 1815-16? The reasons are unclear, but the two situations suggest conclusions relevant for our understanding of how social identities and habits were

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94 See pp. 233-4 above.

95 BAHS, MS3101/C/E/5/6/5, Isabella Galton to Joseph Strutt, 23 Oct. 1840. In 1820, Joseph Strutt had urged her 'always to apply to me in your Distress', MS3101/C/D/8/11/1, Joseph Strutt to Isabella Galton, 7 May 1820.

reproduced between generations. First, we might suppose that it was simply a case of John Howard being older and wiser. Perhaps he had learnt from the experiences of his youth, and perhaps his wife was a beneficial influence.[96] Otherwise we might suggest that the differing subjects of the two crises played a vital part in determining the nature of John Howard's response. In the first instance, the emotional aspect of the affair might have encouraged him to ignore his parents' repeated warnings. John Howard might have been rather more impressed by the threat of financial embarrassment than he had been by the threat to his future character, especially if his judgement was affected by romantic feelings towards Mary Freer.

These two examples have shown the degrees of success and failure of the Galtons' efforts at social education. In the long term they were successful, John Howard did eventually learn how to behave appropriately. However, this ultimate success should not suggest that the process was easy or inevitable. Lucy and Samuel Galton Junior had to work very hard to ensure their youngest son understood the implications of their social status, and even then he seems to have never been able to fully manage his finances. The difficulties faced by a family with extensive resources and time to devout to the social education of their children raises a key question regarding the processes of social reproduction that are important to social history. If social education, even when ultimately successful, was not a simple process how should we generalise about the transfer of social identities between generations and therefore about the reproduction of social understandings? This case study has discussed one example of the processes and difficulties involved in reproducing the social status quo, more studies of this issue are needed in order to understand social reproduction and continuity, rather than relying on ahistorical assertions that inertia is the norm for any society.[97]

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[96] There are suggestions of this in the active role Isabella Galton played in the search for servants for their household, see BAHS, MS3101/C/D/8/14/1, LAP to Isabella Galton, nd. [1820?]; MS3101/C/D/10/7/3, Mary Galton (Hubert's wife) to JHG, [17 Jan. 1820]; MS3101/C/D/10/7/4, Mary Galton to JHG, [27 Jan. 1820]; MS3101/C/D/10/7/5, Mary Galton to JHG, [11 May 1820]; MS3101/C/D/10/7/6, Mary Galton to JHG, [15 Feb. 1820].

[97] W.H. Sewell Jr., *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (Chicago, IL, 2005), pp. 272-3.

Conclusion

Families were (and are) key to the process of transferring social values from one generation to another; Samuel and Lucy Galton spent a great deal of time and effort attempting to ensure their youngest son understood his position in society and the type of activities and manners required by that position. The importance of the family to these processes means that a sophisticated understanding of parenting must be central to how we, as historians, think about social-group formation. The Galton family allow us to observe these processes in close detail as Samuel and Lucy Galton sought to teach John Howard first that he was a 'gentleman' and, secondly, that this social identity carried with it certain expectations with regards to his manners, interests and actions. John Howard's understanding of society and his social identity was not a simple production of his position as a member of a rich, manufacturing family; instead it was constructed through, and altered by, his parents attempts to educate him. There is no simple connection between attributes and actions, and as historians we need to bear this in mind when thinking about how family background influenced an individual's actions, understandings and identity.

This chapter has also sought to show the difficulties associated with these processes of social education. Despite the Galton family going to great lengths to educate John Howard about his place in society his education took a long time and there were a number of serious setbacks where he struggled to act the part of a 'gentleman'. In the case of his relationship with Mary Freer he failed to understand how he had contravened the social codes he was expected to adhere to. The reasons for this are unclear. More historical research is required on the how children reacted to parental instruction; for example, the issue of childhood rebellion remains little studied in a historical perspective.[98] What we can observe, however, is that the

[98] For other studies of rebellion and propertied parents responses see Phillips, 'Profligate Son'; Jones, 'Living'.

six surviving children of Samuel and Lucy Galton reacted in different ways to similar parenting. In 1806, their eldest child, Mary Anne married Lambert Schimmelpenninck, a Dutchman involved in the shipping trade at Bristol. She gained success as a writer in later life, but her husband had financial difficulties in 1811. These were exacerbated by a dispute with her parents over her marriage settlement that led to all contact between Mary Anne and her family being broken off in 1811. Her memoirs suggest an ambiguous attitude towards her parents and the education they provided. On the one hand she expressed clear love for her mother; on the other she felt much of the education they provided her led her away from God.[99] In any case she lived a different life from that intended for her by Samuel and Lucy Galton. With their two eldest sons they were more successful. Both Samuel Tertius and Hubert Galton secured 'good' marriages, held public offices and maintained similar social networks to their parents', as well as succeeding in business and financial terms. More ambiguous, regarding this issue, were their two remaining daughters. Little is known about their upbringing; we have to assume that they received one similar to Mary Anne's. Both married late in life. Adele Galton married a distinguished Birmingham physician John Kaye Booth in 1827, and they seemed to have lived a relatively contented life residing in a 'small house' in George Street, Edgbaston.[100] Distinctly less successful in the eyes of others was Sophia Galton. She remained at home and cared for Samuel Galton Junior throughout his old age. In 1833, following her father's death the previous year, she married Charles Brewin. Brewin had been Samuel Galton Junior's steward for many years, and was younger than Sophia. This difference in age and social status caused great upset within the family and, according to Violetta Galton, '[t]he unfortunate marriage of Sophia has quite distressed all

[99] E. Lee, 'Schimmelpenninck, Mary Ann (1778-1856), rev. K.D. Reynolds, *ODNB*; Schimmelpenninck, *Life*, pp. 11, 27, 333-5. An extract from her will sent to Hubert Galton by her executors in 1856 suggested that she felt her brothers and sisters had failed to avoid the dangers inherent in their upbringing, 'You have, as I believe, made a great mistake', BAHS, MS3101/C/D/6/5/1 C.C. Hankin and S.W. Stephen to Hubert Galton, 15 Sept. 1856.

[100] BAHS, MS3101/C/D/10/1/33, Adele Galton to JHG, May 1833, the house cost £900.

Birmingham'.[101] Samuel Tertius Galton's daughter, Elizabeth Anne, remarked 'it was a marriage totally beneath her and was not conducive to happiness on either side'.[102] She had, they felt, made a serious social miscalculation. Sophia defended her actions by pointing out that the years spent 'incarcerated' at Dudson caring for their father had meant she was 'cut off from my early friends' and an 'outcast'. She felt that a 'solitary life is neither conducive to improvement of character, nor to individual happiness', and that Charles Brewin was the only man who had 'proved the sincerity of his attachment by his assiduous and unwearied attention and support through several years of close and severe trial without which support I have often felt that my life or my reason must have been forfeited.' She was aware of the differences in status and age but believed that they were 'far outweighed in my mind by the excellencies of his character and conduct'.[103]

The degrees of success and failure experienced by the Galton family raise an important question about how easy it was to transmit social knowledge and practice across generations. Changing contexts, situations and the variation in individual lives meant that none of the Galton children understood the world as their parents had meant them to. This points to two recurring themes of this thesis. First, that shared attributes did not entail shared actions. Secondly, that social groups were difficult to maintain over long periods of time, not just because of economic and political differences within a society, but also because of the imperfect nature of the processes of cultural transmission and reproduction. The Galton children were educated to be gentlemen and gentlewomen. They did not all manage this, and they did not all consider themselves as gentlemen, or at least were aware that the reality of their life contrasted with how they were supposed to have acted. They managed to maintain their social position, but this was as much, if not more, a consequence of their economic

[101] BAHS, MS3101/C/D/10/2/35, Sophia Galton to JHG, 4-7 May 1833. Booth forbade Adele Galton from seeing her sister; Samuel Tertius Galton referred to the 'horrible event'.
[102] Quoted in P. Ballard, 'A Commercial and Industrial Elite: A Study of Birmingham's Upper Middle Class, 1780-1914' (Reading Univ. Ph.D. thesis, 1983), p. 211.
[103] BAHS, MS3101/C/D/10/10/32, STG to JHG, 21 Mar. 1833.

capital than their social networks or cultural knowledge. This case study raises questions about theories of social-group formation based on shared identities. Further study on the transfer of social knowledge across generations is required to develop a full understanding of the processes and problems associated with this key aspect of social life. Such studies would allow us to better approach the problem of social reproduction and, in turn, to develop a more sophisticated understanding of how social identities are maintained over long periods of time.

Chapter 5: 'A Body Without a Head': Propertied Society and Governing an Industrial Town.

In his *History of Birmingham* William Hutton lauded the town's lack of strong institutions of local government, 'We often behold a pompous corporation, which sounds well in history, over something like a dirty village – This is a head without a body. The very reverse is our case – We are a body without a head.'[1] Elsewhere in his *History*, Hutton did acknowledge the existence of power structures and their importance to Birmingham's public life, but he offered no sustained analysis of either the structure of local government or the individuals who held office and undertook the business of governing. Modern historians have not filled in the gaps left by Hutton, for Birmingham or other eighteenth-century towns. Indeed, there is little systematic work on local government in incorporated towns, and even less on unincorporated towns.[2] This is in contrast to the nineteenth century where we have important comparative studies such as Derek Fraser's, and numerous focused case studies from E.P. Hennock's examination of Birmingham and Leeds to Benjamin Weinstein's recent analysis of London vestry politics.[3] These studies constitute a detailed, comparative historiography, something which is missing for the eighteenth century.

As I noted in the introduction, there are multiple types of social groups, and this chapter focuses on one particular type: the governing elite. Most studies of elites have used two main methods to identify who was a member of a local elite: first, identifying those who

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1 W. Hutton, *A History of Birmingham, to the End of the Year 1780* (Birmingham, 1781), pp. 86-7.

2 For studies that do discuss unincorporated towns see P. Langford, *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman, 1689-1798* (Oxford, 1991), ch. 4; R. Sweet, *the English Town, 1680-1840: Government, Society and Culture* (Harlow, 1999), chs. 2, 3; J. Innes and N. Rogers, 'Politics and Government, 1700-1840', in P. Clark (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain: Volume 2: 1540-1840* (Cambridge, 2000), esp. pp. 532-6; S. Webb and B. Webb, *English Local Government from the Revolution to the Municipal Corporations Act: Statutory Authorities for Special Purposes* (London, 1922), chs. 2 and 4.

3 D. Fraser, *Urban Politics in Victorian England: The Structure of Politics in Victorian Cities* (Leicester, 1976); idem, *Power and Authority in the Victorian City* (Oxford, 1979); E.P. Hennock, *Fit and Proper Persons: Ideal and Reality in Nineteenth-Century Urban Government* (London, 1973); J. Prest, *Liberty and Locality: Parliament, Permissive Legislation and Ratepayers' Democracies in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 1990); B. Weinstein, *Liberalism and Local Government in Early Victorian London* (London, 2011).

held key posts in public life: voluntary associations, trade organizations and local government; secondly, an impressionistic approach based on identifying who was well known in a town. Again, studies of urban elites are far more common for nineteenth-century Britain than for the eighteenth century.[4] This chapter sheds light on the nature of the urban elite of an earlier town, but also suggests that previous approaches to urban elites have been flawed. In relation to governing elites more particularly, most studies based on identifying the holders of key posts have been content to simply identify those who held office and left the issue of who was active in those offices unexamined. This creates a picture in which the links between social status and governmental activity are left unexplored – a tendency most obvious in Patrick Joyce's *Rule of Freedom* where the local state wielded great power without any real analysis of how or by whom that power was exercised.[5] In contrast, this chapter adopts an explicitly *social* approach and considers what thinking about the composition, attributes, connections and perceptions of this governing elite can tell us about Birmingham's public life. It also discusses what type of social group this governing elite was. Much writing on this topic tends to assume that towns have a single elite. For example, in studies of Glasgow and the Black Country, Richard Trainor defines a single elite as those who occupied key posts in public life in local government institutions, philanthropic societies, trade organisations and other associations.[6] In keeping with my approach in the rest of this thesis, I adopt a plural understanding of 'elite' as a concept. There were multiple elites within Birmingham's

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4 For example, R.H. Trainor, *Black Country Elites: The Exercise of Authority in an Industrialized Area, 1830-1900* (Oxford, 1993); R.J. Morris, *Class, Sect and Party: the Making of the British Middle Class, Leeds, 1820-50* (Manchester, 1990), ch. 13; T. Koditschek, *Class Formation and Urban Industrial Society, Bradford, 1750-1850* (Cambridge 1990), chs. 5-12. For the eighteenth century see P. Clark, 'The Civic Leaders of Gloucester, 1580-1800', in idem (ed.), *The Transformation of English Provincial Towns* (London, 1984), pp. 311-54; R.G. Wilson, *Gentlemen Merchants: The Merchant Community in Leeds, 1700-1830* (Manchester, 1971).

5 P. Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom: Liberalism and the Modern City* (London, 2003), esp. chs. 3, 4 where the city is 'made liberal' and 'built' with few references to who undertook these processes or how they achieved them.

6 R.H. Trainor, 'The Elite', in W. Hamish Fraser and I. Maver (eds.), *Glasgow: Volume II: 1830-1912* (Manchester, 1996), p. 228; idem, *Black Country*, pp. 18-21, 122-6, 358-60. Trainor uses the terms 'elite' and 'elites' interchangeably in this book. Other scholars write of a single elite, for example, Morris, *Class*, pp. 11, 320-31.

propertied population. In this chapter I examine the governing elite in detail; I have already discussed elites based on wealth and public activity in chapter 1. The membership of these elites overlapped but was far from congruent. Similarly, while these elites represent individuals who were able to wield power in particular areas of Birmingham's public life, these power relationships cannot be accommodated within a simple hierarchy. The governing elite considered in this chapter wielded considerable power over the environment of the town, the lives of the poor and, through their ability to raise rates, the purses of propertied individuals. However, there were many areas in which they did not wield power; for example, the town's cultural life. It does not make sense to say a member of local government was more powerful than someone who dominated local cultural affairs, as these are different forms of power and the relationship between the two cannot be expressed by a simple hierarchy. Additionally, there were plenty of individuals with shared economic positions, political views or religious beliefs that were not members of a particular institution and thus were not members of a particular elite. As I have repeated throughout this thesis, there was no simple relationship between attributes and actions or status. Thus, the relationship between such shared attributes and elite groups were more complex than historians tend to suggest when they define an elite as *the* 'top' of a social class.[7]

Local Government in Birmingham[8]

Local administration in Birmingham before incorporation in 1838 was based around four main institutions: the vestry, the manorial court, the Street Commissioners and the Guardians

[7] S. Gunn, 'The "Failure" of the Victorian Middle Class: a Critique', in J. Wolff and J. Seed (eds.), *The Culture of Capital: Art, Power and the Nineteenth-Century Middle Class* (Manchester, 1988), p. 31.

[8] As Joanna Innes has noted, the language of 'central' and 'local government' is not used in this period; however I will use the term 'local government' in this chapter as a shorthand for the institutions, practices and individuals involved in the regulation of Birmingham's urban environment and population, see J. Innes, 'Central Government "Interference": Changing Conceptions, Powers and Concerns, c. 1700-1850', in J. Harris (ed.), *Civil Society in British History: Ideas, Identities, Institutions* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 40, 42-3.

of the Poor. This chapter focuses on the Street Commissioners and the Guardians for reasons of archival survival – the sources of those two bodies are much more complete than for the manor or the vestry – and because from the 1780s onwards the powers of the vestry were greatly reduced (the newly-created Guardians of the Poor took control of the poor law). Local government in Birmingham has tended to be viewed negatively by historians. Anne Rodrick commented that local government in the early nineteenth century 'appeared to punish action and reward sloth', a interpretation shared by other historians.[9] Such an argument, which often compares the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century situation with Joseph Chamberlain's Birmingham, risks adopting what Joanna Innes and John Styles have termed (in the context of the history of crime) the 'reform perspective' – relying on the critics of the system for the sources to understand the system.[10]

The main powers of the Birmingham Street Commission and Guardians of the Poor are shown in table 5.1. Particularly important to note are the numbers and means of appointment of each body – self-selection for the Commissioners, triennial ratepayer election for the Guardians of the Poor – and the property qualifications – for the Street Commissioners £1000 personal estate or property rated at over £15 p.a.; Guardians had to be rated at over £20 p.a. Paul Langford has commented that such levels of property qualification would allow individuals of, as he puts it, 'modestly middle-class status' to serve in either body.[11] In chapter 1 it was established that between 17 and 25 per cent of Birmingham's population were ratepayers in this period. In 1801 and 1830 84 per cent of rate payers in the streets sampled in

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9 A.B. Rodrick, *Self-Help and Civic Culture: Citizenship in Victorian Birmingham* (Aldershot, 2004), p. 66; for similar comments see C. Gill, *History of Birmingham: Volume I: Manor and Borough to 1865* (Oxford, 1952), pp. 72-3; D.B. Jackson, 'The Growth of an Industrial City, Birmingham, 1800-1851' (Yale Univ. Ph.D. thesis, 1956), p. 79; C.R. Elrington, 'Local Government and Public Services', in *VCH*, pp. 319, 324, 337; J. Money, *Experience and Identity: Birmingham and the West Midlands, 1760-1800* (Manchester, 1977), pp. 21, 227; Z.A.A. Scott, 'The Inquiring Sort: Ideas and Learning in Late Eighteenth-Century Birmingham' (Warwick Univ. Ph.D. thesis, 2007), pp. 18-21; P.M. Jones, *Industrial Enlightenment: Science, Technology and Culture in Birmingham and the West Midlands, 1760-1820* (Manchester, 2008), p. 62.

10 J. Innes and J. Styles, 'The Crime Wave: Recent Writing on Crime and Criminal Justice in Eighteenth-Century England', *JBS*, 25/4 (1986), p. 383.

11 Langford, *Public Life*, pp. 235.

chapter 1 met the Street Commissioner rate qualification; in 1801 63 per cent met the Guardian rating qualification while 59 per cent did in 1830.

There is little evidence about how many people voted in Guardian of the Poor elections. In 1819 nearly 800 people voted; however, this was a particularly controversial election because of the large increase in the poor rates caused by the recent depression and because the radical politician George Edmonds had conducted a long campaign to ensure people voted. These factors may have meant that more people than average exercised their right.[12] However, even in this year the number of ratepayers who voted were only a small proportion of the overall ratepaying population.

It must be remembered that table 5.1 lists only the theoretical powers of each body – in both cases what they could and could not do was limited by the particular context of each situation. Even bearing this in mind, the list of powers suggest two bodies with significant abilities to affect the lives of individuals throughout Birmingham's social structure, whether through the Guardians granting or denying poor relief or the Commissioners making compulsory purchases in order to move markets and improve streets.

I have marked some of the key locations for Birmingham's local government on figure 5.1. The Public Office used until 1807 was a rented house; the Office used from 1807 onwards was purpose-built. The two bodies shared the Public Office with each other and with the Warwickshire magistrates. The Public Offices and Town Hall were all within the central district discussed in chapter 3; the workhouse was not within that district, but the expansion of the town meant that by the end of this period, as the map shows, it was not on the periphery of the town.

[12] G. Edmonds, 'Letter VI', in in idem, *Letters to the Inhabitants of Birmingham* (Birmingham, 1819), p. 89.

Table 5.1, Powers of the Birmingham Street Commissioners and Board of Guardians.

	Street Commission	**Board of Guardians**
Date of creation	1769	1783
Local acts affecting the bodies	1773, 1801, 1812, 1828	1831
Number of members	50 (1769), 79 (1773), 99 (1812), 89 (1828)	108
Method of election	Self election	Triennial election; franchise – paying more than £10 pa in poor rates
Property qualification	Personal estate £1000 or paying more than £15 pa in poor rates	Paying more than £20 pa in poor rates
Powers (year gained)	To raise a levy on buildings worth more than £6 pa. (1769) To purchase & clear buildings (1769) To light streets (1769) To remove obstructions and nuisances (1769) To appoint watchmen (1773) To make by-laws (1773) To borrow money (1773) To determine the level and line of new streets (1801) To compel the paving of streets (1801) To license hackney coaches (1801) To set the town boundaries (1801) To build a Public Office (1801) To make, repair, drain and pave all streets in the town (1812) To build a new cattle market (1812) To raise a specific paving rate (1813) To build a Town Hall (1828) To expand and regulate the markets (1828)	To rate and raise a levy on houses worth more than £12 pa. (1783) To run and maintain the workhouse (1783) To run and maintain the Asylum for poor children (1797) To rate houses worth more than £6 pa. (Sturges Bourne Act, 1819)

Figure 5.1, Important Locations in Birmingham's Local Government.
Figure 5.1 is not currently available in ORA.

Composition

The following section analyses the members of these two bodies in terms of occupation, wealth, religion, overlap and attendance. Beginning with the older body, the Street Commissioners, between 1769 and 1828 there were 471 Commissioners. Of these, 338 (72 per cent) can be identified in the trade directories from this period. Tables 5.2-3 shows the occupational breakdown of these individuals and compares this with the overall occupational structure of the town in 1801.

Table 5.2, Occupations of the Birmingham Street Commissioners, 1769-1828.

Occupation	Number	Percentage (%)
Manufacturing	178	53
Dealing	116	34
Transport	3	1
Building	10	3
Public Service & professional	24	7
Industrial Service	7	2
Total	337	

Sources: BAHS, MS2818/1/1-4, Street Commission Minutes, 1773-1828; J.T. Bunce, *History of the Corporation of Birmingham* (6 vols., Birmingham, 1878-1957), i, 76, 81-2, 85; *The New Birmingham Directory, and Gentleman and Tradesman's Compleat Memorandum Book* (Birmingham, 1774?); *The Birmingham Directory; or, Merchant and Tradesman's Useful Companion* (Birmingham, 1777); *The Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Walsall, Dudley, Bilston and Willenhall Directory; or, Merchant and Tradesman's Useful Companion* (Birmingham, 1780); C. Pye, *Pye's Birmingham Directory, for the Year 1797* (Birmingham, 1797); idem, *The Birmingham Directory, for the Year 1800* (Birmingham, 1800); *Chapman's Birmingham Directory, or Alphabetical List of the Merchants, Tradesmen, and Principal Inhabitants, of the Town of Birmingham, and its Vicinity* (Birmingham, 1801); *Wrightson's New Triennial Directory, of Birmingham, Including an Alphabetical List of the Merchants, Tradesmen, and Respectable Inhabitants of the Town* (Birmingham, 1818); *The Directory of Birmingham, Including and Alphabetical List of the Inhabitants of the Town, a Classification of its Merchants, Manufacturers &c.* (Birmingham, 1835).
Notes: The occupation categories are taken from P.J. Corfield, 'Guide to the *Directories Database, 1772-87: Urban Occupations in Britain in the Early Industrial Revolution*', http://esds.ac.uk/doc/3443/mrdoc/pdf/guide.pdf (accessed 16/10/10).

Table 5.3, Birmingham Street Commissioner Occupations 1769-1828 Compared to 1801.

Occupation	Number	Percentage (%)	Number in 1801 directory	Percentage of whole directory population (%)
Manufacturing	178	53	2089	52.1
Dealing	116	34	1150	28.7
Transport	3	1	12	0.3
Building	10	3	192	4.8
Public Service & professional	24	7	221	5.5
Industrial Service	7	2	19	0.5

Sources: see table 5.2, 1801 figures taken from *Chapman's Birmingham Directory.*
Notes: 1801 percentages do not equal 100% as not all categories from the trade directory are present in the table.

The comparison in Table 5.3 is not ideal. The figures for the Street Commissioners cover 59 years so a comparison with the figures for one year must be viewed as suggestive only. However, the analysis of trade directories from the period 1780-1830 made in chapter 1 suggested there was comparatively little variation in the proportions of each category between 1780 to 1830. With this in mind, the table suggests that the Street Commissioners were strikingly representative of the overall occupational structure of Birmingham.

The Street Commissioners in this period included 44 of the 69 individuals who served as High Bailiff in the period between 1769 and 1834, 43 of the 70 Low Bailiffs and 56 of the 138 Constables.[13] This indicates a high level of overlap with the manorial structures of political power.

It is more difficult to judge the religious affiliations of the Street Commissioners. We need to bear in mind that religious affiliation is more complex than labels such as 'Anglican' or 'Unitarian' suggest. Individuals moved between churches and beliefs did not automatically

[13] The High and Low Bailiffs and Constable were manorial officers, elected by the jury appointed by the previous Low Bailiff; the High Bailiff was always an Anglican and the Low Bailiff a dissenter; for their powers see Bunce, *Corporation*, i, 5-12. The lists of Bailiffs and Constables are taken from W. Hutton, *The History of Birmingham*, ed. J. Guest, 6th edn. (Birmingham, 1836), pp. 216-21, 482-4.

correspond to the church most commonly attended. Ronald Ram has analysed the numbers of Street Commissioners drawn from three dissenting congregations: the Unitarian New Meeting, the Baptist Cannon St Chapel and the Quaker Bull St meeting. He identified the congregations' memberships from baptism, marriage and death registers and other records produced by these congregations.[14] The figures in the table 5.4 will not capture all the dissenting members of the Street Commission, but they give an impression of their representation.

Table 5.4, Street Commissioners from the New Meeting, Cannon St Chapel and Bull St Meeting, 1769-1828, (Percentages (%) of Total Commissioners in brackets).

Year	New Meeting (Unitarian)	Cannon St (Baptist)	Bull St (Quaker)	Total no. of Commissioners
1769 (original Commissioners)	12 (24)	3 (6)	0 (0)	50
1773 (additional Commissioners appointed)	6 (21)	1 (3)	0 (0)	29
1801 (additional Commissioners appointed)	3 (7)	2 (5)	0 (0)	42
1828 (all Commissioners)	15 (16)	7 (7)	1 or 2 (1-2)	94

Source: Ram, 'Influences', p. 33.

These figures indicate that dissenters from these three congregations made up about one quarter of the Street Commissioners for each of the years in question (with the exception of 1801). This result should be compared to the overall figures for the dissenting population of Birmingham given by Peter Jones, in table 5.5. He constructed these figures from the records of Birmingham's dissenting communities and figures derived from other historians' work. He stresses that these figures must be treated with caution and for some congregations are only

[14] R.W. Ram, 'Influences on the Patterns of Belief and Social Action Among Birmingham Dissenters Between 1750 and 1870', in A. Bryman (ed.), *Religion in the Birmingham Area: Essays in the Sociology of Religion* (Birmingham, 1975), pp. 29, 42.

approximations.

Table 5.5, Birmingham's Protestant Dissenters (households), 1771-1820.

	1771-80	1791-1800	1811-20
Dissenting households as percentage (%) of all Birmingham households	11.6	6.1	7.3

Source: Jones, *Industrial Enlightenment*, p. 171.

We must bear in mind that these are the figures for *all* dissenters and measure households rather than individuals, while the figures in table 5.4 are only for three congregations, and thus underestimate the number of dissenters among the Street Commissioners. If we assume that the Commissioners were heads of households, this suggests there was a disproportionately large number of dissenting Commissioners compared to the proportion of dissenting heads of households in the town's total population. Many historians have suggested that dissenters played an important role in Birmingham's public life and government, and these figures support those claims.[15] However, we must note that in each sample year the majority of both bodies were still members of the Church of England – dissent was important, not dominant.[16]

The Guardians of the Poor had a similar occupational make-up to the Street Commissioners, as table 5.6 and 5.7 show. Of the 672 Guardians, the occupations of 657 (98 per cent) were given in their minute books.

[15] L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes: the Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850*, rev. edn. (London, 2002), p. 43; Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, p. 204; Ram, 'Birmingham Dissenters', pp. 30-31, 34; Jones, *Industrial Enlightenment*, p. 177; R. Watts, *Gender, Power and the Unitarians in England, 1760-1860* (Harlow, 1998), pp. 74, 108; Scott, 'Inquiring Sort', p. 184.

[16] Scott, 'Inquiring Sort', p. 166.

Table 5.6, Occupations of the Birmingham Guardians of the Poor.

Occupation	Number	Percentage (%)
Manufacturing	348	53
Dealing	212	32.3
Transport	2	0.3
Building	12	1.8
Public Service & professional	45	6.8
Industrial Service*	23	3.5
Agriculture	1	0.2
Gentlemen	13	2
Esq	1	0.2
Total	657	

Sources: BAHS, GP/2/1/1-3, Board of Guardian minutes, 1783-1838.
Notes: * all but one of those classified as industrial services were bankers, there was one accountant.

Table 5.7, Birmingham Guardians of the Poor Occupations 1769-1828 Compared to 1801.

Occupation	Number	Percentage (%)	Number in 1801 directory	Percentage of whole directory population (%)
Manufacturing	348	53	2089	52.1
Dealing	212	32.3	1150	28.7
Transport	2	0.3	12	0.3
Building	12	1.8	192	4.8
Public Service & professional	45	6.8	221	5.5
Industrial Service	23	3.5	19	0.4
Agriculture	1	0.2	5	0.1
Gentlemen	13	2	42	1.1
Esq	1	0.2	8	0.2

Sources: See table 5.6, 1801 figures taken from *Chapman's Birmingham Directory.*
Notes: 1801 percentages do not equal 100% as not all categories from the trade directory are present in the table.

As table 5.7 shows, the close fit between the Guardians and the overall occupational structure is striking.

Table 5.8 shows the number of Guardians elected in each election who had never served as Guardians before.

Table 5.8, Number of New Guardians Elected, 1786-1831.

Year	Number of New Guardians	Year	Number of New Guardians
1786-9	32	1810-13	17
1789-92	20	1813-16	33
1792-5	58	1816-19	24
1795-8	78	1819-22	71
1798-1801	34	1822-5	33
1801-04	29	1825-8	32
1804-07	58	1828-31	44
1807-10	31		

Source: see table 5.6.

This data suggests no obvious pattern, though it is notable that the largest intakes of new Guardians were in 1795 and 1816, years of particularly acute depression in Birmingham.[17] The relatively high level of new Guardians elected each time (at least a third of the total in many years) does suggest that there was a large group of individuals who were seen as appropriate to serve as Guardians, that the ratepaying population were happy for individuals without prior experience to serve, and perhaps that they appreciated the need for new Guardians to ensure there was a large-enough pool to avoid over-reliance on a small group of individuals. Of course, it may also reflect the difficulty of finding individuals willing to act as Guardians for more than one three-year term.

The Guardians included 29 of the 69 High Bailiffs, 33 of the 70 Low Bailiffs and 52 of the 138 constables. This, and the data for the Street Commissioners, suggest that the Commissioners and Guardians supplied a significant proportion of those individuals who occupied the most important manorial offices. 75 of the manorial officers between 1769 and 1834 were both Street Commissioners and Guardians of the Poor. In terms of sequence, 90 individuals were elected as Guardians before holding a Manorial office, just 21 held a

[17] C.W. Chalklin, *The Provincial Towns of Georgian England: a Study of the Building Process, 1740-1820* (London, 1974), pp. 173, 176, 285-8.

Manorial office before serving as a Guardian. These three institutions, which constituted the main bodies of local government in Birmingham, were clearly intertwined in terms of membership.

Ram's data for the Guardians is restricted to the period 1819-1837. This makes comparison with Jones' figures for the size of the overall dissenting population less secure, but the outline of a picture is visible.

Table 5.9, Guardians of the Poor from the Union New Meeting, Cannon St Chapel and Bull St Meeting, 1819-1837, (Percentages (%) of Total Guardians in Brackets).

Year	New Meeting	Cannon St	Bull St	Total Number of Guardians
1819	21 (19)	4 (4)	3 (3)	108
1825	7 (6)	4 (4)	4 (4)	108
1837	15 (14)	3 (3)	5 (5)	108

Source: Ram, 'Influences', p. 33.

Even in 1825, when dissenters made up their smallest proportion of the Guardians, they were still disproportionately well-represented: 14 per cent compared to 7.3 per cent of Birmingham's population in 1811-20. Again this highlights the prominent place of dissenters among Birmingham's elite. These denominational figures also point towards a key aspect of what determined the make-up of these two bodies. In both the Street Commissioners and the Guardians of the Poor, the Unitarian New Meeting provided the largest number of members. This reflected the fact that the New Meeting's congregation was wealthier than the Cannon St Baptists.[18] This greater level of wealth increased the number of individuals eligible to serve on either body and, in the case of the Guardians of the Poor, the number who could vote. This, combined with the close-knit nature of the Unitarian community in Birmingham, provides a possible explanation for their disproportionate presence in both organizations.[19] The

[18] Ram, 'Birmingham Dissenters', pp. 31, 34.

[19] A good impression of the interconnected nature of Birmingham's Unitarians is given by T.H. Ryland, *Reminiscences of Thomas Henry Ryland*, ed. W.H. Ryland (Birmingham, 1904); see also P. Ballard, 'A Commercial and Industrial Elite: A Study of Birmingham's Upper Middle Class, 1780-1914' (2 vols., Reading Univ Ph.D. thesis, 1983), i, 204, 215-20.

Birmingham Quaker community rivalled the Unitarians in terms of wealth, but were fewer in numbers and this probably explains the smaller number of Quaker Commissioners and Guardians.[20]

The wealth of the Commissioners and Guardians at the moment of appointment is difficult to judge. However, the members of the two bodies can be compared with the probate data collected by Phillada Ballard in 1983.[21] Wealth at the end of life is a difficult tool to use to analyse the wealth of members of the Street Commission and the Board of Guardians, but it does allow some conclusions to be made. Of the 473 Street Commissioners 95 were present in her data, and of the 672 Guardians 102 were present. Table 5.10 and figures 5.2-5.3 show the distribution of wealth among members of the two bodies.

This data suggests a similar wealth distribution amongst the Guardians and the Commissioners, apart from the fact that the Commissioners had a few more in the highest wealth brackets (over £100,000) with 12 Commissioners and 7 Guardians. However these differences are minimal. Together, the Street Commissioners and the Guardians of the Poor included 142 of the 316 individuals worth over £10,000 that Ballard identified dying in the period 1775-1864.[22] These wealthy individuals were drawn from most of the occupational categories among the Commissioners and Guardians.[23] Therefore, they represent a significant section of the wealthiest members of the town's population, something reflected in Charles Villiers' comment in 1834 that in Birmingham 'wealthy and influential persons had always

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[20] Ram, 'Birmingham Dissenters', p. 36; Jones, *Industrial Enlightenment*, p. 176.

[21] See p. 94 above for Ballard's approach.

[22] Ballard, 'Commercial and Industrial Elite', ii, Appendices I and II.

[23] Transport, building and agriculture did not provide Guardians worth over £10,000, while transport did not for the Commissioners.

Table 5.10, Street Commissioner and Guardians of the Poor Wealth, (Percentage of Total Guardians and Commissioners Worth over £10,000 at Probate (%)).

Value (£1000s)	No. of Street Commissioners	No. of Guardians of the Poor	Total no. of individuals worth over £10,000, 1780-1864
0-10	5 (5.3)	8 (7.8)	22 (7.0)
10-12	8 (8.4)	7 (6.9)	29 (9.2)
12-14	3 (3.2)	5 (4.9)	24 (7.6)
14-16	8 (8.4)	6 (5.9)	27 (8.5)
16-18	2 (2.1)	5 (4.9)	16 (5.1)
18-20	12 (12.6)	15 (14.7)	57 (18.0)
20-25	11 (11.6)	11 (10.8)	32 (10.1)
25-30	9 (9.5)	8 (7.8)	27 (8.5)
30-35	7 (7.4)	11 (10.8)	26 (8.2)
35-40	5 (5.3)	5 (4.9)	11 (3.5)
40-45	3 (3.2)	3 (2.9)	6 (1.9)
45-50	1 (1.1)	1 (1.0)	5 (1.6)
50-60	5 (5.3)	5 (4.9)	7 (2.2)
60-70	2 (2.1)	3 (2.9)	4 (1.3)
70-80	2 (2.1)	2 (2.0)	4 (1.3)
80-100	0 (0)	0 (0)	2 (0.6)
100-125	1 (1.1)	1 (1.0)	4 (1.3)
125-150	2 (2.1)	1 (1.0)	3 (0.9)
150-300	6 (6.3)	4 (3.9)	6 (1.9)
300-600	3 (3.2)	1(1.0)	3 (0.9)
>600	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (0.3)
Total	95	102	316

Sources: Ballard, 'Commercial and Industrial Elite', ii, Appendices I and II; BAHS, MS2818/1/1-4, Street Commission Minutes, 1773-1828; GP/2/1/1-3, Board of Guardian Minutes, 1783-1838.

Figure 5.2, Street Commissioner and Guardians of the Poor Wealth

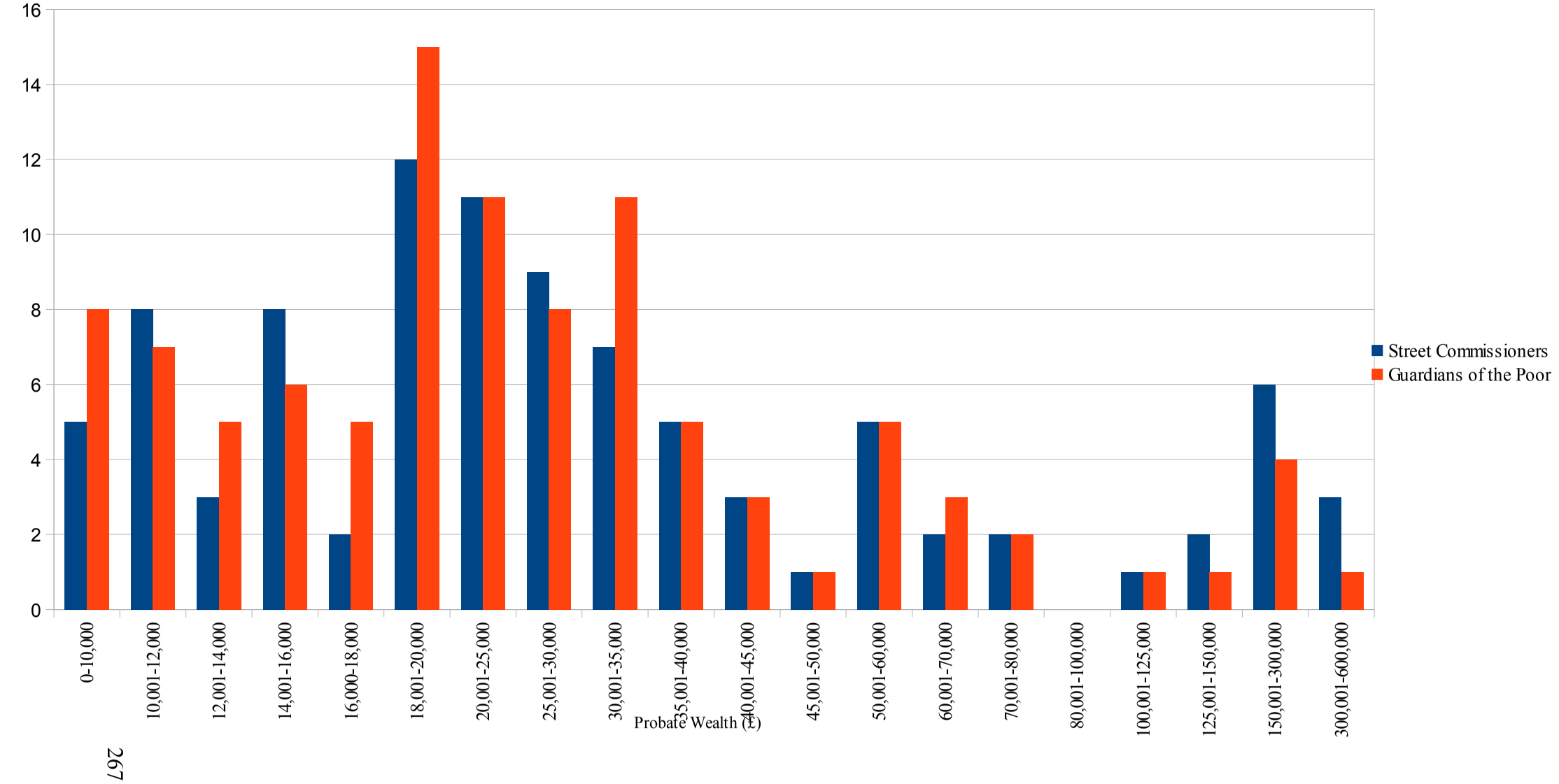
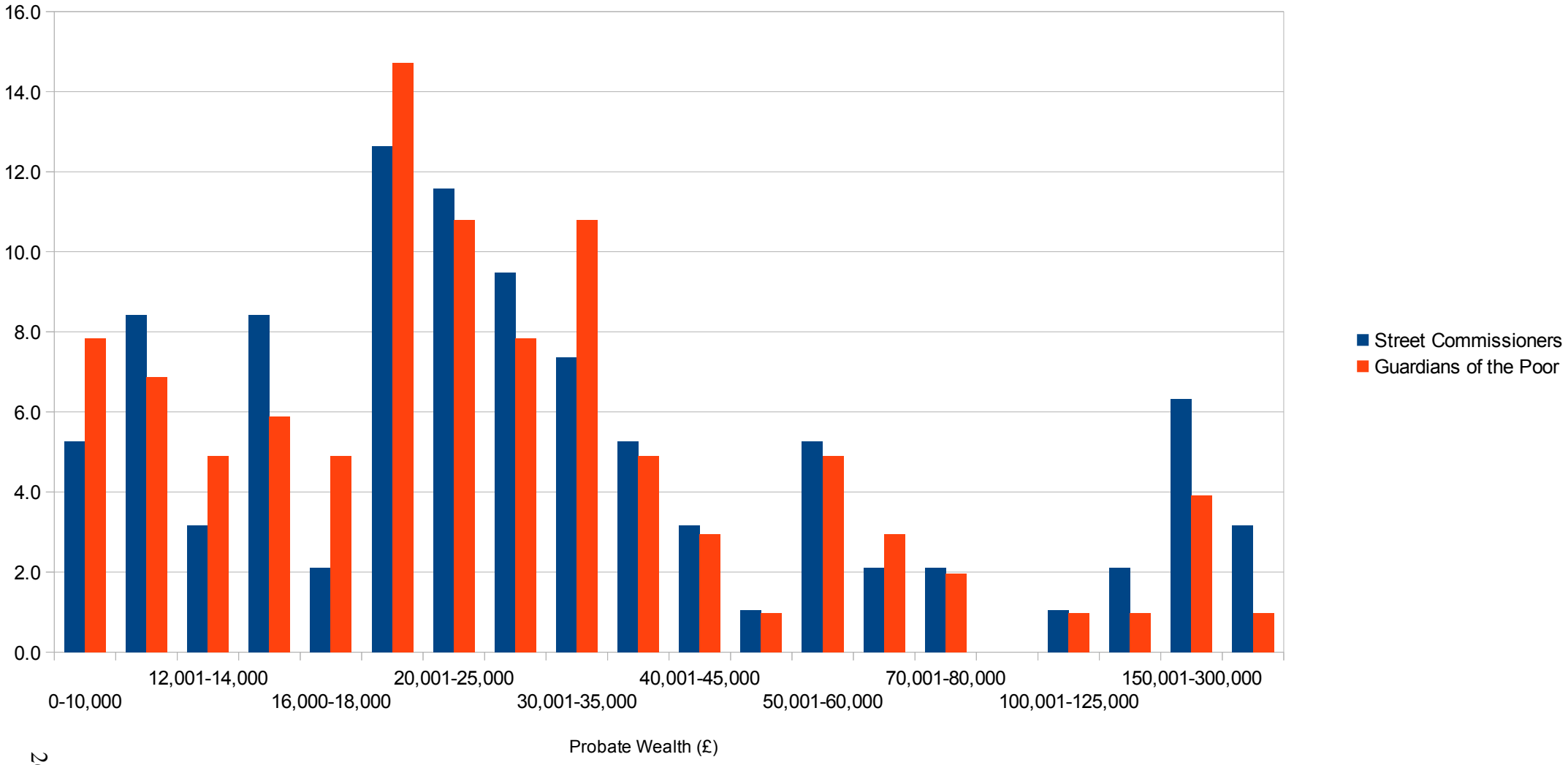
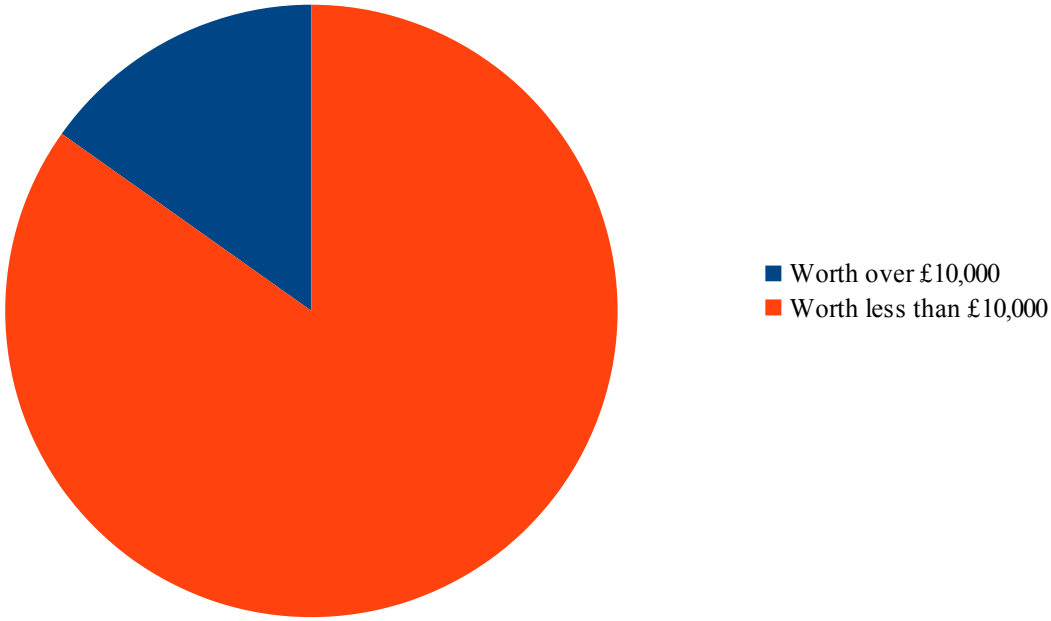


Figure 5.3, Street Commissioner and Guardian of the Poor Wealth Percentages (%).



been selected for guardians.'[24] As examples of the wealthy individuals who served in these bodies, it is worth noting that three members of the Galton family were Guardians and Commissioners in this period: Samuel Galton Senior (Commissioner from 1769; Guardian from 1783), Samuel Galton Junior (Commissioner 1781; Guardian 1783) and Samuel Tertius Galton (Commissioner 1811; Guardian 1816). However, it is important to note that there are limits to the overlap between the governing elite and the wealth elite: 376 Commissioners and 570 Guardians were worth less then £10,000 at death, and 174 of the individuals who were worth over £10,000 did not serve as Commissioners or Guardians (figures 5.4-6).

Figure 5.4, Wealth at Death of Guardians of the Poor.



[24] *Report from His Majesty's Commissioners for Inquiring into the Administration and Practical Operation of the Poor Laws*, *PP 1834*, (44), http://gateway.aa1.proquest.com/openurl?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&res_dat=xri:hcpp&rft_dat=xri:hcpp:fulltext:1834-014987:47 (accessed, 17/9/12), p. 55a.

Figure 5.5, Wealth at Death of Street Commissioners.

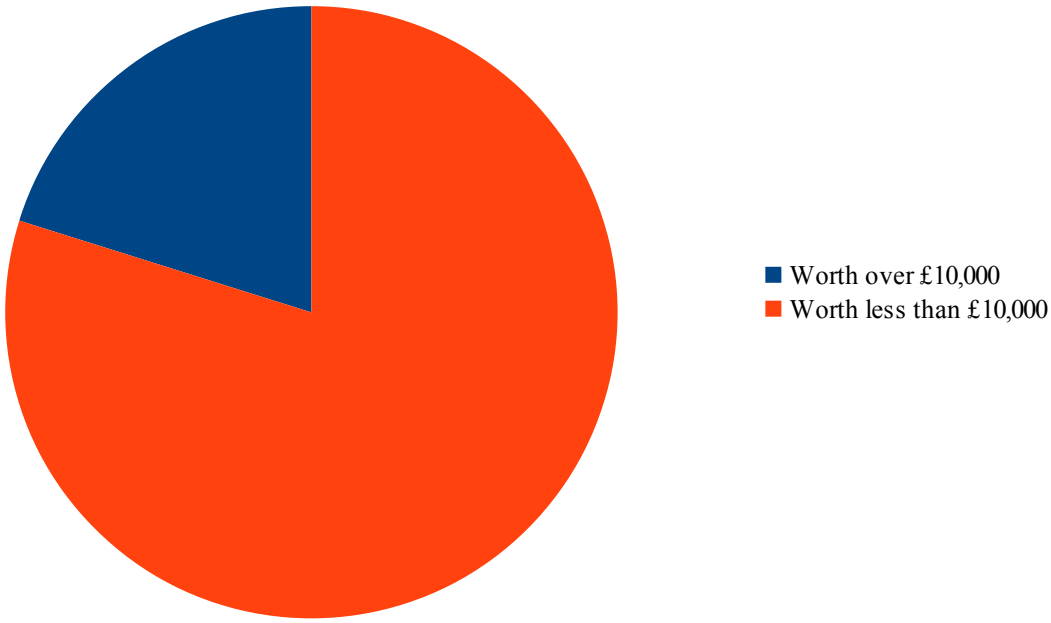
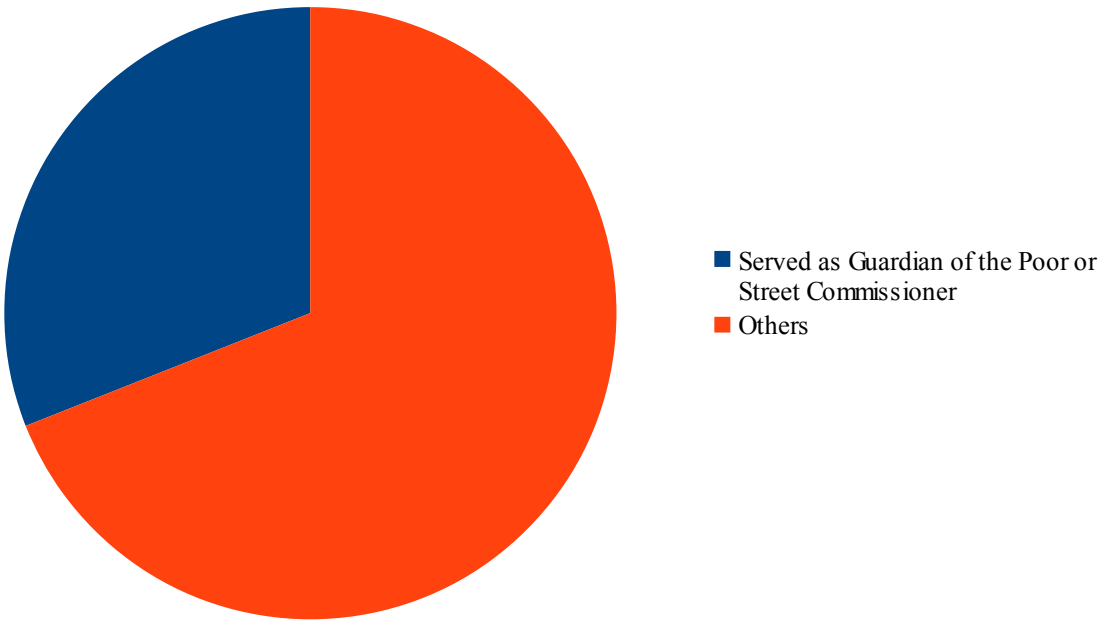


Figure 5.6, Individuals Worth Over £10,000 at Death Compared to the Governing Elite.



The similarity in the data about the two bodies can be partly explained by the high

level of overlap between them. Of the 473 Street Commissioners from the period 1769-1828, 280 (59.2 per cent) of them also served as Guardians of the Poor. The similarity of the occupational breakdowns of each body and the level of overlap in membership between a self-appointed body and an elected one suggests that there was a broadly shared understanding of who constituted the appropriate inhabitants to undertake the government of the town as well as a common perception that such governing bodies had to contain representatives from all areas of the town's economy, in proportions roughly similar to the overall occupational breakdown, members of both the dissenting and Anglican communities, and a wide spread in terms of wealth from the rich to rather more modest individuals.

Was this group was also prominent in other areas of public life in Birmingham? Of the 29 individuals who signed the requisition to found the Birmingham Society of Arts in 1821 or made up its first committee, fifteen were Street Commissioners or Guardians of the Poor. Three of the others were related to Street Commissioners or Guardians (figure 5.7).[25] Of the 23 individuals who were appointed to the first committee of the Birmingham Botanical and Horticultural Society, fourteen were Commissioners or Guardians. Of the 88 people who bought shares in that society in 1830, 19 were also members of the governing elite (figures 5.8-5.9).[26] Table 5.11 compares the Birmingham Commercial Committee (later Chamber of Commerce) and the Street Commissioners and Guardians. These two comparisons suggest that the individuals who comprised the governmental elite also played an important role in the cultural and economic life of the town. Such institutions probably helped strengthen these bodies' connections to a larger propertied population, as John Seed puts it, they were 'local centres of social intercourse for the propertied classes – a … public world which began to

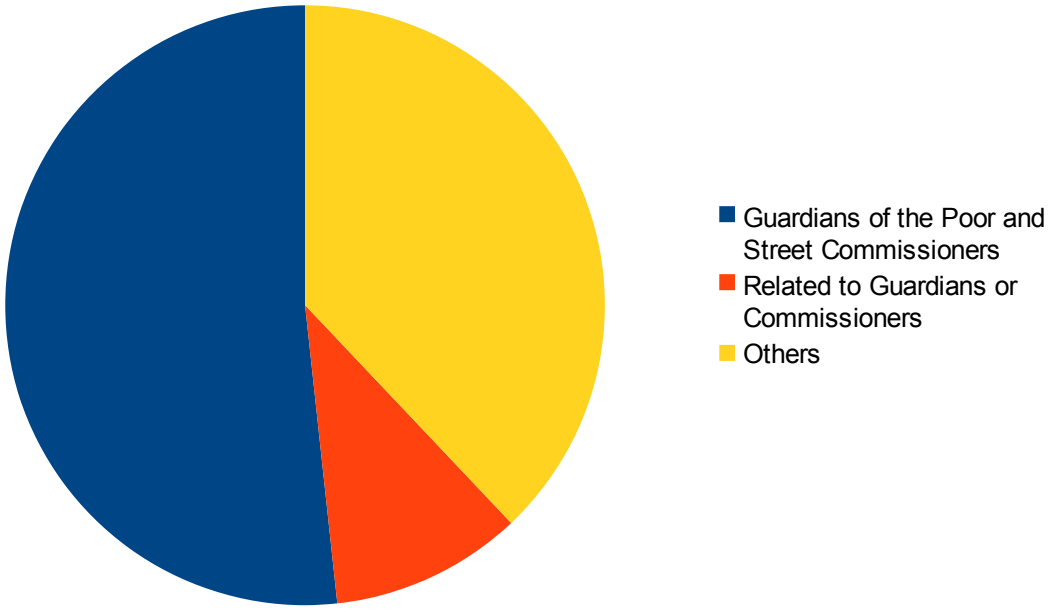
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[25] J.A. Langford, *A Century of Birmingham Life: or a Chronicle of Local Events, from 1741 to 1841* (2 vols., Birmingham, 1868), ii, 411-12; R.K. Dent, *Old and New Birmingham* (3 vols., East Ardsley, 1973 [1880]), ii, 389.

[26] P. Ballard, *An Oasis of Delight: the History of the Birmingham Botanical Gardens*, 2nd edn. (Studley, 2003), p. 16; *Aris'*, 29 Nov., 6, 13, 20 Dec. 1830.

break down the boundaries imposed by the sectarian divisions of religious life'.[27] However, the overlap was not constant over time. The decline in the proportion of members of the Chamber of Commerce who were Guardians or Commissioners between 1813 and 1819 perhaps reflects the growth in the size of that body as it sought to play a larger role in the town and to ensure it did not peter out, as the precursor Commercial Committee had done around 1798.[28] It may also reflect a desire to engage with a wider section of Birmingham's manufacturers. It also reinforces the impression that there was no single elite group in Birmingham that dominated all areas of public life.

Figure 5.7, Membership of the Birmingham Society of Arts Compared to Membership of the Street Commission and the Board of Guardians, 1821.



[27] J. Seed, 'The Role of Unitarianism in the Formation of Liberal Culture, 1775-1851: A Social History' (Hull Univ. Ph.D. thesis, 1981), p. 326.

[28] G.H.Wright, *Chronicles of the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce, A.D. 1813-1913, and of the Birmingham Commercial Society, A.D. 1783-1812* (Birmingham, 1913), p. 48

Figure 5.8, Birmingham Botanical and Horticultural Society Committee Compared to Membership of the Street Commission and the Board of Guardians, 1829.

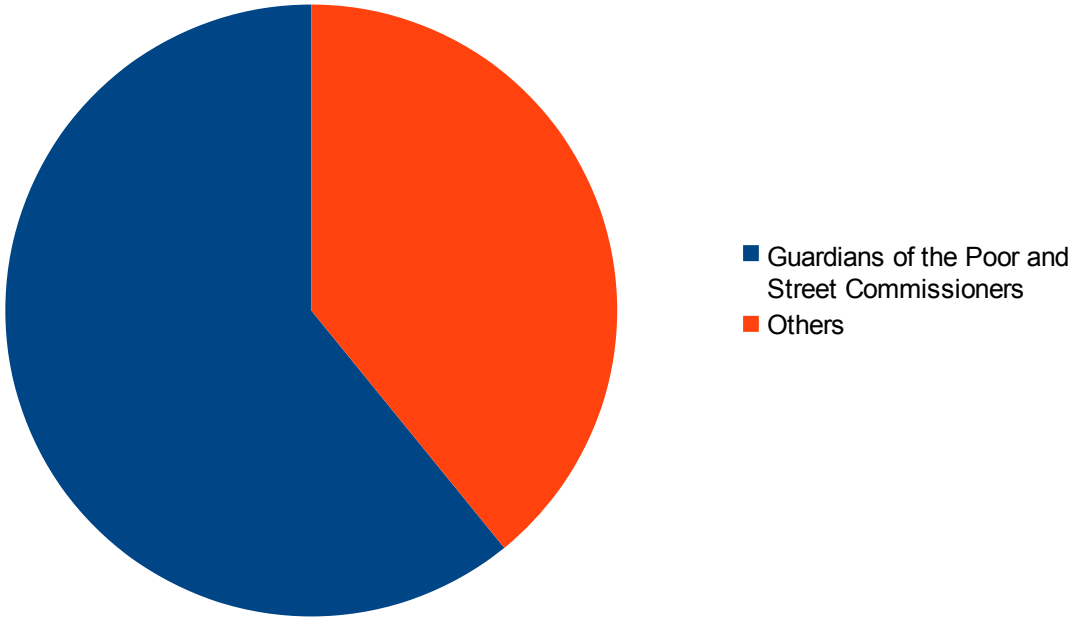


Figure 5.9, Birmingham Botanical and Horticultural Society Shareholders Compared to Membership of the Street Commission and the Board of Guardians, 1830.

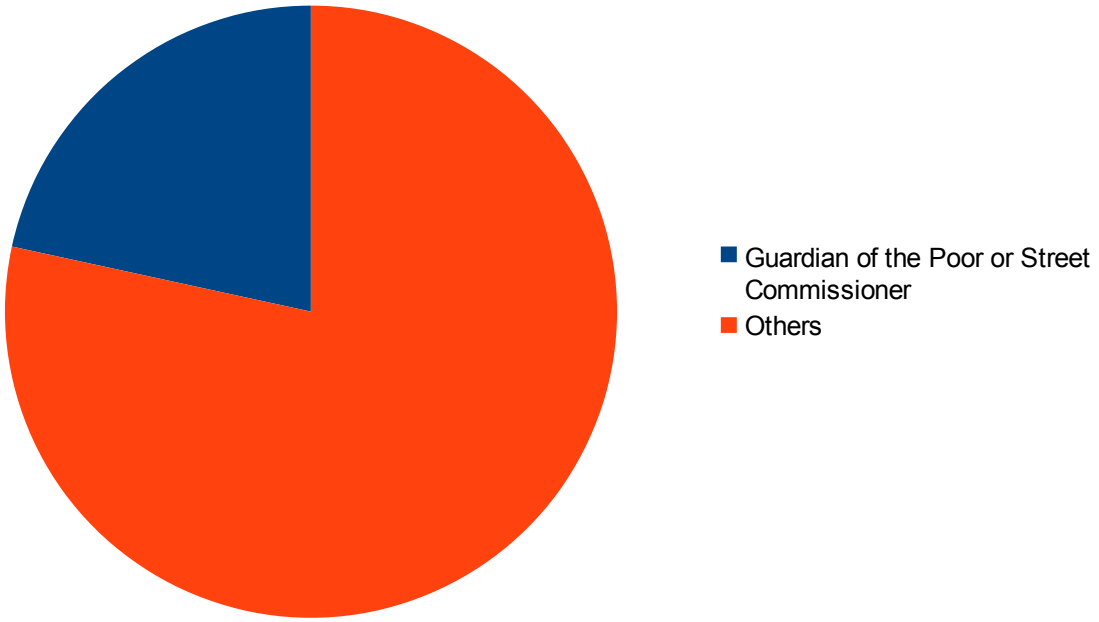


Table 5.11, Membership of the Birmingham Commercial Committee and Chamber of Commerce Compared to Membership of the Street Commission and the Board of Guardians.

Year	Total membership	Members who were Street Commissioners of Guardians of the Poor	Percentage (%)
1783	48	34	70.8
1790-95 additional members	30	22	73.3
1813	50	37	74
1819	175	91	52.0

Sources: http://www.geog.cam.ac.uk/research/projects/chambersofcommerce/birmingham.pdf (accessed 4/6/13); Wright, *Chronicles*, pp. 78-9.
Note: 1783 and 1790-95 are membership of the Commercial Committee, 1813 and 1819 of the Chamber of Commerce.

This picture can be compared to those that have been painted for a number of other towns. Louise Miskell has suggested that in early nineteenth-century Dundee the Town Council and the Harbour Commission were dominated by the mercantile elite with the manufacturing elite notable by its absence; she argues that the growth of Dundee's linen industry had little effect on the composition of the town's local government. She has also drawn a similar picture for Swansea in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[29] Richard Trainor and Stena Nenadic have shown that Glasgow's governing elite in the 1840s was dominated by merchants, with industrialists providing an important minority, but that there was still a real disconnect between the structure of Glasgow's economy and the occupational breakdown of the town's elite.[30] All these studies suggest that the representative nature of Birmingham's governing elite was unusual. These other studies do not give specific figures in terms of the wealth of members of local government bodies; however, the

[29] L. Miskell, 'Civic Leadership and the Manufacturing Elite: Dundee, 1820-1870', in L. Miskell, C. Whatley and B. Harris (eds.), *Victorian Dundee: Image and Realities* (East Linton, 2000), pp. 52-5; idem, 'Urban Power, Industrialisation and Political Reform: Swansea Elites in the Town and Region, 1780-1850', in R. Roth and R. Beachy (eds.), *Who Ran the Cities? City Elites and Urban Power Structures in Europe and North America, 1750-1940* (Aldershot, 2007), pp. 21-36.

[30] Trainor, 'Elite', p. 240; S. Nenadic, 'The Structure, Value and Influence of the Scottish Urban Middle Class: Glasgow, 1800 to 1870' (Glasgow Univ Ph.D. thesis, 1986), pp. 297-8, 311.

impression is that more of Birmingham's wealthiest inhabitants were members of these two bodies than elsewhere. For example, Miskell states that in Dundee the wealthiest inhabitants were not members of the town council.[31]

The denominational co-operation between dissenters and Anglicans found in Birmingham starkly contrasts to the picture of Manchester given by Vic Gatrell. He portrays Manchester's elite as split between a Tory Anglican group and a Unitarian group, and argues that the dynamics of urban government in that town were determined by the rivalry and conflict between them.[32] No such obvious conflict can be found in Birmingham's elite. Indeed, even in 1792 (the year after the Priestley Riots had pointed to serious religious tension in the town), a number of prominent dissenters were elected to be Guardians, including five who served as Low Bailiff, the second most important manorial position and one held by dissenters throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Four of them were Low Bailiff after 1792, one, Samuel Rogers, held the position in 1791.Similarly, a number of prominent dissenters continued to be active as Commissioners after 1791, for example, Richard Conquest and Charles Lloyd.

The governing elite identified by membership of the Street Commission and Board of Guardians was representative of the general contours of the propertied portion of Birmingham society and included a significant proportion of the wealthiest inhabitants. Furthermore, this group was in both respects more representative of Birmingham's propertied population than elites were in Manchester, Glasgow, Swansea and Dundee. How can this unusual fit between the structure of Birmingham's propertied society and its governing elite be explained? The unrepresentative nature of Swansea and Dundee's governmental structures, in part, derived from the fact that they were controlled by interests that had no desire to bring representatives of the growing industrial sectors into local government. Thus in Swansea the corporation was

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31 Miskell, 'Civic Leadership', p. 66.

32 V.A.C. Gatrell, 'Incorporation and the Pursuit of Liberal Hegemony in Manchester, 1790-1839', in D. Fraser (ed.), *Municipal Reform and the Industrial City* (Leicester, 1982), pp. 15-60.

dominated by the Duke of Beaufort whose steward controlled the appointment of burgesses.[33] In Dundee, Louise Miskell has shown that industrialists had little success in becoming members of the Town Council because their networks of contact and association were largely separate from those of the mercantile elite that dominated local government, a pattern of oligarchy that seems to have been common to Scottish burghs.[34] In Leeds, manufacturers did manage to take a role in local government in the 1810s, but they had to force their way in by using the improvement commission and the parish vestry to build up a power base in opposition to the Tory merchant-dominated corporation.[35] In institutions that were based around self-election, individuals or groups could easily secure their own dominance by choosing new members only from within their own social networks. There was no one dominant force that restricted access to the Street Commission in Birmingham; the local gentry played no role in the institutions and the Commissioners seem to have been happy to admit individuals from a range of social and religious networks. It may also be significant that the structure of Birmingham's economy did not change as significantly in this period as it did in Dundee or Swansea, with the rise of the linen and copper industries respectively; manufacturers in Birmingham were not rising to challenge an established governing elite.

Birmingham's local government was relatively harmonious compared to other towns. In contrast to Manchester, where Gatrell shows that local government was the site of fierce contests between a Tory Anglican group and a Dissenting Whig/radical group, there were no dramatic party-political conflicts over local government in Birmingham until the late 1830s.[36] There were occasional disputes over the issues of compulsory purchase and rating, but nothing on a scale similar to Manchester or elsewhere. There was growing criticism of the

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33 Miskell, 'Urban Power', pp. 25-6.

34 Miskell, 'Civic Leadership', pp. 60-63; I. Maver, 'The Guardianship of the Community: Civic Authority Prior to 1833', in T.M. Devine and G. Jackson (eds.), *Glasgow: Volume I: Beginnings to 1830* (Manchester, 1995), pp. 240-41.

35 Wilson, *Gentlemen Merchants*, pp. 171-7.

36 Gatrell, 'Incorporation', pp. 17-18, 22-3. Much of the conflict in Birmingham related to incorporation; see Fraser, *Power and Authority*, ch. 4.

Commissioners and Guardians from 1815 onwards, but this was confined to a small group of municipal radicals and their campaigns met with limited success, though their criticisms were important in the long-term growth of widespread criticism of local government. I suggest that this lack of open conflict over local government was a result of the reaction of the town's propertied population to the Priestley Riots of 1791. Those riots, which were the largest riots outside of London during the eighteenth century, were aimed in general at the town's dissenters, and Joseph Priestley and the Unitarians in particular. They had a significant impact on Birmingham. Individuals within propertied society had seen the danger and power of the mob up-close and had little desire to see its return.[37] This shared fear of the power of the poor was in contrast to Manchester where, as Gatrell argues, the structure of the labour market and other factors meant the elite of that town were secure in the strength of the social order. The fear of the mob in Birmingham was common to both dissenters and Anglicans and meant that, though there was tension between denominations at various points after 1791, it was not on the scale that led to the riots of 1791.[38] Such considerations played an important part in encouraging relative harmony with regards to the institutions of local government.

Activity

So far I have considered only the total number of individuals who were elected or appointed to the two bodies: everyone who potentially could have acted in local government. However,

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[37] For some examples of such fears, see *The Birmingham Inspector; A Periodical Work* (Birmingham, 1817), p. 39; BAHS, Baker Misc/2/33, Pages from a Commonplace Book, Probably that of Thomas Baker, c. 1812; C. Hutton Beale (ed.), *Reminiscences of a Gentlewoman of the Last Century: Letters of Catherine Hutton* (Birmingham, 1891), p. 112; Dent, *Old and New*, ii, 249. The memory of the Priestley Riots remained a prominent issue throughout this period and a constant concern for propertied individuals who were often keen to prove that the Birmingham population had overcome its riotous past; for example, T.H. Ryland, *Reminiscences of Thomas Henry Ryland*, ed. W.H. Ryland (Birmingham, 1904), p. 47; W. Matthews, *A Sketch of the Principal Means which have been Employed to Ameliorate the Intellectual and Moral Conditions of the Working Classes at Birmingham* (London, 1830), pp. 9-11.

[38] Relations between Dissenters and Anglicans seem to have calmed down by the later 1790s; for example, S.J. Pratt, *Harvest-Home* (3 vols., London, 1805), i, 282-3; Hutton Beale, *Reminiscences*, p. 114; *Aris'*, 12 Mar. 1798.

as with any institution, not every member of the Street Commission and the Board of Guardians was assiduous in their duties. It is important to consider activity levels for two reasons. First, it expands our understanding of the processes and mechanisms of local government before the widespread existence of paid, professional, local government officers. Secondly, it suggests a modification to the concept of a governing elite.

There is little work on the activity of those appointed to local government offices. I have found just two discussions for this period. First, Paul Langford has suggested that improvement commissions were often dominated by the less wealthy members because they were most likely to be affected by the changes in the urban environment that such bodies caused.[39] This conclusion is reinforced by David Griffiths' examination of the local government of Huddersfield between 1820 and 1848. He found that the Commissioners for Lighting, Watching and Cleansing contained a range of individuals in terms of wealth, some very wealthy, others less so. However, in terms of activity, of the sixteen individuals who were active in local government all but one were small producers and shopkeepers.[40] For London in an earlier period, Mark Latham has suggested that commoners (as opposed to alderman) played an increasingly important role in local government during the first half of the eighteenth century.[41] John Davis has shown that the absence of the very rich and the nature of the property qualification meant that mid and late nineteenth-century metropolitan government was dominated by small masters and shopkeepers.[42] Birmingham was different. Both the Street Commissioners and the Board of Guardians contained active members from varying wealth levels, up to some of the wealthiest individuals in Birmingham.

The first point to make is that attendance was not particularly impressive. It was common for individuals to refuse to serve at all. For example, in 1795 23 of the 108

[39] Langford, *Public Life*, pp. 230-31, 236, 248.

[40] D. Griffiths, *Pioneers or Partisans?: Governing Huddersfield, 1820-1848* (Huddersfield, 2008), pp. 44-6.

[41] M. Latham, 'From Oligarchy to a "Rate Payer's Democracy": the Evolution of the Corporation of London, 1680s-1750s', *UH*, 39/2 (2012), pp. 234-7.

[42] J. Davis, *Reforming London: The London Government Problem, 1855-1900* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 20-23.

Guardians elected refused to serve.[43] Once this hurdle was cleared, it is obvious that many Commissioners and Guardians simply did not attend meetings or perform their duties. Both bodies at times struggled to convoke enough active members to function.[44] Between 1780 and 1793, fifteen meetings did no business because there were insufficient numbers present, while on two occasions business was conducted despite there being fewer than seven Commissioners in attendance (the number required for a quorum). This problem did not disappear in the early nineteenth century; in 1819 the Guardian's Workhouse Clothing Committee reported that 'It is much to be regretted that the labour of this department falls more heavily on a few individuals than it properly should do in consequence of the non-attendance of at least two-thirds of the committee'.[45] Table 5.12 shows the average numbers attending meetings of the Street Commission and the Board of Guardians in five sample years.

Table 5.12, Average Attendance at Guardian and Street Commissioner Meetings, 1783-1830.

	Guardians of the Poor		**Street Commission**	
	No. of meetings	**Average no. attending**	**No. of meetings**	**Average no. attending**
1783	23	16	14	12
1795	22	10	10	10
1805	12	20	12	18
1819	10	31	13	26
1830	8	24	16	30

Source: BAHS, GP/B/2/1/1-3; MS2818/1/1-4, MS2818/1/6.

These figures are not perfect. After 1786, the Guardians' minute books stopped recording weekly committee meetings, and recorded only special and general meetings. Yet for both institutions we have a picture where the average attendances fell initially, before rising over the next thirty years. Some of the increase in the Commissioner attendances may reflect the

[43] BAHS, GP/B/2/1/1, 31 Mar. 1795. It is unclear whether they were fined for refusing to serve.
[44] For example, BAHS, MS 2818/1/2, 7 Aug. 1793.
[45] BAHS, GP/B/2/1/2, 29 June 1819.

increasing number of Commissioners being appointed. There is not much comparative data to give an idea about how typical these numbers are. Paul Langford's analysis of the first year's worth of meetings of the Cambridge Improvement Commission shows an average attendance of fourteen people per meeting, which is similar to the figures for Birmingham in 1783.[46]

These figures give an overly optimistic picture of attendance as they do not show how many people attended only one or two meetings before never returning. Tables 5.13 and 5.14 display the attendance records in more detail.

Table 5.13, Board of Guardians Regularity of Attendance, 1783-1830.

No. of attendances	1783	1795	1805	1819	1830
1	22	18	25	28	30
2	16	7	12	13	18
3	7	1	11	15	13
4	8	6	7	14	12
5	8	1	6	10	
6	3	1	3	9	4
7	3	1	3	1	2
8	5	1	4	2	
9	3	4	1	3	
10	2	2	1		
11			1		
12	2	1			
13	3	1			
14	1				
15					
16					
17		1			
18		2			
19					
20	1				
Total attenders	84	47	74	95	79

Source: BAHS, GP/B/2/1/1-3.

[46] Langford, *Public Life*, p. 231.

Table 5.14, Street Commission Regularity of Attendance, 1783-1830.

No. of attendances	1783	1795	1805	1819	1830
1	6	12	23	12	11
2	2	7	14	12	15
3	5	4	10	16	14
4	6	4	5	14	9
5	4	3	6	6	7
6	1	2	5	2	4
7	5	2	1	8	4
8	2	1	2		12
9				1	2
10				6	3
11	2		1	1	4
12			1	2	3
13			1		2
14	1				1
15					
16					1
Total	34	35	69	80	92

Source: BAHS, MS2818/1/1-4, MS2818/1/6.

These two tables suggest a number of conclusions. First, the proportion of the total number of both bodies attending at least one meeting increased during this period. However, the majority attended only a handful of meetings. This is particularly noticeable in the case of the 1830 Guardians: half of the 108 Guardians only attended either one or no meetings. The Street Commissioners look somewhat better, but even so, in 1830 over a third of active Commissioners attended three meetings or fewer. The large number of individuals who attended only one or two meetings supports Paul Langford's conclusion that for members of these bodies having the right to attend was more important than actually attending.[47]

In Birmingham active participation was not limited to those of lower status, as suggested by Langford and Griffiths. Status is difficult to measure but we can use two

[47] Langford, *Public Life*, pp. 231-2.

methods to approximate aspects of it. First, wealth. As mentioned above, the wealth data available is from probate and this material only captures status at one snapshot moment, but once again it does give an impression. Comparing Ballard's individuals worth over £10,000 with the lists of active Guardians and Commissioners reveals a picture in which individuals of significant wealth were as likely as anyone else to be frequent opposed to infrequent attenders. This data is displayed in tables 5.15 and 5.16.

Table 5.15, Number of Attendees of Guardian Meetings Worth Over £10,000 at Probate, 1783-1830 (Total Number of Attendees in Brackets).

No. of attendances	1783	1795	1805	1819	1830
1	8 (22)	2 (18)	6 (25)	4 (28)	5 (30)
2	5 (16)	0 (7)	1 (12)	2 (13)	3 (18)
3	3 (7)	0 (1)	0 (11)	2 (15)	2 (13)
4	0 (8)	2 (6)	3 (7)	1 (14)	1 (12)
5	2 (8)	0 (1)	2 (6)	0 (10)	
6	0 (3)	0 (1)	0 (3)	3 (9)	2 (4)
7	0 (3)	0 (1)	1 (3)	0 (1)	0 (2)
8	0 (5)	0 (1)	1 (4)	1 (2)	
9	1 (3)	1 (4)	1 (1)	1 (3)	
10	2 (2)	0 (2)	0 (1)		
11			0 (1)		
12	0 (2)	1 (1)			
13	0 (3)	1 (1)			
14	0 (1)				
15					
16					
17		0 (1)			
18		0 (2)			
19					
20	0 (1)				
Total	21 (84)	7 (47)	15 (74)	14 (95)	13 (79)

Source: BAHS, GP/B/2/1/1-3.

Table 5.16, Number of Attendees of Street Commission Meetings Worth Over £10,000 at Probate, 1783-1830 (Total Number of Attendees in Brackets).

No. of attendances	1783	1795	1805	1819	1830
1	2 (6)	3 (12)	6 (23)	4 (12)	3 (11)
2	0 (2)	0 (7)	2 (14)	1 (12)	4 (15)
3	2 (5)	0 (4)	3 (10)	2 (16)	6 (14)
4	1 (6)	1 (4)	0 (5)	6 (14)	0 (9)
5	2 (4)	1 (3)	3 (6)	1 (6)	5 (7)
6	0 (1)	0 (2)	2 (5)	0 (2)	2 (4)
7	3 (5)	1 (2)	0 (1)	1 (8)	0 (4)
8	0 (2)	0 (1)	0 (2)		4 (12)
9				0 (1)	1 (2)
10				3 (6)	0 (3)
11	1 (2)		0 (1)	0 (1)	1 (4)
12			0 (1)	2 (2)	2 (3)
13			0 (1)		2 (2)
14	0 (1)				0 (1)
15					
16					0 (1)
Total	11 (34)	6 (35)	16 (69)	20 (80)	30 (92)

Source: BAHS, MS2818/1/1-4, MS2818/1/6.

These figures do not display an obvious pattern, though the Street Commissioner data suggests that it became more common over time for richer individuals to take an active role in local government. What can be suggested is that there was no strong correlation between wealth and level of activity; instead, the pattern of those valued over £10,000 roughly mirrored that of all attenders.

Another approach to measure status involves setting numbers of attendances alongside other offices held, on the assumption that someone who is both a Commissioner/Guardian and a Manorial officer was particularly important to Birmingham's public life. Tables 5.17 and 5.18 display this comparison. The comparison with the manorial officeholders strengthens the

conclusions drawn from the wealth data. The number of office holders who were active Commissioners or Guardians increased during the period, suggesting that active Commissioners or Guardians increasingly dominated certain other areas of Birmingham's public life. However, again, there is no correlation between holding manorial office and intensity of activity.

Unfortunately it is not possible to examine the religious composition of the active members. The data provided by Ram is not in a form that can be compared to the lists of active members I have collected and I do not have other data to establish the religious beliefs of the active individuals.

Table 5.17, Number of Attendees of Guardian Meetings Holding a Manorial Office, 1783-1830 (Total Number of Attendees in Brackets).

No. of attendances	1783	1795	1805	1819	1830
1	1 (22)	8 (18)	5 (25)	8 (28)	8 (30)
2	0 (16)	0 (7)	3 (12)	4 (13)	6 (18)
3	0 (7)	0 (1)	1 (11)	2 (15)	3 (13)
4	0 (8)	1 (6)	1 (7)	4 (14)	1 (12)
5	0 (8)	0 (1)	3 (6)	4 (10)	
6	1 (3)	0 (1)	0 (3)	2 (9)	1 (4)
7	0 (3)	0 (1)	0 (3)	0 (1)	0 (2)
8	0 (5)	0 (1)	2 (4)	1 (2)	
9	0 (3)	0 (4)	1 (1)	1 (3)	
10	1 (2)	1 (2)	0 (1)		
11			0 (1)		
12	0 (2)	0 (1)			
13	0 (3)	0 (1)			
14	0 (1)				
15					
16					
17		0 (1)			
18		0 (2)			
19					
20	1 (1)				
Total	4 (84)	10 (47)	16 (74)	26 (95)	19 (79)

Source: BAHS, GP/B/2/1/1-3.

Table 5.18, Number of Attendees of Street Commission Holding a Manorial Office, 1783-1830 (Total Number of Attendees in Brackets).

No. of attendances	1783	1795	1805	1819	1830
1	4 (6)	3 (12)	5 (23)	5 (12)	6 (11)
2	0 (2)	0 (7)	2 (14)	2 (12)	7 (15)
3	3 (5)	0 (4)	1 (10)	4 (16)	5 (14)
4	2 (6)	1 (4)	2 (5)	7 (14)	1 (9)
5	1 (4)	0 (3)	2 (6)	4 (6)	0 (7)
6	0 (1)	0 (2)	1 (5)	1 (2)	1 (1)
7	2 (5)	0 (2)	1 (1)	5 (8)	1 (1)
8	1 (2)	0 (1)	1 (2)		7 (12)
9				0 (1)	0 (2)
10				2 (6)	2 (3)
11	0 (2)		0 (1)	1 (1)	2 (4)
12			0 (1)	2 (2)	2 (3)
13			1 (1)		2 (2)
14	1 (1)				1 (1)
15					
16					1 (1)
Total	14 (34)	4 (35)	16 (69)	33 (80)	38 (92)

Source: BAHS, MS2818/1/1-4, MS2818/1/6.

The absence of similar systematic studies means that it is difficult to tell how typical Birmingham's situation was. However, the impression from the scholarship on Dundee, Glasgow, Manchester and Huddersfield is that local government institutions tended to be dominated either by wealthier (as with Glasgow) or poorer (as in Dundee and Huddersfield) propertied individuals in contrast to the mixture of status and wealth seen in Birmingham; however, further comparative study is required to flesh out this conclusion.[48] If it can be sustained then it points to a different politics of social position in Birmingham from elsewhere. In other towns the wealthiest elites tended to either monopolise power (often for political reasons, like the Tory Anglican elites attempts in Manchester to deny their dissenting

[48] See, Miskell, 'Civic Leadership', p. 66; Maver, 'Glasgow's Civic Government', in Fraser and Maver (eds.), *Glasgow*, p. 443; Gatrell, 'Incorporation', pp. 22, 24, 28-9, 34; Griffiths, *Pioneers*, pp. 45-9.

opponents access to local governments), or to leave the daily business of government to others (as in Huddersfield and Cambridge).

Perceptions

There was, unsurprisingly, a contrast between how the members of the Street Commission and the Board of Guardians described themselves and how they were portrayed by others. The Street Commissioners and the Guardians of the Poor both portrayed themselves as members of a wider social group which encompassed the upper part of Birmingham's population. This was reflected in the vocabulary they used to describe members. The Guardians described themselves as 'fit and substantial people' or 'gentlemen'.[49] 'Gentleman' and 'Gentlemen Inhabitants' were also the most common term used by Street Commissioners to describe themselves.[50] They did not use the term 'chief inhabitants', as found by Henry French in seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century parochial records.[51] The terms employed portrayed members of the two bodies as part of a larger social group, rather than as a distinct elite in their own right. Quite how that wider section of society was understood is unclear. Sometimes it seems to have been defined as the rate-paying population of the town. The Guardians received petitions from 'ratepayers', and when they called meetings they were appealing to the 'ratepayers'.[52] The Street Commissioners seem to have been less concerned with the opinions of 'ratepayers', receiving fewer petitions from them. Beyond the rate-paying section of the town's population, both bodies frequently refer to the 'inhabitants' of the town and seem to have regarded their activities as (in theory) open to the scrutiny of a proportion of the

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49 BAHS, GP/B/2/1/1, 23 Sept. 1783; 21 May 1795; GP/B/2/1/2, 25 Jan. 1820.

50 BAHS, MS2818/1/2, 6 Jan. 1790; MS2818/1/3, 4 Feb. 1811; MS2818/1/6, Street Commission Minutes, 1827-37, 30 June 1828.

51 H.R. French, *The Middle Sort of People in Provincial England, 1600-1750* (Oxford, 2007), ch. 2, esp. pp. 92-3. The Guardians used 'principal inhabitants' to refer to themselves, but only once, see BAHS, GP/B/2/1/1, 20 Sept. 1784.

52 BAHS, GP/B/2/1/1, 30 Aug. 1796; BP/B/2/1/2, 25 Jan. 1820; GP/B/2/1/3, 22 Feb. 1831

population. In 1789 when the Guardians drafted an agreement with George Robinson for him to employ some of the inhabitants of the workhouse they left the agreement at the public office 'for the inspection of the inhabitants of the town'. However, 'inhabitant' did not refer to every resident of Birmingham.[53] They produced 2000 copies of the draft agreement which were given 'to the Overseers of the Poor to distribute as they may think proper' suggesting that the Guardians conceived of a small, vital constituency they had to address.[54] The Guardians and Commissioners saw themselves as acting for the benefit of the town's entire population, but as being responsible to a much smaller proportion of that population. Thus, there were at least four groups the governing elite perceived themselves interacting with: 'gentlemen', 'ratepayers', 'inhabitants' and, of course, the 'poor'.

It is striking that little public criticism of the Street Commission or Board of Guardians emerged from Birmingham's propertied society. What did arise tended to be authored by less wealthy individuals who usually had radical political sympathies. Most vociferous among such individuals was George Edmonds.[55] He felt that the two bodies were the tools of an oligarchy that corruptly ruled the town, as he put it 'the very parties who lead all the measures of the Guardians, aye, and the Commissioners too.'[56]

Edmonds conducted a campaign in the period 1817-20 to make the Guardians of the Poor a more accountable and representative body. He believed that they were an oligarchic 'junto' (a term he used) which simply voted itself back into power time and again.[57] This elite could do this because it had done 'all in their power to destroy public spirit' and so had encouraged the apathy of Birmingham's inhabitants.[58] This meant that parish meetings were

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53 French, *Middle Sort*, pp. 97-100; the issue of settlement was of great importance, see K.D.M. Snell, *Parish and Belonging: Community, Identity and Welfare in England and Wales, 1700-1950* (Oxford, 2006), ch. 3.

54 BAHS, GP/B/2/1/1, 1 Sept. 1789; the Street Commissioners did much the same, for example, MS2818/1/1, 21 Oct. 1783. Birmingham's population in 1791 was 73,653, see Hutton, *History* (1836), p. 77.

55 See pp. 116-17 above for Edmonds' social status.

56 G. Edmonds, *Letter to the Payers of the Levies of the Parish of Birmingham* (Birmingham, 1825), p. 9.

57 G. Edmonds, 'Letter IV', in idem, *Letters*, p. 48.

58 G. Edmonds, 'Letter III', in ibid., *Letters*, p. 18.

poorly attended, the Guardians were never held to account and, hence, the town's affairs were badly managed.[59] This allowed a particular group to monopolize power and to corruptly promote their own interests through the manipulation of contracts. In 1819 and 1820 Edmonds complained that Richard Jabet was an auditor of the churchwardens' accounts and yet also supplied books and stationery to them. Edmonds complained that 'Mr. Jabet seems to enjoy our parish patronage as a sort of heir-loom.'[60] This meant that the money and the goods of ratepayers were taken from them 'only to swell the gains of our parish robbers', either the 'peculating *servants*, or peculating *guardians*'.[61] He criticized the Guardians for seeking to manipulate the press and meetings to ensure they themselves were re-elected and for making false legal objections to prevent the votes of the majority of qualified ratepayers counting, by claiming those in arrears with their rates could not vote.[62] Edmonds claimed that these tactics were all designed to ensure the re-election of the 'Aristocratic party', the small group that undertook most of the Guardians' business, something only encouraged by the fact that only five Guardians were required for a quorum.[63] This all amounted to an attempt 'to *rob* the payers of the levies of their legal rights'.[64]

In the election of 1819 Edmonds himself was elected as a Guardian and appointed to the committee which inspected the workhouse. While serving on this committee Edmonds claimed that one member of that 'party' 'drew a distinction between his colleagues and the *"visitors"*' who had been newly appointed in 1819.[65]

Edmonds wrote his *Letters* in 1819 to persuade more of the town's population to take an interest in parish affairs and to challenge the oligarchy of the richest inhabitants. He felt he had succeeded when in 1819 only 27 of the previous set of Guardians were re-elected. Of the

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59 *The Saturday Register* (Birmingham, 1820), pp. 28-9, 171-7.
60 Edmonds, 'Letter III', p. 19.
61 Ibid., p. 27.
62 Edmonds, 'Letter IV', pp. 39, 46; idem, 'Letter V', in idem, *Letters*, pp. 61-2, 65, 76-80.
63 G. Edmonds, 'Letter VI',in idem, *Letters*, p. 84; idem, 'Letter VIII', in ibid., p. 115.
64 Edmonds, 'Letter V', p. 65.
65 G. Edmonds, 'Letter IX', in ibid, p. 130, original emphasis.

remaining 81, 58 had never served as Guardians before.[66] Those 27, Edmonds claimed, were merely 'the reliques, or rather *quintessence* of the old Guardians'; though unfortunately they were 'the worst of the old ones, as I believe, by the tricking of friends, were got in again … [t]hese few then of the old spawn, are such as were most active under the old administration, and who are now the busiest under the new.'[67] Edmonds also believed a vigilant committee for inspecting the workhouse would create a new, efficient, responsible Board of Guardians.[68] Unfortunately, for his plan, Edmonds was arrested in 1820 for his role in the 'Legislatorial Attorney' scheme. His opponents (as he saw them) reconsolidated their control over the Guardians and he was not re-elected in 1825.[69] To Edmonds the Guardians were controlled by a section of Birmingham's population who were anti-reform and who sought to oppress the poor and the independent inhabitants of the town. They aimed to advance the interests of themselves and other members of their social elite at the expense of the rest of the population.

Joseph Russell, who was imprisoned for six months in 1819 for selling William Hone's *Political Litany*, attacked the Street Commissioners on similar grounds. Russell appeared in 1818, 1823, 1828 and 1830 directories, but not in any of the other data used in chapter 1. In 1828 he published a letter to William Phipson, a Unitarian Street Commissioner, in which he criticized Phipson and his 'brother Commissioners' for opposing, and defeating, a resolution Russell had proposed at a meeting of the Birmingham ratepayers for the Commissioners to replace the system of appointment with ratepayer election.[70] He claimed their opposition was driven by the 'love' of power:

> upon what ground of policy can you refuse a similar [to the poor law] controul, over the application, to the contributors to the Street act rate? can it possibly be, that a love of irresponsible power is so sweet to you the enlightened and oracular

66 In 1816 24 of the Guardians elected had never served before.

67 *Saturday Register*, p. 25, original emphasis.

68 G. Edmonds, *Letter to the Inhabitants of Birmingham* (Birmingham, 1820), p. 3.

69 Edmonds, *Letter* (1825), pp. 4-5.

70 J. Russell, *A Letter to W. Phipson, Esq. Street Commissioner, on the Impropriety of his Conduct, at the Birmingham Rate Payers' Meeting* (Birmingham, 1828), pp. 3-4.

> W. Phipson, Esq. (a professed liberal) that for its exercise, you can … compromise your character, and shew an utter disregard to the representative principle? and after having done so, can you flatter yourself, that the majority of your townsmen will not see that it is self-love, gratified by the exercise of irresponsible power[71]

Russell hoped that all the Commissioners would resign as there would be no difficulty in finding 'sufficient ability and integrity … in other inhabitants to fill your situations, and that all the business previously intrusted to you and your Colleagues, as Street Commissioners, would continue to be managed equally as able and more economically than has hitherto been the case.'[72] Like Edmonds he thought that an irresponsible, oligarchic body had abused the ratepayers, and this had led to waste and corruption.

At the end of this period Richard Jenkinson[73] renewed the charge made by Edmonds in the post-war period that the institutions of urban government were controlled by a corrupt oligarchy who held a 'monopoly of patronage' and had increased 'the "screw of taxation past endurance"'. He claimed that the Street Commissioners had subverted a public meeting in 1828 where they had stated that those in favour of applying to Parliament for a new Improvement Act outnumbered those against when the opposite had been true.[74] He was glad that '[t]he people', following the success of the BPU, were now 'conscious of their strength' and that consequently they 'cannot longer be made subservient to the views, private interests, and emoluments of the few *aristocratical shopocracy men*, if we may so call *you*, the commissioners, overseers, and guardians of the poor'.[75] Both Edmonds and Jenkinson's understandings of the nature of this oligarchic social group were driven by causes external to

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71 Ibid., pp. 6-7.

72 Ibid., p. 8.

73 Jenkinson was included in trade directories in 1828 and 1830

74 R. Jenkinson, *Abuses in Authority Exposed! In an Address to the Rate-payers, Overseers, Guardians, and Commissioners, of the Borough and Parish of Birmingham* (Birmingham, 1834), pp. 4, 5

75 Ibid., p. 5, original emphasis. These charges were found in all of Jenkinson's publications from this period, see *The Birmingham Scholastic Tickler* (Birmingham, 1829), pp. 9-12, 49-50, 57-8, 65-8; R. Jenkinson, *Richard Jenkinson's Address to the Men of Birmingham, on his Recent Conviction in Five Pounds and Costs, for Selling the Journal Office Report, of the Last Newhall-hill Meeting* (Birmingham, 1833), p. 4; idem, *Richard Jenkinson's Warning Voice to Oppressors, Showing the State of Society in Birmingham, Facts on the Spy and Informing System, on the Supineness of the Magistracy* (Birmingham, 1833), pp. 14-15.

the reality of Guardians and the Commissioners actions and composition. In Edmonds' case he saw the Guardians of the Poor as part of a national system of corruption: 'Like the corruptions of another house of guardians, – the House of Commons, – those of our work-house, were "notorious as the sun at noon day."'[76] Elsewhere Edmonds made a similar point with regards to the Street Commissioners, commenting that the BPU would ensure that 'the day was not far distant … when, like the House of Commons, the Commissioners would no longer be elected by themselves, but by the great body of ratepayers, whose money they expended.'[77] Jenkinson's ire was driven by his humiliation at the hands of the Court of Requests when he was imprisoned for debt. In response he published numerous attacks on his own personal enemies within the systems of Birmingham's urban government.[78]

The criticism from Edmonds and others was part of a tradition of municipal opposition that gathered pace in the later eighteenth century driven by the growth in interest in local government activities, prompted, in part, by the expansion of the provincial press.[79] The Birmingham municipal radicals' critiques shared many features with reformers elsewhere. The stress on the failure to manage revenues or keep accurate accounts, the critique of governing elites as 'aristocratic', the critiques of the secrecy surrounding local government activities, and the argument that corporations and other bodies usurped the legal rights of ratepayers or freeman were common arguments throughout England. The similarity between unelected local government bodies and restricted Parliamentary franchise was also often noted by radicals in the early nineteenth century.[80] One aspect that was missing in Birmingham was a use of history, presumably because, unlike in incorporated towns, there were few obvious

[76] Edmonds, 'Letter III', p. 25.

[77] *Report of the Proceedings of the Second Annual Meeting of the Birmingham Political Union* (Birmingham, 1831), p. 6.

[78] Rodrick, *Self-Help*, pp. 65-6.

[79] Innes and Rogers, 'Politics', pp. 565-7; Sweet, *English Town*, pp. 141-3, 148-50.

[80] S. and B. Webb, *English Local Government from the Revolution to the Municipal Corporations Act: the Manor and Borough* (2 vols., London, 1908), ii, 700-705; idem, *Statutory Authorities*, pp. 271-3, 345-6, 412-23; E. Reynolds, *Before the Bobbies: the Night Watch and Police Reform in Metropolitan London, 1720-1830* (Basingstoke, 1998), pp. 61, 98, 126, 142-5; Innes and Rogers, 'Politics', pp. 567-8; Sweet, *English Town*, pp. 148-52.

historical rights to appeal to in Birmingham.[81]

These were some of the strongest critiques of the Guardians and Street Commissioners. However, others criticized these bodies as corrupt and self serving, usually in milder terms. This type of criticism sometimes came from wealthier individuals within propertied society. To give just one example: William Hutton had attacked the bill which created the Guardians of the Poor in 1783 because he felt that expanding the number of people responsible for the administration of the poor law would lead to increased corruption, because of the nature of commerce:

> Our commerce is carried on by reciprocal obligation. Every overseer has his friends, whom he cannot refuse to serve; nay, whom he may even wish to serve, if that service costs him nothing: hence, that over-grown monster so justly complains of, *The Weekly Tickets*; it follows, whether *sixty* guardians are not likely to have more friends to service, than six overseers?[82]

According to Hutton, this was especially pernicious because people in power always sought to expand the scope of that power. In his vision, the nature of power and commerce would create a self-perpetuating oligarchy.

Criticism from the wealthier inhabitants was most often expressed during the long-running struggle over rating small buildings (worth less than £12) from 1790 to 1819. In 1790 John Green requested a thorough inspection of the Overseers' accounts before any change in rating was even considered, wondering whether 'it has been the practice of any, and what overseers, during the time of their being such, to act as *buyers* for the poor, and as *sellers* at the same time of articles *furnished* by *themselves*.'[83] Those who opposed a proposed bill to allow small buildings to be rated in 1790 claimed that the public meeting which had agreed to apply to Parliament 'was not a fair and impartial Meeting' as invitations were sent 'to those Persons who were known to be desirous of supporting the Measures previously adopted …

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81 Sweet, *English Town*, pp. 150-52.

82 W. Hutton, *An History of Birmingham*, 2nd edn (Birmingham, 1783), p. 366, original emphasis.

83 Langford, *Century*, i, 448.

without others having any Knowledge or Intimation of such Invitation.'[84] Hutton led much of the criticism of the administration of the poor law, reacting to criticism from the Overseers: 'If I am *ambitious*, it is not for an Emolument or a Place; I never expressed a Wish for either, but to save the Town four or five Levies a Year, and your Credit, while you refuse to save either. Had I wished an Office, your Fondness for Power prohibited all Access.'[85] The theme of the Guardians or Overseers as a corrupt oligarchy continued in the post-war period.[86]

These criticisms were less overtly political in their nature than Edmonds', and I do not want to over-emphasize the extent to which this was a prominent discourse. However, the idea of the Guardians as corrupt and as ignorant of the interests and experiences of the majority of the population did circulate in this period and suggested an idea (however ill-formed) of the Guardians as constituting or representing only a particular section of society, rather than serving the population of the town as a whole.

The Street Commissioners were attacked for similar reasons. In 1824 'Ambulator' criticized the Commissioners for showing 'a total disregard of private property' and for pursuing 'improvement' at all costs, even when it was unnecessary, claiming that 'too much may be sacrificed to symmetry and to apparent (I say *apparent*) public advantage.'[87] Part of the charge was that the Street Commissioners claimed to act in the 'public' interest, but that actually they served private interests or, otherwise, were simply ignorant of what the 'public' interest was. Thus, their proposed changes caused only 'serious inconvenience to the inhabitants'. 'Ambulator' characterized the Commissioners as a self-contained group of 'improvers' separate from the majority of the population.[88] He also speculated that at times

[84] Ibid., i, 453.

[85] Ibid., i, 461.

[86] For example, BAHS, MS1098/101, Papers Relating to a Petition by the Birmingham Landowners Against the Birmingham Poor Rates Bill. 1817; H.W.S., *Plain Truth; or a Correct Statement of the Late Events Relative to the Birmingham Workhouse* (Birmingham, 1818), p. 5.

[87] *The Birmingham Spectator, a Miscellany of Literature, and of Dramatic Criticism* (Birmingham, 1824), p. 146. It was not all criticism however, in the same issue of this periodical included a letter from 'A Friend to Architectural Improvements' which praised the actions of 'our active and enlightened body of Commissioners, aided by the … support of a few private individuals of opulence and taste.', (p. 152).

[88] Ibid., p. 147.

they neglected to sweep certain roads in an attempt force inhabitants to themselves raise subscriptions to pay for their streets to be swept.[89] The criticism of the Street Commissioners as an oligarchic body would continue until their abolition in the 1850s; in 1837 the *Birmingham Journal* commented that the Commissioners were '*chosen by themselves*; working in the dark, unseen by the public eye; irresponsible to the public voice', their power 'vested, in the hands' of a section of the town's population they characterized as 'Whigs'.[90]

The perceptions of the Guardians and Street Commissioners which circulated in this period suggest that when these bodies were particularly prominent in the public life of the town then they were viewed, by their opponents, as closed organizations which sought to promote their own interests at the expense of the rest of the town. Furthermore, the wider political environment promoted the view of the Commissioners and Guardians as a self-perpetuating social group, social in the sense that their actions were driven by their interests as defined by their economic position within the town and by their familial and friendship links. This view was in contrast to the Guardians' and Commissioners' understanding of themselves as the representatives of a broad section of Birmingham's society and as servants of the town in general.

Conclusion

This chapter has offered an account of the governing elite of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Birmingham that has sought to develop our understanding of the social history of urban elites and local government. In addition to the conclusions mentioned earlier, about the existence of a broad-based representative governing elite and the contingent nature of harmonious local government in Birmingham, I would like to add a number of conclusions

[89] Ibid., p. 148.
[90] *Birmingham Journal*, 21 Oct. 1837.

that might point the way to new avenues of investigation. First, the data analysed in the first part of this paper suggests that there were in fact two governing elites in Birmingham during this period. First, a symbolic governing elite – all those who held office as a Commissioner or Guardian, but many of whom rarely, if ever, exercised the formal power granted by membership of those bodies. This symbolic governing elite was key to the maintenance of denominational peace, as it allowed individuals of different religious affiliations to appear to be co-operating without any real need for them to actually undertake much governmental business together.[91] Secondly, an active governing elite, much smaller and made up of those who actually undertook the business of local government. Birmingham provides one example of this second group – whether similar groups elsewhere were as varied in terms of wealth and status remains to be seen. The existence of two different types of governing elite group suggests that we need to be wary of thinking in terms of a single elite. Birmingham had multiple elite groups, and those elites might contain different groups within themselves, as in this chapter with the active and the symbolic governing elites. I suspect that the inconsistency between the membership of these two groups can help explain why certain issues become particularly controversial and caused real conflict and others did not. For example, from July 1808 to February 1809 the Commissioners were divided over the issue of whether a wall put up across Fazeley Street by the trustees of St Martins' in order to increase the size of their graveyard was legal or not. This issue caused great debate and large attendances, 50 Commissioners attended a meeting on the 3rd October 1808, and 60 on 25th October. The reasons for disagreement are not recorded. However, comparing those who voted yes or no for the removal of the wall to the subscription data collected for chapter 1 reveals that those who voted for the wall's removal were more likely to be opponents of the Orders in Council and those who voted for the wall were more likely to support the Orders.[92] This is not to suggest a

[91] There is evidence for a lack of inter-denominational socializing; Thomas Henry Ryland's social world in the early nineteenth century, as he remembered it, was almost solely Unitarian, Ryland, *Reminiscences*.

[92] BAHS, MS2818/1/3, 4 July, 1 Aug., 5 Sept., 25 Oct. 1808, 6 Feb., 7 Aug. 1809; of the 29 who voted on 25th

strong causal link between the two issues; rather, that this division in 1808/9 can be related to other divisions within this propertied governing elite.

Secondly, this governing elite began to fracture in the 1820s. The campaign for the Reform Act of 1832 and the important role played by the Birmingham Political Union caused significant tension in the town. This is particularly important in this context, as the BPU drew more support from the level of society that provided Street Commissioners and Guardians of the Poor than had been the case in previous campaigns for parliamentary reform. In conjunction with other developments in the 1820s (notably the increasing political importance of small producers and the re-emergence of denominational tensions over church rates and Catholic Emancipation), this seems to have caused increasing divisions in the propertied population of the town. It was in the 1830s, both during the reform campaign and after, that we begin to see regular criticism of the Street Commission and the Guardians of the Poor from members of the BPU and others. This is despite the fact that leading reformers like Thomas Attwood, Joshua Scholefield and G.F. Muntz were all members of the the bodies now attacked at BPU meetings. It was the political history of the 1830s that drove the emergence and crystallization of two competing governing elites, the conservatives dominated the Street Commission and the radicals the Town Council.[93]

The governing elite were held together by a shared fear of the mob and sectarian division. This fear was frequently reinforced by national and local political events: the French Revolution's impact, the political radicalism of the post-war period (especially the impact of Peterloo) and the constant reiteration of the importance of order, harmonious social relations and the avoidance of revolution.[94] Following the Priestley Riots, it was only in the 1820s that

October 1808 to remove the wall, 13 signed a requisition for a meeting to protest the Orders in Council; 12 of the 27 who voted against removing the wall signed a requisition arguing that the Orders in Council were not the sole cause of the current economic distress; only one person against removal signed the anti-Orders requisition and just three people for removal signed the opposite requisition.

93 Hennock, *Fit and Proper*, pp. 20-23; Fraser, *Power and Authority*, pp. 86-9.

94 See pp. 128-36 for the importance of a discourse of social cohesion and order. For examples of authors using the French Revolution to appeal for cohesion see Conciliator, *An Appeal to the Artisans of Birmingham by Conciliator* (Birmingham, 1819), p. 6; A Briton, *An Address to Reformers* (Birmingham, 1819), pp. 2-4; for

this governing elite began to splinter over a number of increasingly important issues and form into different social groups focused on particular issues. Most notably, disagreement was caused by the issue of Birmingham's relationship to Parliament. The memory of 1791 became less important; it was either regarded as having been solved by the education of the working population, or was perceived as less pressing than parliamentary reform. The elite's coherence had been forged by contingent circumstances, rather than shared attributes, and when those circumstances changed so the group's unity weakened. The memory of 1791 ceased to bind Birmingham's governing elite together as a social group united in the pursuit of stability and improvement.

Peterloo see John Nott Junior, *Letters from John Nott to his Fellow Townsmen* (Birmingham, 1819), p. 4.

Chapter 6: The Social History of the Birmingham Political Union: Routes to Radical Politics.

The Birmingham Political Union (BPU), inspired by the success of Daniel O'Connell's Catholic Association, was created on 14 December 1829 by Thomas Attwood, Joshua Scholefield (a merchant and radical) and fourteen other individuals. The rules and organization of the Union were formalized at a mass meeting on 25 January 1830. It sought to reform Parliament in order to end the depression that Attwood and others attributed to the 'mismanagement of public affairs' by a Commons that had little or no understanding of the nature or needs of manufacturing.[1] The BPU was directed by a council of thirty-six members; the general membership paid dues of one penny per week. It united individuals of different political stances around the idea of parliamentary reform. Attwood combined Tory-radicalism with his own ideas about currency reform. However, the BPU encompassed a wide variety of other stances: members included constitutionalist radicals such as George Edmonds, Owenites such as William Pare, and Whigs like Joshua Scholefield.[2] Attwood's high social status seems to have encouraged a much wider participation from within propertied society than in campaigns in the 1790s or 1810s. It is hard to tell how usual it was for a Political Union to have been formed by a Tory; however, the scattered evidence given by Nancy LoPatin suggests they were more usually formed by gentlemanly or working-class radicals (such as in London and Bolton), or in opposition to Tory-controlled corporations (for example, in Nottingham).[3] The BPU was the first of over a hundred Political Unions created during the reform campaign. They played an important role in securing the passage of the Bill, not least

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1 *Report of the Proceedings at the Meeting of the Inhabitants of Birmingham, Held on Monday, the 25th of January 1830* (Birmingham, 1830), p. 13.

2 For constitutionalism see J. Epstein, *Radical Expression: Political Language, Ritual, and Symbol in England, 1790-1850* (Oxford, 1994), ch. 1.

3 N.D. LoPatin, *Political Unions, Popular Politics and the Great Reform Act of 1832* (Basingstoke, 1999), pp. 39-51, 53-63, 70-73, 76-9, 82-4, 101-17, 139-41; frustratingly LoPatin does not systematically consider the political views and social status of the founders of the many Political Unions she discusses.

because the existence of numerous unions posed a credible threat of physical force during the May Days crisis. After the general election the BPU broke up because of internal quarrels between Whigs, Tories and radicals, currency and political reformers, and wealthier and poorer members.[4]

As LoPatin has stressed, the BPU was undoubtedly a hierarchical body, whose constitution placed control in its Political Council. This body consisted of 28 men, selected each year at the general meeting. Its approval was necessary for any official Union activity.[5] Between 1830 and 1832 the BPU united individuals from a wide variety of socio-economic positions in the pursuit of parliamentary reform. They clothed themselves in a rhetoric which was as much social and economic as it was political. This was evident in the way in which Attwood and other leaders of the Union spoke of 'industrious classes' and the 'Union between the Lower and Middle Classes of the People', and justified parliamentary reform based on the economic contribution of the unenfranchised to the nation.[6] The BPU offers an example of a group of individuals united around a particular issue who spoke about themselves in a rhetoric which stressed social unity but whose association was temporary, breaking down after the success of 1832, reforming in 1837 and then breaking down again under the pressure of Chartism.[7]

By what processes did individuals from different positions in the social structure of Birmingham come to think of themselves as part of a group sharing a particular socio-economic vision and united in the pursuit of radical political change? This is a question which current scholarship struggles to answer. Too much political history takes for granted a model of society which explains individuals' political views in a socially reductive fashion.[8] This

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4 For the BPU see LoPatin, *Political Unions*, ch. 1; C. Behagg, *Politics and Production in the Early Nineteenth Century* (London, 1990), chs. 4-5; C. Flick, *The Birmingham Political Union and the Movements for Reform in Britain, 1830-1839* (Folkestone, 1978).

5 LoPatin, *Political Unions*, p. 26.

6 For 'industrious' see pp. 135-43 above.

7 Behagg, *Politics and Production*, ch. 5.

8 J. Lawrence, *Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England, 1867-1914*

model informs Asa Briggs' description of Birmingham's 'class cohesion', where its particular economic structure of (its workshop-based economy) guaranteed political stability because of the supposedly common experience of social mobility and the close relationship between master and worker.[9] Clive Behagg's critique of Briggs, while valuable, is still based on a socially reductive understanding of politics. Thus, he states that '[t]he conflict between capital and labour over workplace autonomy … was also acted out through antagonistic concepts of the democratic process.' In his account of Birmingham politics 'bourgeois' individuals believed in household suffrage (if that) while the working class called for universal suffrage.[10]

The approach shared by Briggs and Behagg has been questioned by those historians of popular politics who engaged with the 'linguistic turn'. Patrick Joyce, Gareth Stedman Jones and James Vernon have all, in different ways, promoted a move away from social explanations of politics and towards discursive and linguistic analysis. They argue that political identities are fluid and discursively constructed rather than determined by social position.[11] In this chapter I do not want to suggest that embracing the advances in understanding provided by this scholarship requires historians to abandon all concern with material issues, to ignore the relationship between socio-economic position and political activity.[12] However, as I have stressed throughout this thesis, there is no simple relationship between attributes (whether material resources or cultural discourses) and actions. This chapter, therefore, considers how social historical study can explain political activities, without recourse to material or linguistic determinism. While this chapter is concerned with political ideas and how they limited and enabled political action, it is more concerned with

(Cambridge, 1998), pp. 2, 14-15, 18-22, 41-2, 44; C. Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives* (London, 1986), esp. pp. 6-7, 13-4.

9 For references and my critique of Briggs' approach see pp. 47-8 above.

10 Behagg, *Politics and Production*, p. 86.

11 P. Joyce, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class* (Cambridge, 1991), chs. 1-3; J. Vernon, *Politics and the People: A Study in English Political Culture, c. 1815-1867* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 1-11; G. Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History, 1832-1982* (Cambridge, 1983), 'Introduction' and ch. 3; though note Jon Lawrence's observation that in practice none of these historians completely rejected structural analysis, *Speaking*, pp. 48-54, 57-8.

12 Lawrence, *Speaking*, p. 48.

practice – with the networks and structural constraints which affected how political opinions were formed.[13]

The approach taken in this chapter involves examining the process of politicization by comparing a series of propertied members of the BPU. These biographies reveal a selection of the ways by which people could end up at the same point despite having started from different social positions and followed different paths. This chapter considers the BPU as a social group, as a group of individuals whose connections to each took a range of forms (familial, associational, economic, political and so on). In doing so it seeks to explain, as chapter 4 and 5 have done, some of the processes by which historians might relate actions to attributes.

The individuals studied in this chapter have been chosen because sufficient archival and published material has survived to allow a close reading of their political views and biographies. Source constraints mean that this account cannot hope to be complete in terms of description or explanation. Instead, it aims to achieve two main objectives. First, to expand our understanding of propertied radical politics in this period. This is particularly important for Birmingham's history because in the 1830s and 40s it was regarded as a radical town. The town's propertied population consistently elected radical MPs and town councillors in the 1830s, 40s and beyond.[14] Therefore, we need a better understanding of how propertied individuals came to hold radical political views. Secondly, to encourage historians to think about the relationship between social structure and politics in terms of possibility rather than determination. It is unclear whether a model of the political history of mass movements can

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[13] Ibid., p. 49; Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class*, p. 8. Stedman Jones provides a brilliant example of an approach based on both intellectual and structural analysis in his 'Introduction' in K. Marx and F. Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, ed. Gareth Stedman Jones (London, 2002), pp. 3-187, esp. pp. 50-69, 70-73, 75-6, 98.

[14] A. de Tocqueville, *Journeys to England and Ireland*, trans. G. Lawrence and K.P. Mayer, ed. J.P. Mayer (New Haven, CT, 1958), pp. 94-5; H. Miller, 'Birmingham', *History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1832-38* (draft article, forthcoming), http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1832-1868/constituencies/birmingham (accessed 21 May 2013), my thanks to Dr. Miller for allowing me access to this prior to publication; E.P. Hennock, *Fit and Proper Persons: Ideal and Reality in Nineteenth-Century Urban Government* (London, 1973), pp. 20-3, 135; D. Fraser, *Power and Authority in the Victorian City* (Oxford, 1979), pp. 86-9; C.R. Elrington, 'Local Government and Public Services', in *VCH*, p. 332.

ever be constructed which does not rely, at least in part, on a form of social analysis.[15] This is particularly the case in instances where we lack the archival sources to examine the political views and biographies of large numbers of the members of such movements. In such instances historians should undertake analysis of the factors that enabled individuals to engage in political activity and so create a picture of the political possibilities available at any one time and place. This involves a change in what is being explained, from documented political views to political possibilities, but it is the best option available to understand political movements considering the nature of the sources available.

Thomas Attwood (1783-1856)

When considering the history of the formation of the BPU it seems sensible to begin with Thomas Attwood, who played such an important role in its creation and in determining its political approach and ideology. He was the third son of Matthias and Ann Attwood. His father had made his wealth in the iron trade before opening a bank in Birmingham in 1791 in partnership with Isaac Spooner. Attwood married Elizabeth Carless in March 1806. She bought with her a marriage settlement of £20,000. Attwood was a man of significant public standing in Birmingham from 1811, when he was appointed High Bailiff, at the age of 28. He first served as a Guardian of the Poor in 1810, a Street Commissioner in 1811 and was a member of the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce in 1813. Attwood is the wealthiest and most publicly prominent individual considered in this chapter. James Luckcock, the Hills and Thomas Clark Senior were all important in the town's public life, but none were of the same status as Attwood; for example, none held a manorial office. The course of Attwood's route

[15] A distinctly more positive formulation of this suggestion is found in G. Eley and K. Nield, *The Future of Class in History: What's Left of the Social?* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2007), esp. pp. 108-16, 169-72, 197-8. This is a problem that Marx grappled with following the failure of the 1848 revolutions and he provides one of the most important discussions of the relationship between social class and political activity in his 'Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte', in K. Marx, *Surveys from Exile*, ed. D. Fernbach (Harmondsworth, 1973), pp. 143-249; see also J. Seed, *Marx: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London, 2010), pp. 46-64.

towards the BPU is well described in David Moss' biography.[16] He details Attwood's growing frustration with his failure to promote his monetary policy through publications, personal relationships and petitions emerging from town meetings, and his consequent turn towards the mobilization of mass public opinion behind parliamentary reform in order to pressurize the government into concessions.[17] I do not want to repeat that story here. Instead, I will discuss Attwood's move towards the BPU in the larger context of the relationship between Birmingham and Parliament before 1832.

Birmingham's relationship with Parliament became more sophisticated in this period. John Money has described the process by which the 'Birmingham interest' grew in importance during the 1770s and 1780s. Money does not explicitly define this entity, but it refers to the influence of Birmingham residents on county politics. Its development is most obvious in the growing unity of Birmingham voters in elections. In 1780 the electors of Birmingham played a key role in returning Sir Robert Lawley as a member for the county. Birmingham electors secured Lawley's nomination and through the formation of the 'Association of the Independent Freeholders in this Town and Country' did much to promote Lawley's candidature among Birmingham residents.[18] From 1780 Birmingham secured an understanding that at least one Warwickshire member would be expected to represent the town's concerns and interests. Of course, 'Birmingham' here tended to refer to a restricted portion of the town's population, though less wealthy or prominent individuals could be involved in these processes through town meetings.[19] The county members' main measurable

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16 D. Moss, *Thomas Attwood: The Biography of a Radical* (Montreal, 1990), chs. 2-7.

17 Attwood argued that the depressions of the 1810s and 20s were caused by underconsumption driven by a decline in the purchasing power of all areas of society. He argued that the management of the economy was the responsibility of Parliament through its tool, the Bank of England. His solution to these problems was based on the supply of money. He argued against the resumption of the gold standard and thus for inconvertible bank notes which, he argued, would stimulate both supply and demand; see ibid., pp. 58-70; H. Miller, 'Radicals, Tories or Monomaniacs? The Birmingham Currency Reformers in the House of Commons, 1832-67', *Parliamentary History*, 31/3 (2012), pp. 359-61.

18 J. Money, *Experience and Identity: Birmingham and the West Midlands, 1760-1800* (Manchester, 1977), pp. 4, 179-80, 210-14, 280; see also J.A. Cannon, 'Warwickshire', in *HOP: 1754-1790*.

19 Such meetings were a vital aspect of British popular politics until the First World War, see J. Lawrence, 'The Transformation of British Public Politics After the First World War', *P&P*, 190 (2006), pp. 185-216. It is

activity regarding Birmingham was to present petitions previously agreed at town meetings. We should not over-estimate the extent to which they were active in representing the Birmingham interest. For example, Sir John Mordaunt (member 1793-1802), though regarded as representing the interests of the town, spoke against a 1795 petition from Birmingham against the treason bills.[20] His son, Charles (member 1804-20), was attacked for his conduct over the Orders in Council, when he presented the town's petition with some levity.[21] In contrast, Dugdale Stratford Dugdale (member 1802-31) and Sir Francis Lawley (member 1820-32) were particularly active in service of the Birmingham interest, presenting numerous petitions.[22] The case of Lawley offers a useful illustration of the limitations of Birmingham's influence over county politics. In 1820 Charles Mordaunt resigned his seat and, in the election that followed, Lawley stood against the Birmingham banker Richard Spooner, who had played a key role in the campaign against the Orders in Council and the East India Company's charter.[23] Spooner stood as the Birmingham candidate, arguing that manufacturing and commercial interests required specific representation in the Commons and that the landed Lawley could not provide that. As Zachariah Parkes put it, 'Birmingham seems determined to send one County Member who understands commerce (it is the only chance we have) in which M[r] Spooner is reccond [sic] very clever'.[24] Spooner lost to Lawley, but the geographical distribution of votes was striking. Of the 969 votes he received, 670 came from the Hemlingford Hundred, which contained Birmingham; it was the only Hundred in which he out-polled Lawley. Of these 670, 367 came from Birmingham (there were 400 voters resident

unclear how well attended they were. For evidence of individuals from a wide range of social statuses attending, see W. Hutton, *An History of Birmingham*, 3rd edn. (Birmingham, 1795), p. 135; W.H. Smith, 'The Town of Birmingham', in idem, *Birmingham and its Vicinity as a Manufacturing and Commercial District* (London and Birmingham, 1836), pp. 26-7. For evidence that few attended such meetings see *Edmonds's Weekly Recorder* (Birmingham, 1819), p. 14; G. Edmonds, 'Letter I', in idem, *Letters to the Inhabitants of Birmingham* (Birmingham, 1819), p. 8.

20 R.G. Thorne, 'Mordaunt, Sir John, 7th Bt. (1734-1806)', in *HOP:1790-1820*.

21 R.G. Thorne, 'Mordaunt, Charles (1771-1823), in ibid.

22 M. Escott, 'Dugdale, Dugdale Stratford (?1773-1836); idem, 'Lawley, Francis (1782-1851), both in in *HOP: 1820-1832*.

23 Moss, *Attwood*, ch. 2.

24 BAHS, MS535/1, Zachariah Parkes to William Bentley, 29 Oct. 1820.

in Birmingham in 1820).[25] Spooner was Birmingham's candidate, but the support of the town failed to secure his election. At the next election Lawley was returned unopposed; perhaps his service to Birmingham during the period 1820-26 convinced the town of his utility.[26]

If the county members represented one avenue through which Birmingham's population could access Parliament, then a series of informal representatives of the town offered another of equal importance. Matthew Boulton, Samuel Garbett and others acted as brokers between the inhabitants of Birmingham and various MPs.[27] Matthew Boulton was an especially effective lobbyist for the Birmingham interest from 1773, when he campaigned to establish an Assay Office in Birmingham. Boulton was vital because of his connections with politicians in London; he was well acquainted with the chairmen of the Parliamentary committees that were appointed to read the Birmingham and Sheffield petitions relating to this issue (Thomas Skipworth, member for Warwickshire) and to investigate irregularities in the manufacture and assay of silver (Thomas Gilbert, member for Lichfield). He also wrote in defence of the Birmingham interest against the claims of the London Goldsmiths' Company that Birmingham contained too few with skill in gold and silversmithing to undertake the important duty of assaying.[28] He later had success lobbying to defend James Watt's steam-engine patent and in favour of an act to prevent the exportation of tools, was a key figure in

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25 *The Poll of the Freeholders of Warwickshire at the Election at Warwick on the 31st October, and 1st, 2d, 3d, 4th, 6th, and 7th November, 1820* (Birmingham, 1821).

26 He brought in or supported numerous petitions from Birmingham: on Birmingham's distress (8 Feb. 1821); for repeal of the excise licence duties (12 Mar. 1824); for repeal of the combination laws (15 Mar. 1824); against the Bristol town dues bull (13 Apr. 1824); against the sale of beer bill (11, 13 May 1824); for lower duties on metals (11 Mar. 1825); he directed the Birmingham Assay Office's bill (19 Feb, 15 Mar. 1825) and the Birmingham gas light bill (withdrawn 6 May 1824, carried 1825), this list of petitions is taken from Escott, 'Lawley'.

27 For Boulton see E. Robinson, 'Matthew Boulton and the Art of Parliamentary Lobbying', *HJ*, 7/2 (1964), pp. 209-29 and S. Baggott, '"Real Knowledge and Occult Mysteries": Matthew Boulton and the Birmingham Assay Office', in M. Dick (ed.), *Matthew Boulton: A Revolutionary Player* (Studley, 2009), pp. 201-16; for Garbett see J.M. Norris, 'Samuel Garbett and the Early Development of Industrial Lobbying in Great Britain', *EcHR*, 10/3 (1958), pp. 450-60; V.E. Dietz, 'Before the Age of Capital: Manufacturing Interests and the British State, 1780-1800' (Princeton Univ. Ph.D. thesis, 1991), chs. 2, 3; J. Money, *Experience and Identity: Birmingham and the West Midlands, 1760-1800* (Manchester, 1977), pp. 35-47, 212-13; K. Quickenden, 'Samuel Garbett and Early Boulton and Fothergill Assay Silver', in K. Quickenden, S. Baggott and M. Dick (eds.), *Matthew Boulton: Enterprising Industrialist of the Enlightenment* (Farnham, 2013), pp. 127-46.

28 Baggott, '"Real Knowledge"', pp. 204-6.

the General Chamber of Manufactures, and urged the government to act against the edict published by Catherine the Great in 1793 which prohibited the import of many British-made goods to Russia.[29] When he and Watt sought to defend Watt's steam engine patent they appealed to 104 MPs; 76 of these were people to whom Boulton felt he could appeal to for support. Watt was the next most connected with just 16.[30] He was also important for enquiries coming the other way – from MPs enquiring into the state of manufacturing and commerce. For example, in 1803 William Wilberforce wrote to Boulton in order to ask about the state of the gun trade in Birmingham. Despite the fact that Boulton had little connection to the gun trade, he was thought of as the default contact for such matters.[31]

The Birmingham Commercial Committee (later Chamber of Commerce) was a key institution through which the town could act on the national stage, though it also dealt with disputes within the town. The Committee consisted of between 60 and 100 members; new members were elected by the existing ones.[32] In 1784 it was unanimous in its support for Sir George Shuckburgh and Sir Robert Lawley as members for Warwickshire. In John Money's words it 'had in effect conducted … what amounted to Birmingham's pre-emptive nomination to the Warwickshire seats.'[33] However, we should not assume that the creation of the Commercial Committee in 1783 marked a move from an older model of interaction with Parliament through personal connection to one based on corporate bodies representing collective interests through formal petitions.[34] First, the Commercial Committee did not have

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29 BAHS, MS3782/12/87, American Disputes, Act Prohibiting the Exportation of Tools, Brass Exportation Prohibition, Commercial Committee, General Chamber of Manufactures; and MS3782/12/92, Irish Propositions.

30 Robinson, 'Matthew Boulton', pp. 224-9.

31 BAHS, MS3782/12/48/228, William Wilberforce to Matthew Boulton, 22 July 1803; see also MS3782/12/48/229, Matthew Boulton to Samuel Galton Junior, 23 July 1803; MS3782/12/48/238, copy letter Matthew Boulton to William Wilberforce, July 1803; MS3782/12/48/243, William Wilberforce to Matthew Boulton, 5 Aug. 1803; MS3782/12/48/285, Matthew Boulton to William Wilberforce, Aug. 1803. See also, M. Berg, 'Britain, Industry and Perceptions of China: Matthew Boulton, "Useful Knowledge" and the Macartney Embassy to China, 1792-94', *Journal of Global History*, 1/2 (2006), pp. 282-4.

32 G.H. Wright, *Chronicles of the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce, A.D. 1813-1913, and of the Birmingham Commercial Society, A.D. 1783-1812* (Birmingham, 1913), pp. 11-12, 54-5.

33 Money, *Experience and Identity*, p. 212.

34 Chambers of Commerce often fulfilled similar functions to corporations elsewhere, representing local

a continuous existence. It was refounded in 1813, 1820 and 1842.[35] Secondly, though the body represented a novel model of lobbying activity for Birmingham, it was not novel in a British context and it used many of the same techniques employed in the older forms of interaction with Parliament. The Committee was prominent in the press – they issued reports and printed memorials on topics – and therefore was in some way more 'public' than older lobbying bodies or individuals. However, similar tactics had been undertaken by the Convention of Royal Burghs in Scotland and by corporations in other English towns.[36] Furthermore, they continued to rely on connections and friendships with key individuals to interact with Parliament and the government.[37]

Birmingham's relationship with Parliament was based around a model of informal representation mainly through individuals, with a slowly growing institutional element. It was against this background that Thomas Attwood began his political career. We can understand his move away from considering the poor as 'wretches who clamour for Burdett & Liberty, meaning Blood & anarchy' and towards mass mobilization as the result of a series of failures to achieve his aims through the older mode of informal representation.[38] His first political activity was a successful campaign against the Orders in Council and the East India Company Charter. This convinced Attwood of the virtue of Birmingham and the value of his own opinions, but also began to persuade him of the problems in the Commons, as he commented in 1812, 'Such a set of feeble mortals as the members of both Houses are I never did expect to meet within this world. The best among them are scarce equal to the worst in Birmingham.'[39]

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interests, see R.J. Bennett, *Local Business Voice: the History of Chambers of Commerce in Britain, Ireland, and Revolutionary America, 1760-2011* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 111-3, 158, 164-9, 373-4.

35 Ibid., p. 827.

36 B. Harris, 'Parliamentary Legislation, Lobbying and the Press in Eighteenth-Century Scotland', *Parliamentary History*, 26/1 (2007), pp. 90-91.

37 For example, BAHS, MS3782/12/87/75, Report of a Meeting of the Birmingham Commercial Committee, 19 Sept. 1783 where they resolved that 'Mr. *Spooner*, Mr. *Russell*, Mr. *Galton*, Mr. *Welch*, Mr. *Clay*, and Mr. *Garbett*, are particularly requested to make Application to those Noblemen and Gentlemen, or to any other, in such Manner as they may think expedient, and report the Advice they may receive to this Committee', original emphasis.

38 BAHS, MS2685/1/1/3/5, Thomas Attwood to Elizabeth Attwood, 30 June 1818.

39 Quoted in Moss, *Attwood*, p. 47.

The period from 1817 to 1829 saw him undertake a series of campaigns to secure currency reform. Initially, in 1817-18, he was not taken seriously and was ignored by Lord Liverpool.[40] However, as the economic downturn continued, his writings became increasingly prominent; Colquhuon told Attwood that his pamphlets of 1816-18 had 'saved the country'.[41] This growing national prominence led to him being seen by Lord Liverpool and others, even if they ignored his advice.[42]

His failures in the immediate post-war period led Attwood to change tack and adopt two main tactics. First, he continued to publish, but in order to reach a wider audience he wrote letters to journals and newspapers rather than pamphlets. Secondly, he aimed to build up a strong body of support in Birmingham, to enhance his profile in national debate. This meant making monetary reform a prominent topic by ensuring it was mentioned at every public meeting, on a wide range of topics, by Attwood, Spooner or another of Attwood's supporters. Meanwhile this group raised its profile as patrons and leading figures in Birmingham's associational culture, for example by involvement with the Mechanics' Institute, which Attwood valued as a connection to the artisan population. This strategy succeeded in raising Attwood's local and national profile. However, he got no closer to having his monetary policies implemented and his interactions with Parliament were, on a number of occasions, completely unsuccessful (such as when he appeared before the 1821 Select Committee on the subject of agricultural distress and was outmanoeuvred by Huskisson and Ricardo, or when the Birmingham-Liverpool railway proposals he supported in 1824 failed).[43] Furthermore, this approach was not innovative in terms of methods of influencing Parliament.

Why was Attwood so unsuccessful in comparison with Boulton, Garbett and the other earlier 'informal representatives'? First, he could never call on as much support in the

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40 Ibid., pp. 54, 69.
41 BAHS, MS2685/1/1/3/13, Thomas Attwood to Elizabeth Attwood, 1818.
42 Moss, *Attwood*, pp. 75-6;
43 Ibid., pp. 96-8, 114.

Commons as Boulton did in the 1770s and 1780s. Attwood had allies in the House (notably his brother and Edward Davenport), but never in the number that Boulton did. Secondly, where Boulton sought particular measures (the Assay Office, Watt's patent and so on), Attwood pursued a general change in government policy. Parliament was more receptive to particular, private requests than attempts to fundamentally alter economic policy (though of course private bills could fail as well, as Attwood's experience with the railway suggests).[44] It should be noted that the moment at which Attwood got closest to successfully influencing government policy was in 1825. In that year he tried to see Liverpool to discuss the growing financial crisis but was ignored. He next appealed to Robert Peel (through Peel's father). Peel agreed to see him, and took him to meet Liverpool. His arguments at this moment, about the need to force the Bank of England to lend to the country banks, were in agreement with the government's opinion. He was taken to see the Directors of the Bank and that interview, combined with his short meeting with Peel and Liverpool, gave Attwood a belief that he was a man of increasing importance and that the government was coming round to his economic views.[45] As he put it to his wife:

> I am not yet a minister quite although I may perhaps be called a privy councillor. … You must be assured that in whatever I do with the ministers I will have no contact with the Radicals, unless things take a strange turn. I know you have an antipathy to those Gentlemen & I am myself not disposed to think very well of them.[46]

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[44] This is not to suggest there was no general legislation in this period, only to point out the difficulties faced by those seeking dramatic changes to existing general policies, an observation which supports the recent challenge to the image of the eighteenth-century state as 'reactive', see R. Sweet, 'Local Identities and a National Parliament, *c*. 1688-1835', in J. Hoppit (ed.), *Parliaments, Nations and Identities in Britain and Ireland, 1660-1850* (Manchester, 2003), pp. 48-9; J. Innes, *Inferior Politics: Social Problems and Social Policies in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 7-8, chs. 1, 3; P. Langford, *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman, 1689-1798* (Oxford, 1991), ch. 3; P. Gauci, 'Introduction',in P. Gauci (ed.), *Regulating the British Economy, 1650-1850* (Farnham, 2011), p. 19. Furthermore, recent discussions of economic regulation in this period have suggested that economic thought had a complex relationship to the generation of economic policy, see Gauci, 'Introduction', p. 18.

[45] Moss, *Attwood*, pp. 119-23.

[46] Attwood papers in the possession of Professor Jonathan Freeman-Attwood, Thomas Attwood to Elizabeth Attwood, 18 Dec. 1825, original emphasis.

Attwood was mistaken. Throughout his career prior to 1830 Attwood misread moments of promise as proof of real change in the government's attitude to currency matters but disappointments always followed. This repeated frustration persuaded Attwood that a different approach was required. He began to adopt new tactics, bolstering his support in Birmingham, while his public expressions in support of parliamentary reform became increasingly radical (especially after the failure of Charles Tennyson's motion in 1827 to enfranchise Birmingham at the expense of East Retford).[47] The success of the Catholic Association in securing Catholic emancipation provided a model of successful mass engagement with Parliament, and it was the combination of that model and Attwood's disenchantment with the older model of informal representation that inspired him to found the BPU in order to force the issue of parliamentary reform.[48]

Attwood's critique of the unreformed parliament was, in essence, a socio-economic one. He argued that the composition of the Commons did not reflect the changed nature of the British economy. It was dominated by aristocratic families who had no real understanding of commerce and, importantly, manufacturing. However, his move towards the creation of the BPU was also about his failure to secure the economic policy he believed in through the older methods of engagement with Parliament. In contrast, Matthew Boulton succeeded on a number of occasions in securing legislation from Parliament. Yet while Boulton had sought to protect and enhance the manufacturing interest by means in line with prevailing economic thought (for example, by altering duties) Attwood sought a radical change in the financial policy of the Government. The older model of informal representation was ill-suited to attempts to radically alter government policy and his growing realization of this generated the 'strange turn' which pushed Attwood towards a mass-mobilization model of popular involvement in national politics.

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47 Moss, *Attwood*, pp. 131-2, 135-40, 144.

48 Ibid., pp. 149-51; Behagg, *Politics and Production*, p. 162.

Unitarianism and Radical Politics

The individuals that form the basis for the next three case studies all came from Unitarian families, each of which had histories of involvement in reformist and radical politics. Their religion made them a distinctive subset within Birmingham's population. The Unitarian Old and New Meeting Houses had provided a number of key individuals in Birmingham's political reform movements. This reflected the influence of Joseph Priestley and the other Unitarian ministers (all of whom were outspoken commentators who frequently criticized the government), and also the fact the Unitarians had experience of public political campaigning in the form of their struggle to secure the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts.[49] The Birmingham Unitarian communities were among the wealthiest religious communities in the town and were, as discussed in the previous chapter, over-represented in the town's governing elite. This combination of material wealth, social status and a tendency towards radical politics mean that the Unitarians in Birmingham were in a particular situation with regards to the BPU. As the BPU was founded by a Tory in the form of Attwood, the Unitarians seem to have been reluctant to join. James Luckcock and Thomas Henry Ryland (a member of an important Unitarian family) commented that few Unitarians joined the BPU before May 1832.[50] Luckcock felt that by failing to act the Unitarians were betraying their own professed identity as 'the champions of civil & religious liberty':

> Tho' always professing to tread in <u>the steps of</u> Priestley, in the cause of civil & religious liberty; I am totally at a loss to trace one single cause they have made of importance, excepting the part they took in procuring the repeal of the Test & Corporation acts, since the national disgrace which drove that distinguish'd patriot

[49] For the continuing importance of Priestley to Birmingham's Unitarians after 1791 see H. Smith, '"The Blessedness of Those Who Are Persecuted for Righteousness Sake": The Role of "Candour" and the Priestley Riots in Birmingham Unitarian Identity, 1791-1815', *Midland History*, 35/2 (2010), pp. 183-6.

[50] T.H. Ryland, *Reminiscences of Thomas Henry Ryland*, ed. W.H. Ryland (Birmingham, 1904), p. 59.

> from our town & from our country.[51]

Luckcock wondered whether those who joined the BPU after 9 May 1832, including the Unitarians, signed up because they feared the public would see them as allies of the 'Boroughmongers', or whether perhaps they hoped their support of the BPU would allow them to claim some benefits from reform. He also suggested a 'less honourable motive', speculating that perhaps they sought

> the setting up a new party, to deter any more advances in aid of the Union? – The latter have always been obnoxious to them – & one of their principal exultations has been – with one or two exceptions is there a proper <u>respectable</u> among them? They forsooth would have their Union, but it would be one that should exclude nineteenth twentieths of the people – for their horror at being oblig'd to accept the cooperation of the multitude could not be exceeded by their coming in close contact with the numerous joints of the tails of a rattle-snake.[52]

Luckcock's view of his fellow Unitarians was clouded by a series of disagreements over the funding of the Old Meeting Sunday School, a belief that the Old Meeting's vitality had declined and a general feeling that they had been ungrateful for his services. In fact, the Tory origins of the BPU may have been more important than Luckcock was willing to admit. A number of Birmingham Unitarians who favoured political reform in the 1820s were associated with Joseph Parkes, who was initially suspicious of the BPU. Parkes never became a member and continued to be suspicious of Attwood. His Unitarian supporters may have shared his suspicion.[53] However, we need to remember that there is no simple connection between political radicalism and Unitarianism, that political radicalism came in many forms, and that more factors than a shared belief in some kind of reform was required to bind

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51 BAHS, UC1/11/10/1, J. Luckcock, 'Narrative of Proceedings Relative to the Erection of the Old Meeting Sunday-School Birmingham & of Various Occurrences therewith connected', c. 1832, pp. 95-6, original emphasis.

52 Ibid., p. 90.

53 P. Salmon, 'Parkes, Joseph (1796-1865), *ODNB*; LoPatin, *Political Unions*, pp. 25-6, 28-30, 37; R.B. Rose, 'Political History to 1832' in *VCH*, p. 292.

individuals together.[54] The three cases studies considered here illustrate these points.

The three case studies span two generations. The first generation (James Luckcock, Thomas Clark Senior and Thomas Wright Hill) were all friends, were educated by Joseph Priestley and all played important roles in Birmingham radical politics in the 1790s. They were a generation older than Thomas Attwood. They were all members of the Birmingham Society for Constitutional Information and were all proposed for affiliation with the London Society in February 1793.[55] This group was important in sustaining radical politics in Birmingham between the 1790s and the 1810s.[56] The second generation (Thomas Clark Junior and the children of Thomas Wright Hill) came to political maturity in the 1810s and their fathers' political ideas and contacts played an important role in the development of their political views. Indeed, these case studies all suggest that the type of education available to Unitarians in Birmingham in the period 1780-1830 was conducive to a belief in the necessity of reform. However, as discussed above, this was not a sufficient cause to support the BPU and in each case other factors played an important role: Luckcock's politics cannot be understood without considering the logic of his political ideas and how they relate to his thinking about education and the social order; Thomas Clark Junior's case demonstrates the importance of public meetings and personal contacts in the development of political beliefs; and the case of the Hill family suggests the importance of shared familial identities.

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54 For a work that assumes a simplistic connection between religious heterodoxy and political radicalism see J.C.D. Clark, *English Society, 1688-1832: Ideology, Social Structure and Political Practice during the Ancien Regime* (Cambridge, 1985). For a more convincing and subtle discussion see J. Seed, 'Gentlemen Dissenters: The Social and Political Meanings of Rational Dissent in the 1770s and 1780s', *HJ*, 28/2 (1985), pp. 314-23; idem, 'The Role of Unitarianism in the Formation of Liberal Culture, 1775-1851: A Social History' (Hull Univ. Ph.D. thesis, 1981), pp. 328-61.

55 Money, *Experience and Identity*, p. 143.

56 The maintenance of radicalism was difficult, see M. Philp, 'Disconcerting Ideas: Explaining Popular Radicalism and Popular Loyalism in the 1790s', in G. Burgess and M. Festenstein (eds.), *English Radicalism, 1550-1850* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 175-80.

James Luckcock (1761-1835)

Nothing is known about Luckcock's parents. However, he was educated at Winson Green Academy, near Birmingham, and then sent to Paris to learn French, suggesting a background of some substance, if not great wealth. He was apprenticed to a Birmingham plater, before setting up a buckle-making business with his brother Joseph. This business failed when the buckle trade declined in the early 1790s, whereupon Luckcock entered the jewellery trade, managing a branch of Samuel Pemberton's business (one of Birmingham's most substantial jewellers). Complications following the death of Pemberton in 1810 led Luckcock to set up his own jewellery business in 1811. He was soon successful: by 1813 he was making a profit of £2000 per annum.[57] He appeared in the trade directories in 1815, 1818 and 1823. He appeared in the subscription data discussed in chapter 1 in 1812. Luckcock was sufficiently prominent in the jewellery trade that when a bill was introduced in Parliament in 1818 to restrict jewellery sales he was appointed by Birmingham's jewellers to be chairman of the association they created to oppose to that bill. He prepared a petition that ensured the bill failed.[58] He was eventually successful enough in business to construct a house in Edgbaston in 1820 (when nearly 60 years old) at the cost of £2000.[59] In 1831 his property had an annual rental value of £19. In 1821 his son Felix refused to take over the business (which Luckcock estimated made £1000 a year profit at this point), and Luckcock was forced to sell it to his partner, John Horton, on disadvantageous terms. This left him reliant on his property for an income.[60] In 1824 Luckcock estimated his annual household expenses at £370 and he employed two servants. Luckcock believed this level of expenditure meant he met 'in a tolerable degree, the opinions and practices of modern society. We are, however, far below the

[57] H. Smith, 'Luckcock, James (1761-1835)', *ODNB*.
[58] Luckcock, *Sequel to Memoirs*, p. 38.
[59] Ibid., p. 51.
[60] Ibid. pp. 53-60.

fashionable standard'.[61]

Luckcock first served as a Guardian of the Poor in 1792 (aged 31 and early in his business life), serving at least once again in 1819. He was appointed as a Street Commissioner in 1815. He also, in 1819, wrote a pamphlet suggesting how to deal with the increase in the number of the poor and the burden of the poor rates.[62] The other area of public life where he was prominent was education. He was a member of the Unitarian Old Meeting and played an important role in the New and Old Meeting Sunday Schools, founded in 1787. Luckcock felt that the normal Sunday School education was inadequate, turning out students who could read but not think independently. As a consequence Luckcock was key to the development of the Birmingham Brotherly Society in 1796, along with Thomas Wright Hill and Thomas Clark Senior. This organization was set up to provide further instruction for people who had already passed through an ordinary Sunday School education.[63] In 1798 Luckcock expanded this society to include a benevolent fund which provided relief for its sick members. Luckcock remained committed to the Sunday Schools throughout his life, and he published a volume entitled *Moral Culture* in 1817 which consisted of his collected addresses to the Brotherly Society and was influenced by Priestley's educational theory. Luckcock himself felt that his work on education was his most important contribution to public life.[64] However, he withdrew from public service in 1820, shortly before retiring from business.

Luckcock seems to have been well known in the town from at least the 1810s. He described how by 1819 he was 'becoming a man of notoriety and public business'. During the political agitation of 1816-20 he was attacked by the loyalist press and defended by the radicals, suggesting that both sides saw him as an individual of some significance, even if they took different views of his quality.[65] In 1831 a deputation from the Brotherly Society led

[61] Ibid., pp. 84-8, quotation at p. 87.
[62] J. Luckcock, *Thoughts on the Means of Employment and Relief of the Poor* (Birmingham, 1819).
[63] Money, *Experience and Identity*, pp. 142-3.
[64] Clark, *A Biographical Tribute to the Memory of James Luckcock* (Birmingham, 1835), p. 10.
[65] *Edmonds's Weekly Register* (Birmingham, 1819-20), p. 54; *The Selector; or Political Bouquet* (Birmingham,

by Thomas Wright Hill presented him with a medal that showed his likeness and bore the inscription 'James Luckcock Father of Sunday School Instruction in Birmingham'.[66] Luckcock was an important member of Birmingham society, prominent both as a politician and as an educator. Though never among the richest members of the town's population, he was far from poor and even in his retirement he never struggled financially.

Politically, Luckcock first appeared as a radical in 1792 when, in his early 30s, as mentioned above, he, along with Clark Senior and Thomas Wright Hill, was among the first members of the Birmingham Society for Constitutional Information. Little is known about his political activities between 1792 and 1810, when he published an anti-war pamphlet under the pseudonym 'Irenaeus' in which he was critical of warfare in general and argued that the war against Napoleonic France was an attempt to crush France's 'infant liberty'.[67] He played a prominent role in Birmingham's post-war radicalism. He published frequently in William Hawkes Smith's pro-reform periodical *The Birmingham Inspector* and in George Edmonds' various periodicals.[68] At the request of the Birmingham Hampden Club, he drew up three petitions for parliamentary reform in 1817-18 which were endorsed by mass meetings at Newhall Hill, and was, after the first meeting on 22 January 1817, appointed to the committee created to organize the campaign for political reform in Birmingham.[69] He subsequently distanced himself from the mass meetings held at Newhall Hill on 12 July and 16 September 1819. The first of these meetings saw the election of Sir Charles Wolseley as Birmingham's 'Legislatorial Attorney'. He published a letter in *Aris' Birmingham Gazette* in which he stressed that he had nothing to do with those meetings and had not seen Wolseley and T.J.

1819), p. 201; Luckcock, *Sequel to Memoirs*, p. 44.

66 Clark, *James Luckcock*, p. 13.

67 Irenaeus [J. Luckcock], *An Appeal to the British Nation, on the Folly and Criminality of War* (Birmingham, 1811), quotation at p. 30.

68 *The Birmingham Inspector* (Birmingham 1817), pp. 15-7, 258-63, 322-5; *Edmonds's Weekly Register*, pp. 44-5, 61.

69 Luckcock, *Sequel to Memoirs*, pp. 34-7; *Remarks upon the Character of the Late Mr. James Luckcock, Printed from the Minutes of the Brotherly Society, for the Use of the Members* (Birmingham, 1835), p. 5.

Wooler during their visits. He reiterated his outrage at the condition of the poor who worked long hours for little reward, as well as his anger at Peterloo.[70] With respect to Peterloo, he and Thomas Clark Senior organized the Birmingham subscription to aid sufferers and they themselves 'beat the rounds for subscriptions' and sent out printed circulars to prominent individuals in the town.[71]

Luckcock retired from public life in 1820 at the age of 59, following the frustration of his attempts to reform the Guardians and the Birmingham Churchwardens. However, he continued to publish on various topics, including a pamphlet on the representation of Birmingham inspired by the plan to enfranchise it at the expense of East Retford. In this he argued that government was meant to ensure the protection of property and the 'greatest quantity of happiness for the whole' population. In order to ensure this he contended that representatives had to be well acquainted with the interests of their constituents, and that the manufacturing and commercial interest should be strengthened in the Commons, not to overwhelm the agricultural interest but to 'harmonize with it.' He argued that property was at the heart of the political system, but he also suggested that it 'is the great mass of the population who hold the principle [sic] property of the country' and that this meant that they should have access to representation. Therefore, he proposed a household franchise, based on residency and poor rate payments. He did not specify the amount of poor rates required for the franchise but did specify at least twelve months residency.[72]

When the BPU was created in 1830 he 'did not hesitate a moment' to become a member. He felt he was too old, at sixty nine, to take an active part in the BPU Council, but his two eldest sons, Felix and Urban, were elected to it. He attended a number of the meetings, but he felt unable to attend the mass meetings held at Newhall Hill. However, he did send a letter to be read out at the gathering of the Political Unions on 7 May 1832. It was

[70] *Aris'*, 27 Sept. 1819.
[71] Luckcock, *Sequel to Memoirs*, pp. 42-3.
[72] Luckcock, *Representation of Birmingham*.

subsequently printed in the pro-reform *Birmingham Journal*, an indication of his importance to the reform movement in Birmingham, an impression that is reinforced by Thomas Attwood's description of him as 'Father of Birm[m] Reform.'[73]

Luckcock spent much of his life engaged in the cause of political reform. He, like Clark and Thomas Wright Hill, represents a group who were continually interested in reform from the 1790s to the 1830s and their contribution to the survival of political radicalism in Birmingham should not be underestimated. Why was Luckcock a political reformer? The archival and published material offers no explicit explanation. He wrote little about his reading habits. He associated with other political reformers, though, unlike Thomas Clark Junior or the Hill children, Luckcock was a contemporary of those reformers and so there is no evidence of a process of him being educated into political reform by Thomas Clark or Thomas Wright Hill. Instead, their shared experience of education at Priestley's Sunday School seems to have been important. Indeed, writing c. 1832, Luckcock saw the improved education of the poorer part of the population as vital to the emergence of a successful political reform movement:

> During the last 50 years, the friends of reform have been as disunited & ineffective in their operations as a rope of sand – No bond of union, no rallying point on which they could fix their hopes & attentions, all was apathy or contradiction, & a concept government well understood how to "divide & govern." Nothing but union was wanted, & nothing so feeble as the attempts to accomplish it. The multitude left to themselves, without one friendly head to advise or hand to direct them became the easy dupes of the wily & bloodthirsty spies, sent among them to allure them to destruction. The middle classes had far too many among them who were in some degree or other interested in the venality & corruption of the times, so that an honest patriot like Major Cartwright might spend a long life in the most laborious exertion, & sink into his grave without the cheering prospect of even the most distant success. Thanks, however, to public education, the last 5 & twenty years have rear'd a new race to take their parts in that grand drama in society from which their class had been hitherto excluded. The experience of that period had demonstrated that intellect is not confin'd to rank or classic education – & that passive obedience & non resistance must make way for the government of common sense. Union is thus become the watchword of the day … Away then with the insolent assertion or even the insinuation – that

[73] BAHS, UC1/11/10/1, Luckcock, 'Narrative', pp. 85-9, quotation at p. 85.

> the multitude must not be encourag'd or permitted to unite – without their numerical strength, to say nothing of their mental capabilities, no reform worth having will even be accomplish'd.[74]

Luckcock's political thought was infused with a paternalist strain that stemmed from his belief in the necessity of order in society.[75] In *Moral Culture* (published in 1817 but based on lectures given 1801-04) he wrote that there 'must be inequalities of condition … The only thing at which we should aim, is to be satisfied with our lot, and to be true to the station and duties assigned to us.'[76] For the poor, their 'station' involved labouring, and thus the issue of employment was the key for solving the problem of widespread poverty in Birmingham in 1819.[77] He repeated this idea in 1825, when discussing the Priestley Riots of 1791; he attributed them to the poor being misled by 'their natural guardians'.[78] This did not mean that Luckcock disliked the poor; indeed, he had a clear notion of the degradation caused by poverty and of the power discrepancies between poor and rich, but nevertheless he did believe in social hierarchy and the need for order, believing that education could counteract this degradation, improve the morals of the poor and ensure everyone understood the duties of their position.[79] An important reason for Luckcock's belief in political reform was his understanding of society as based around the importance of property combined with a belief that this was widespread and deserving of representation. This, combined with a belief that

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74 Ibid., pp. 90-92.

75 This is perhaps unsurprising for someone so influenced by Priestley, whose social thought had a paternalist streak, see M. Canovan, 'Paternalistic Liberalism: Joseph Priestley on Rank and Inequality', *Enlightenment and Dissent*, 2 (1983), pp. 23-37. John Seed has suggested that paternalism was common to Unitarian thought in this period, 'Theologies of Power: Unitarianism and the Social Relations of Religious Discourse, 1800-50', in R.J. Morris (ed.), *Class, Power and Social Structure in British Nineteenth-Century Towns* (Leicester, 1986), pp. 137-8.

76 J. Luckcock, *Moral Culture; Attempted in a Series of Lectures, Delivered to the Pupils and Teachers of the Old and New-Meeting Sunday-Schools, in Birmingham* (Birmingham & London, 1817), p. 213.

77 Luckcock, *Thoughts*, pp. 5, 7.

78 Luckcock, *Sequel to Memoirs*, p. 36; see also *The Monthly Repository*, 3/25 (1829), pp. 28-30.

79 For his understanding of the degradation of poverty and the inequalities between rich and poor, see Luckcock, *Sequel to Memoirs*, pp. 36, 89; idem, *Representation of Birmingham*; idem, *Annual Address to the Teachers of the Old and New Meeting Sunday Schools, in Birmingham, Assembled Under the Denomination of the Brotherly Society, Jan. 3, 1819* (Birmingham, 1819), pp. 9-10, 15-16; *Edmonds's Weekly Register*, p. 61.

agriculture was over-represented in parliament pushed him towards a belief in political reform. When the reform movement moved beyond such concerns (as with the 'Legislatorial Attorney' scheme) Luckcock distanced himself from them. This reminds us of the need to take political ideas seriously in their own right, rather than seeing them as simply expressions of underlying social or economic structures.[80]

Thomas Clark Junior (1794-?)

It is not known whether Thomas Clark Junior was a member of the BPU, though in his tribute to James Luckcock he praised the BPU and parliamentary reform as 'that great and good work'.[81] Furthermore, his father was a key radical figure in Birmingham from the 1790s to the later 1830s and Clark Junior's autobiographical notebooks offer a valuable source for understanding the nature of radical politics in Birmingham. The Clarks were members of the Unitarian New Meeting. Thomas Clark Senior was a toy manufacturer and a member of the Street Commissioners and the Board of Guardians.[82] Clark Senior's business was successful and when he died in 1847 his probate valuation was £40,000.[83] He appeared in the subscription data used in chapter 1 in 1788, 1812 and 1830. In 1831 the house in Edgbaston had an annual value of £38. Thomas Clark Junior attended Thomas Wright Hill's school from 1803 to 1808. He also attended Rev. John Kentish's 'class for instructing young persons' at the New Meeting House from 1803 to 1811.[84] He worked for his father's firm until 1818 when he fell out with his father's partner and set up a business of his own, with John Jones,

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80 Frank Trentmann makes this point in a different context, see, *Free Trade Nation: Commerce, Consumption, and Civil Society in Modern Britain* (Oxford, 2008), p. 13.

81 Clark, *Luckcock*, p. 15.

82 Ryland, *Reminiscences*, p. 70.

83 P. Ballard, 'A Commercial and Industrial Elite: A Study of Birmingham's Upper Middle Class, 1780-1914' (2 vols., Reading Univ. Ph.D. thesis, 1983), ii, 987.

84 BAHS, MS1114/11, Memoir of Thomas Clark, 1794-1816, not paginated. Kentish was minister of the New Meeting House 1803-44.

constructing greenhouses. This business proved successful. In the first nine months they sold goods worth £2500 and estimated profits at half of that.[85] In October 1822 he married Sarah Jones, sister of his business partner, and they took a house in Frederick Street in Edgbaston at a yearly rent of £35. In 1823 his annual expenditure was £231.16.0.[86] In 1824 he moved back towards Birmingham, taking a house in Cottage Lane, before moving again in 1826 to a house in Lionel Street adjoining his manufactory. With the continued success of his business he began to invest in canal shares, and by 1863 he held 'accumulated property' worth £3000, £8000 of shares in the Worcester canal and other public companies, along with about £500 of furniture and other possessions.[87] Thomas Clark Senior was a relatively wealthy individual, who was very active in Birmingham's public life. Thomas Clark Junior was not as active in the town; unlike his father he was not a Street Commissioner or a Guardian of the Poor. However, they were both members of the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce and both appear in various directories. This places them in various elites: Thomas Clark Senior was in both the governing elite discussed in chapter 5 and the wealth elite discussed in chapter 1. Thomas Clark Junior was in neither of these groupings, though he was still a substantial individual. His main activities of note were business-focused, contrasting with his father's extensive involvement in Birmingham's public life.

Clark was in favour of parliamentary reform. When required to write a tribute to the late James Luckcock in 1835, Clark praised him as 'a warm, steady, and consistent reformer'.[88] Much the same could be said of Clark, though he was not as prominent in Birmingham's parliamentary reform movement as Luckcock. He was critical of Pitt the Younger and of Lord Liverpool's 'corrupt & vile administration' that sought the 'infringement of our liberties'.[89] He was in favour of representation for Birmingham, even if only on the

[85] BAHS, MS1114/10, Autobiographical Notebook of Thomas Clark, Jan.-Aug. 1819, p. 1064.
[86] BAHS, MS1114/15, Memoir of Thomas Clark, 1821-4, pp. 72, 134-5, 138.
[87] BAHS, MS1114/16, Memoir of Thomas Clark, 1824-25, not paginated.
[88] Clark, *Luckcock*, p. 15.
[89] BAHS, MS1114/1, Autobiographical Notebook of Thomas Clark, 1812-14, p. 99; MS1114/4,

grounds of convenience.[90] His politics were of a kind with many post-war reformists. He sought the restoration of the 'original purity' of the 'British Constitution'. He had a notion of what he called 'natural rights', but did not elaborate on what he meant by that term; the only one he specified was a right to petition.[91] In this he was typical of the radicalism of the post-war period; patriotic and constitutionalist, he cautioned against any violence but defended the mass meetings and the implicit threat and challenge they represented, and much of his critique was about corruption and the abuse of power. However, he was at the radical end of the reform spectrum in that he called for annual parliaments and universal suffrage.[92]

Neither Briggs' nor Behagg's models account for Clark's particular views. In Briggs' terms, he had no experience of social mobility, having been born into an affluent 'middle-class' family and hence had no comprehension of the lives of the poor or 'working class'. He does not fit into Behagg's model because he was a 'capitalist' but was in favour of universal suffrage, supposedly the preserve of 'working-class' radicals, rather than household-suffrage towards which his economic position should have (according to Behagg) predisposed him. Clark's political views cannot be reduced to a simple expression of his economic interests. Instead his political views derived from a combination of his upbringing, reading, associational experiences and engagement with the political life of early nineteenth-century Birmingham.

The main source available for Clark's life are sixteen notebooks that are a combination of memoirs and diaries. The period 1817 to 1823 is covered in most detail; though they do contain information about the period 1794-1817 and, to a lesser extent, 1823-63. He was inspired to begin writing his memoirs by reading James Luckcock's *Memoirs in Humble Life*,

Autobiographical Notebook of Thomas Clark, 1816-17, p. 402.

90 In looking back on the events of 1819 he wrote 'Birmingham is a large town, but it has no Representatives; therefore … we are obliged to trouble the members for the County & for the neighbouring town.' BAHS, MS1114/10, p. 994

91 For his constitutionalism see BAHS, MS1114/4, p. 360; MS1114/8, Autobiographical Notebook of Thomas Clark, Feb.-Aug. 1818, p.871; for the right to petition see MS1114/4, pp. 356-7, 359.

92 BAHS, MS1114/4, p. 362, presumably he meant universal manhood suffrage, but he did not explicitly state this. For his patriotism see MS111/4, pp. 393-4, 411; MS1114/8, p. 870.

the first volume of which appeared in 1813, though no copy has survived.[93] He based them on a series of memoranda that he had kept from 1808 onwards.[94]

First, let us consider the issue of reading. Printed material has been given pride of place in accounts of politicization, especially following the English translation of Habermas' *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. The available information on Clark's reading habits does not suggest a man radicalized by printed material. He records reading various London newspapers, Hume's and Smollett's histories of England, Richard Grey's *Memoria-Technica,* James Luckcock's *Memoirs in Humble Life*, T.J. Wooler's *Black Dwarf*; he often read French prose to improve his command of that language.[95] Among these, Hume and Smollett's histories, Luckcock's *Memoirs* and Wooler's *Black Dwarf* would have exposed him to political views, though of rather different types. Clark may have read other, more explicitly, political works which he did not note in his memoirs. However, what is important is that he does record, in some detail, works which were important to him and these were exclusively scientific in nature. Thus he particularly recommended Priestley's *The History and Present State of Electricity* (1767), Tiberius Cavallo's *A Complete Treatise of Electricity* (1777), William Nicholson's, *Dictionary of Chemistry* (1795), James Parkinson's *The Chemical Pocket-Book* (1800), Jane Marcet's *Conversations on Chemistry* (1805), William Henry's *An Epitome of Chemistry* (1806), Jeremiah Joyce's *A Familiar Introduction to the Arts & Sciences* (1810) and Samuel Parkes, *The Rudiments of Chemistry* (1810).[96] When considering the most important books he had read, Clark turned to the works which had inspired and shaped his interest in chemistry rather than any political works, despite the fact that political events and issues were (along with scientific issues) one of the most important topics discussed in his memoirs.

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93 BAHS, MS1114/8, p. 800

94 Ibid., p. 799.

95 BAHS, MS1114/6, Autobiographical Notebook of Thomas Clark, Sept.-Dec. 1817, p. 669.

96 BAHS, MS1114/4, p. 350.

If reading was marginal to Clark's own understanding of his political self then where can we find insight into the origins of his political views? His family provides a starting point. Clark's father, Thomas Clark Senior, was an important figure in reformist politics in Birmingham from the 1790s onwards. In addition to his membership of the Birmingham Society for Constitutional Information, Clark Senior was remembered by Thomas Henry Ryland as a 'radical'; he was associated with the reformist poet John Freeth's circle; he was one of the defence's witnesses at the trial of London Corresponding Society (LCS) member John Gale Jones; and was good friends with the Unitarian printer James Belcher, who was imprisoned in 1793 for selling Paine's *Letter Addressed to the Addressers*. Clark wrote to and visited Belcher frequently during his three-month sentence.[97] Clark Senior was not simply a political radical, however, he was also an important member of the town's governing elite. As well as holding positions in the official structures of power as a Street Commissioner, Guardian and later Overseer of the Poor (as already noted), he was one of the Birmingham manufacturers who gave evidence against the Orders in Council in 1812. He was secretary for the Birmingham Philosophical Institute in the early 1810s; he was appointed in 1818 to hear appeals from the town's population against the Highway Levy; and in 1819 he was nominated to audit the churchwardens' accounts. He also played an important role in raising subscriptions to build the Birmingham New Library (when construction began, Clark Senior laid the second stone, after Quaker loyalist Paul Moon James and before the Anglican loyalist Edward Thomason). He also helped raise subscriptions to relieve the victims of the Peterloo Massacre. In 1820 he served on the committee which ran Richard Spooner's candidature for the Warwickshire by-election. In December 1832 he seconded G.F. Muntz's nomination of Joshua Scholefield for the candidature at Birmingham.[98] Evidently his radical activity, much

[97] Ryland, *Reminiscences*, p. 69; Birmingham University Special Collections, MS562, Diary of James Belcher, 1793, 29 July, 1 Aug., 11, 18 Sept. and 2 Oct. 1793.

[98] BAHS, MS1114/1, pp. 86-9, 132; MS1114/12, Memoir of Thomas Clark, 1817-19, unpaginated, entry for 3 Feb. 1818; MS1114/13, Memoir of Thomas Clark, 1819-20, unpaginated, entry for Summer 1819; MS1114/8, p. 852; Luckcock, *Sequel to Memoirs*, pp. 42-3; MS1114/14, unpaginated; W. Hutton, *The History of*

of which was public and visible, did not undermine his suitability to perform other duties.

Although Clark made no explicit reference in his memoirs to the debt his political views owed to his father, he frequently records his father's actions with pride and his attachment to his father was reflected in his recollection of a period of his life in which he had clashed with him over his role in the family business: 'I will pass over in silence the many harsh expressions which my father made use of to me during this interval, for the … recollection of them now fills my breast with the most painful emotions'.[99] His father's radical political views and actions clearly made radical political views much more feasible for Clark; he did not have to risk a family rift by adopting a position contrary to his father. However, we should not assume that Clark simply absorbed his father's political views and reproduced them as his own. Though vital to the creation of political and social identities, families are not perfect mechanisms for the reproduction of attitudes across the generations, as the example of the Galton family discussed in chapter 4 suggests. If we cannot simply assume that Clark's politics were taken from his father, without difficulty or change, we can say that his father brought him into contact with a wide range of political individuals, many of whom Clark Junior admired greatly upon meeting. Thus through his father Clark met both local and London radicals and reformers. In Birmingham, Clark's family were good friends with James Luckcock and the Hill family. At the New Meeting House he would have encountered Rev. Joshua Toulmin who was an outspoken critic of warfare, refused to acknowledge fast days, campaigned against the Test and Corporation acts, and had suffered persecution while minister in Taunton for his political views.[100] Beyond Birmingham, Clark met T.J. Wooler, Charles Pearson (the lawyer and urban reformer), William Hone (the political writer and publisher), Sir Charles Wolesley (who was elected as Birmingham's 'legislatorial attorney'), William Clark (chair of the first Spa Fields reform meeting), Charles Pendrill (a former

Birmingham, 6th edn., ed. J. Guest (Birmingham, 1836), p. 155.

[99] BAHS, MS1114/4, p. 421.

[100] G.M. Ditchfield, 'Toulmin, Joshua (1740-1815), *ODNB*.

member of the LCS and associate of Colonel Despard) and Paul Lemaitre (the LCS member and former Jacobin).[101] Such contacts, combined with Clark Senior's own political views, start to suggest a process by which Clark Junior was politicized by a familial situation where radical politics was frequently engaged with.

During the post-Napoleonic reform agitation Clark Junior began to take a role in public politics. He attended the mass meetings for parliamentary reform held at Newhall Hill in Birmingham (seconding two motions at the meeting held in February 1818) and at least one county meeting held at Warwick (where he stood on the platform with Samuel Parr and George Edmonds, whom we have already encountered several times as a key figure in Birmingham radical politics). Clark greatly enjoyed attending these meetings: 'It would be impossible for an indifferent person justly to appreciate the pleasure which I experienced in attending this meeting … and had I power to recall but a few hours of past enjoyment they would certainly be those in which I was thus engaged'.[102] This points to another factor in Clark's political development. The one political experience which he commented on time and again was political oratory. Clark did not comment on reading Paine or Cobbett, but he did remember hearing Wooler, Parr and Edmonds speak. Describing Wooler's speech made at the Newhall Hill meeting in July 1819 to elect a 'legislatorial attorney', Clark commented that '[i]t was indeed, a master-piece of elocution, in w^{h} was displayed a combination of talent w^{h} rarely falls to the lot of man, w^{h} gives M^{r} Wooler an indisputable claim to be considered one of the first public speakers of the age.'[103] Indicative of Clark's view of the importance of political oratory was a speech he recorded in his memoirs that he had written for a dinner held at Birmingham in August 1818 to honour Wooler but which he did not have the confidence to deliver. This suggests that he viewed oratory as the correct way to interact with public life but

[101] BAHS, MS1114/4, pp. 391-6; MS1114/8, pp. 862-3, 868; MS1114/10, pp. 978-9, 1009.
[102] BAHS, MS1114/4, p. 411.
[103] BAHS, MS1114/10, p. 1046. For praise of other speeches by Wooler see MS1114/8, pp. 862-3, 868; MS1114/12, unpaginated; for praise of Edmonds see MS1114/4, pp. 354, 365-6, 409; for Parr see MS1114/4, p. 408.

one which should only be performed by those who could manage it in an accomplished fashion.[104]

It is difficult, despite the survival of sixteen volumes of his memoirs, to pinpoint the precise reasons why Clark became a political radical, still less easy to trace the precise origins of his particular brand of constitutionalist politics. His father's influence and contacts and Clark's own descriptions of the excitement of political meetings and oratory suggest the two most important sources. However, we should not discard economic factors and it must be remembered that Clark was able to readily engage in political activity because the success of his father's business, and later his own, gave him money to purchase books and newspapers, and the leisure time to attend political meetings and dinners in Birmingham, Warwick and London. If Clark's political attitude was not defined by his economic position yet the extent of his potential political engagement was enabled by his business success. With regards to the BPU, Clark made no mention of Attwood in his memoirs, though this may reflect their chronological coverage; in his tribute to Luckcock, Clark referred to Attwood as 'our patriotic townsman'.[105] It is difficult to know much about how he related to the BPU's Tory monetarist origins; however, we can say that his route to radical politics had little to do with the monetary policy that drove Attwood, or with the economic reasons that Briggs suggested formed a key motivation for many to join the BPU.

The Hill Family

Thomas Wright Hill (1763-1851) moved to Birmingham in 1777 when he was apprenticed to a brass founder. He married Sarah Lea (1765-1842) in 1791 and they had six children. The family remained in Birmingham until 1833, apart from a brief period when they lived in

[104] BAHS, MS1114/8, p. 870-71.
[105] Clark, *Luckcock*, p. 15.

Wolverhampton following the failure of Hill's business in 1795.[106] In 1792 the family income was a guinea a week, by 1800 this income had more than doubled.[107] They always had at least two servants. Furthermore, their wealth seems to have increased during this period. When he opened his school at Hill Top in 1803 (which later moved to Hazelwood), Hill charged four guineas a year for day boys and eighty guineas a year for boarders.[108] This income was sufficient to maintain Thomas, Sarah and their six surviving children. In 1831 the assessed value of Hazelwood school was £74. The family subscribed to two charities to relieve the poor in 1830, and rented a pew in the New Meeting. Although we do not have probate data for Thomas Wright Hill, valuations do exist for four of his children. Matthew Davenport Hill (1792-1872) was valued at under £40,000, Edwin Hill (1793-1876) at £16,000, Rowland Hill (1795-1879) at under £60,000, and Frederic Hill (1803-1896) at £11,330.19.1.[109] Such data is imperfect for accurately assessing the changing fortunes of the Hill family. However, the children's own accounts of their lives and the existing scholarship on the family all suggest that the family's wealth grew during the time under consideration. However, we should not over-estimate their wealth. Matthew experienced some difficulty in securing an adequate income for himself while training for the bar. In 1818 he wrote to his future wife, Margaret Bucknall: 'If I could look forward … with any certainty to the future, I should be happy: but I cannot. How to make up £200 *per annum* I cannot think.'[110] Despite their increasing wealth, none of the family ever served as a Street Commissioner, Guardian of the Poor or held any of the manorial offices. It is unknown whether they ever tried to be elected or appointed to the governing institutions. This all suggests the family were, in economic terms, comfortable

[106] T. Cooper, 'Hill, Thomas Wright (1763-1851), rev. C.A. Creffield, *ODNB*.

[107] P.W.J. Bartrip, 'The Career of Matthew Davenport Hill with Special Reference to his Place in Penal and Educational Reform Movements in Mid-Nineteenth Century England' (Univ. of Wales Ph.D. thesis, 1975), pp. 4-5.

[108] Ibid., p. 19.

[109] P.W.J. Bartrip, 'Hill, Matthew Davenport (1792-1872)'; idem, 'Hill, Frederic (1803-1896); I.D. Hill, 'Hill, Edwin (1793-1876); C.R. Perry, 'Hill, Sir Rowland (1795-1879), all *ODNB*. The probate data for their two other children, Caroline and Arthur, is unknown.

[110] Quoted in R. and F. Davenport Hill, *The Recorder of Birmingham, A Memoir of Matthew Davenport Hill* (London, 1878), p. 35.

rather than rich and did not occupy a prominent position in Birmingham society, being most renowned for their school rather than for any public activity or for holding political office.

Thomas Wright Hill is best remembered by historians for his role as the founder of Hazelwood School, an institution which has received much attention from historians of education for its innovative form of school government and teaching methods.[111] All of Hill's children were educated at his school.[112] However, he was also important in the history of radical politics in Birmingham. Hill was a member of Joseph Priestley's congregation and attended the Unitarian Sunday School, where he was taught by Priestley.[113] This Unitarian connection was strengthened by intermarriage and association. In 1824 Thomas' daughter Caroline married Thomas Clark Senior's son Francis.[114] The school that Hill ran had its origins in a small school that Clark Senior ran in the late eighteenth century.[115] Furthermore, his sons Edmund and Thomas attended Hill's school.[116]

From 1816 Edwin (aged 23) and Rowland Hill (21) created a Society for Literary Improvements. There were three other members: Thomas Clark Junior, Matthew Davenport Hill (as a corresponding member), and William Laugher Matthews, who is possibly William Matthews Junior, another Unitarian who played an important role in education in Birmingham during the later nineteenth century.[117] In October 1817 they formed a separate debating society, and Arthur Hill (1798-1885) joined. The Society wound up in July 1819, when Matthew moved to London, and the Hills' school was moved to Hazelwood which made

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111 P.W.J. Bartrip, 'A Thoroughly Good School": An Examination of the Hazelwood Experiment in Progressive Education', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 28/1 (1980), pp. 46-59; C.J.M. Jones, 'The Hill Family and Hazelwood School', *History of Education Society Bulletin*, 58 (1996), pp. 34-45; K. Racine, 'Patriots-in-Training: Spanish American Children at Hazelwood School in England during the 1820s', *Paedagogica Historica*, 46/4 (2010), pp. 495-509.

112 R. Watts, *Gender, Power and the Unitarians in England, 1760-1860* (Harlow, 1998), p. 131.

113 F. Hill, *An Autobiography of Fifty Years in Times of Reform*, ed. Constance Hill (London, 1894), p. 9.

114 Cooper, 'Hill, Thomas Wright'.

115 Ryland, *Reminiscences*, p. 65.

116 BAHS, MS1114/7, Autobiographical Notebook of Thomas Clark, Jan.-July 1818, p. 707.

117 A. Rodrick, *Self-Help and Civic Culture: Citizenship in Victorian Birmingham* (Aldershot, 2004), pp. 69, 92, 102, 108, 110; BAHS, MS1114/2, pp. 234-5

meetings more difficult to arrange.[118] However, Clark Junior and Benjamin Hadley (later an important member of the BPU) formed a Society for Literary & Scientific Improvement in October 1819. Rowland Hill was a member, as were James Drake (a radical publisher) and Thomas Clark Junior's cousin, John. The first person to speak to this society was James Luckcock. The topics discussed at these societies covered natural and moral philosophy, the poor law, prisons, drama and broadly political topics (the nature of public assemblies and the importance of free discussion).[119] The members of the Society for Literary Improvement and the debating society were entirely Unitarian. The Society for Literary & Scientific Improvement may have included non-Unitarians. For example, Hadley's religious affiliation is unclear. Carlos Flick describes him as having a 'dissenting background' while Mark Hovell states that he was a churchwarden of St Martins. Both could be true, though neither gives any evidence for these statements.[120]

After the end of the Napoleonic wars, radical politics re-emerged in the mainstream of British political life.[121] Given shifts in the public discourse that occurred in the period 1800-1815, public expressions of political radicalism became much safer and more common in Birmingham, and a number of Unitarians became openly involved with the new movement for political reform. Thomas Wright Hill was no exception, and he was joined by his sons. Indeed, the Hill family acted politically as a coherent collectivity, rather than as a group of individuals. In this manner they provide an example of a different form of familial political education and activity from that illustrated by the example of Thomas Clark and his son

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[118] BAHS, MS1114/10, p. 1040.

[119] BAHS, MS1114/13, unpaginated, October 1819.

[120] Flick, *Birmingham Political Union*, p. 21; M. Hovell, *The Chartist Movement*, ed. T.F. Trout, 2nd edn. (Manchester, 1925), p. 100.

[121] P. Spence, *The Birth of Romantic Radicalism: War, Popular Politics, and English Radical Reformism, 1800-1815* (Aldershot, 1996); J.R. Dinwiddy, *Radicalism and Reform in Britain, 1780-1850* (London, 1992), pp. 208-10; J. Fulcher, 'The English People and their Constitution After Waterloo: Parliamentary Reform, 1815-1817', in J. Vernon (ed.), *Re-Reading the Constitution: New Narratives in the Political History of England's Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 53-4; P. Harling, 'Leigh Hunt's *Examiner* and the Language of Partriotism', *EHR*, (1996) 111/444, pp. 1159-81; J. Innes, 'People and Power in British Politics to 1850', in J. Innes and M. Philp (eds.), *Re-Imagining Democracy in the Age of Revolutions: America, France, Britain, Ireland, 1750-1850* (Oxford, 2013), p. 145.

discussed above. They acted politically as a unit and their family history played an importance psychological role in strengthening their political resolve.

The Hill family took an active role in the renewal of agitation for parliamentary reform in the period 1816-20. Edwin and Arthur Hill were members of the Birmingham Hampden Club.[122] Frederic Hill remembered the radical leader George Edmonds visiting the Hill family house in 1817 to discuss with his father and four elder brothers whether a mass meeting should be held to debate the issue of parliamentary reform. Edwin Hill signed the requisition for the meeting which circulated after the High Bailiff William Cotterill had refused to sanction it.[123] In the 1820s the sources available do not record much explicitly political activity by members of the Hill family; however, their activities do suggest that they continued to possess a generally reformist mindset. In this decade the Hill family were engaged primarily with education and the development of their school at Hazelwood.

When the BPU began to agitate for political reform, the Hills 'held a family council to determine what action duty to our country called upon us to take. All agreed that one member should be spared from the work of the school and set at liberty to take an active part in the coming struggle.'[124] Frederic was chosen for this role. He joined the BPU and became a member of its Council on 15 May 1832.[125] There is no evidence of prior association with Attwood and so their involvement is evidence of the processes by which the issue political reform drew people of different socio-economic status and political opinions and contacts together.

Again their interest in education was combined with political activity. Frederic Hill suggested to the Council of the BPU that they hold public readings of newspapers with comments from members of the Political Unions in towns throughout the country in order to

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[122] Behagg, *Politics and Production*, pp. 93, 175.
[123] Hill, *Autobiography*, pp. 43-4; R.K. Dent, *Old and New Birmingham* (3 vols., East Ardsley, 1973), ii, 353.
[124] Hill, *Autobiography*, p. 77.
[125] Ibid., p. 92.

expose as many of the populace as possible to the course of political events. These were instituted in Birmingham and both Rowland and Matthew wrote to Frederic approving of the measure and recommending it to Political Unions elsewhere.[126]

Following the passing of the Reform Act the Hill family continued to be active in the cause of reform. Clearly their involvement in the BPU had resulted in a relationship between Attwood and the Hill family, as Thomas Wright Hill proposed Attwood for the candidature at Birmingham and was subsequently made the head of Attwood's election committee.[127] Matthew was approached to stand for Warwickshire, Tamworth (to oppose Peel), then for Wolverhampton and Nottingham before eventually agreeing to stand for Hull.[128] In his campaign Matthew described himself as a 'radical' and argued that:

> It has always been the fondest wish of my heart that the people of England were sufficiently educated, down to the very lowest classes, (loud cheering) that they might safely be entrusted with the right of suffrage (Hear, hear, hear.) I trust the time is not far distant, when they may be so entrusted; but ... I ask you whether, acting conscientiously, I can safely say that every person grown up to man's estate – every person arrived at what are called years of discretion, is safely to be entrusted with a franchise so deeply important to the public as the right of electing members of parliament.[129]

He supported triennial parliaments, the secret ballot, the abolition of slavery, the removal of all 'taxes on knowledge', the extension of education, municipal reform, the abolition of the Corn Laws, the abolition of flogging in the army and navy, and also envisaged the enfranchisement of women.[130] Matthew was elected in 1832 but he achieved little as an MP. His time in the house was mainly occupied by a scandal in which he accused the Irish MP Richard Lalor Sheil of publicly opposing the Irish Coercion Bill of 1833 while privately supporting it. He did speak in favour of municipal reform and the abolition of slavery, against

[126] Ibid., pp. 92-5.
[127] Ibid., p. 100.
[128] Davenport Hills, *Recorder of Birmingham*, p. 113.
[129] *Hull Advertizer*, 31 Sept. 1832, quoted in Bartrip, 'Matthew Davenport Hill', p. 124.
[130] Bartrip, 'Matthew Davenport Hill', pp. 124-5.

the Septennial Act and religious discrimination, and on a number of legal issues.[131] However, he was defeated in the general election of 1835.

After 1832 the Hill family continued to be involved in campaigns to reform various areas of public life: Rowland, famously, in the postal service; Matthew and Frederick were penal reformers and Edwin engaged in attempts to reform the currency and the law. The Hills were closely involved in the issue of 'reform' in a wide range of different areas of public life. In the period covered by this thesis their main concerns were political and educational reform. How did these initial concerns develop?

The family was vital to the development of the Hills' views on political reform. In this process the influence of Thomas Wright Hill appears important. Matthew recalled his father encouraging his children to debate issues with him in order to sharpen their reasoning ability.[132] Thomas' political ideas and his contacts amongst Birmingham's radical community (Clark, Luckcock, Edmonds and others) were important. He drew up a model of proportional representation which suggested a radically different model of voting from that used in local or national elections during his lifetime. It proposed that when the total number of members of a representative body is decided, the electors classify themselves into 'as many electoral sections or quorums as there are members to be elected, and each of the equal quorums shall, provided they can agree upon a unanimous vote, return one member'.[133] The proposal was not published in his lifetime and had no influence on Britain in this period. However, it did influence electoral methods in Australia through Rowland Hill, who was appointed in 1835 as the secretary to the South Australia Colonization Commission and who recommended his father's model of proportional representation in that body's third report in 1839. The system was adopted by the town of Adelaide.[134] In this respect Thomas played a similar politicizing

[131] Ibid., pp. 135-51.

[132] Davenport Hills, *Recorder of Birmingham*, p. 6.

[133] *Selections from the Papers of the Late Thomas Wright Hill, Esq. F.R.A.S.* (London, 1860), p. 88.

[134] J. Hart, *Proportional Representation: Critics of the British Electoral System, 1820-1945* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 6-9, Hart suggests Hill was the 'first inventor of the core principles of the system of proportional

role to Thomas Clark Senior, introducing his family to ideas of political reform and also providing them with contacts who encouraged reformist attitudes. However, the family also played another, different, role in the Hills' case.

The Hill family suggests a complication to the traditional narrative of the rise of the individual political self. Collective identities remained vital to political activity in this period – witness their choice of Frederic to represent the entire family in the reform campaign.[135] This was partly because of economic constraints – the remainder of the family had to continue to work in order to maintain the household – but also points to the ways in which a collective, familial identity could strengthen political resolve. This can be seen in the history of their family given by Frederic in his *Autobiography*. He wrote of his paternal grandmother through whom the family claimed a connection to John Hampden. Less historically significant, but still reflective of a desire to illustrate the quality of his family, was a story he told of his maternal grandfather who saved an old woman from a mob that sought to drown her for being a witch.[136] Such claims served to provide an historical background for the family's commitment to public causes and virtue. Thus Frederic claimed his mother inherited 'her parents' strong character', and demonstrated this by recounting a tale of her defying a mob during the Birmingham riots 'who insisted on her calling out "Church and King!" This … she refused to do, upon which some of the men assumed a menacing attitude; but one of them, who seemed to be in authority, called out, "Leave her alone! She is a brave young woman"'.[137] Their family history seems to have provided a reservoir of resolve which emphasized independence in contrast to the loyalist mob. Such collective memories of strong, independent ancestors, and stories of Thomas Wright Hill's own bravery in the face of the Priestley Riot

representation'.

[135] For the importance of collective identities in nineteenth-century politics see K. Gleadle, *Borderline Citizens: Women, Gender, and British Political Culture, 1815-1867* (Oxford, 2009), chs. 2 and 3.

[136] Hill, *Autobiography*, pp. 5, 15.

[137] Ibid., pp. 17-18.

mob,[138] served an important psychological role in strengthening individuals' resolve when confronted with the often violent rhetoric of anti-reformers – who foretold the end of society as the consequence of reform, especially political reform – and helped the family to remain committed to political reform through the difficult years of the 1790s and into the nineteenth century. This provides one possible explanation for how ideas of political reform were able to survive among the closely-knit group of families in Birmingham when attachment to such ideas seemed to have died out among others in the town.

The family, however, does not provide a sufficient explanation for the politicization of the individual members. The diary of Matthew Davenport Hill from 1817-18 reveals an added set of influences which shaped his particular political ideas. During this period he divided his time between Birmingham and London. He had entered Lincoln's Inn (the first person from Birmingham to do so) and he began to keep terms from 1816, though he still resided for at least part of the year in Birmingham, only leaving the family home permanently in 1818. This diary records the books he read, the people he socialized with and what they talked about. In his mid twenties, between March 1817 and March 1818, Matthew was engaged in writing a series of essays on political topics: 'On the present state of liberty in this Country with respect to institutions, manners & persons', 'on the Poor's rates' and 'on the Causes of present distress'.[139] Presumably in connection to these writings he also often visited the library in Birmingham to research the 'gagging & treason acts', standing armies, Habeas Corpus, the Triennial Act, the act against tumultuous petitioning (13 Cha2.st.1c.5), the Bill of Rights and the length of Plantagenet Parliaments.[140] He read a large amount of political literature (*Black Dwarf*, Paine's *Rights of Man*, Richard Owen's works, T.J. Wooler's trial) as well as literature

[138] Thomas Wright Hill was among a group who offered to defend Priestley's house from the rioters; Priestley declined their offer. Despite this, Hill remained at Priestley's house while the others (and Priestley) left, he 'made fast the house' and only left when the mob broke into the house, see *Remains of the Late Thomas Wright Hill* (London, 1859), pp. 116-7. This story was recounted by his children, see Hill, *Autobiography*, pp. 9, 11-12; Davenport Hills, *Recorder of Birmingham*, p. 2.

[139] Bodleian Library, MS Eng.misc.e.88, Diary of Matthew Davenport Hill, 1817-18, 10, 31 Mar., 16 Apr. 1817.

[140] Ibid., 10, 15, 17, 24 Mar., 12 Apr. 1817.

which was not political in a straightforward way but which would have exposed him to particular political viewpoints (Milton, Clarendon, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Franklin's correspondence, William Hazlitt writing for the *Edinburgh Review*).[141] Oral culture also played an important role in his political development. He spent a lot of time with individuals who were prominent in Birmingham's radical community. Thus he frequently met with George Edmonds, Thomas Clark Senior, William Hawkes Smith (a local radical and later Owenite socialist), and a Lewis (perhaps the radical William Greathead Lewis, a Coventry schoolmaster who was arrested in 1820 along with Edmonds).[142] His discussions with Edmonds seem to have been particularly important. He and Edmonds (and a number of unidentified others) formed an informal debating society which discussed a wide range of topics from philology and the importance of history to the arts and the pursuit of happiness. It is unclear whether this society is the same as the 'Society for Literary Improvement' discussed above. This group began as a means for them to 'practice in oratory', something which he often did.[143] They also discussed political matters, in September 1817 Matthew recorded their discussion of political reform:

> I considered first the propriety of reform from the continual mutations of nature which argue the propriety of change – how water become putrid by stagnation – 2nd from the imperfection of present establishments 3rd the dangers of reform – comparison of the northern & southern nations of Europe Southern nations more open to reform than northern…[144]

The diary also records his experience of hearing a number of political orators: Brougham, Burdett, Romilly and Thelwall (in the last case Matthew dined with him on a number of occasions).'[145]

Matthew's diary gives us a snapshot of a young man's (aged 25-6) political activities

[141] Ibid., 22, 30 Apr., 1 Sept., 21 May, 16, 19 Mar., 25 May, 8 Nov., 1-4 May 1817.
[142] Ibid., 12, 16, 26 Mar. 1817.
[143] Ibid., 12 Sept. 1817.
[144] Ibid., 13 Sept. 1817.
[145] Ibid., 19 Feb. 1818.

in a period of growing political unrest. He recorded a wide range of possible influences in his diary from discussions with George Edmonds to his reading of modern and classical authors. It is difficult to judge the relative importance of the various forces, but what is most important to note is the sheer variety of ways and means in which an individual could undergo a process of politicization. When the politics of the Hill family have been discussed by historians, the tendency has been to characterize their politics as related to their material position. Thus, it is argued that the family started out radical when at its poorest (in the 1810s and 20s) but then underwent a process in which the members become increasingly less radical as they grew in material wealth.[146] Instead, the change in the Hill children's political views (which saw them turn away from parliamentary reform and towards social reform of various types) seems to have been driven by a combination of personal experiences and particular understandings of society. Thus Matthew's later concern with penal rather than political reform was driven by his growing friendship with Brougham and his circle (which promoted his pre-existing concern with the education of the masses), his experience as the Recorder of Birmingham (which suggested to him that penal reform was vital to the improvement of society) and by the family's long-standing commitment to educational reform (which he had always stressed as a precondition to any extension of the franchise).[147] Simply examining the family's changing material circumstances does not offer an adequate explanation for their changing views on reform. Their turn away from political reform was more about satisfaction with the Great Reform Act and growing concerns about the condition of society, which needed to be addressed before further political reform could occur, than declining commitment to reform because of their own financial security.[148]

[146] Deborah Gorham describes Matthew, Rowland and Frederic's movement from radical reform to membership of the 'reforming "establishment"' and links it to their growing prosperity, see D. Gorham, 'Victorian Reform as a Family Business: the Hill Family', in A.S. Wohl (ed.), *The Victorian Family: Structures and Stresses* (London, 1978), esp. pp. 120-21, 129, 133; Behagg agrees, *Politics and Production*, pp. 92-3.

[147] Bartrip, 'Matthew Davenport Hill', ch. 10, gives an account of the changing nature of Matthew's political views, though he underestimates Matthew's youthful radicalism.

[148] Their interest in the condition of society was anticipated and, in part, grew out of their long-standing interest and involvement in education, see Bartrip, 'Matthew Davenport Hill', pp. 68-71, 365-7; *Public Education:*

Conclusion

Recent work on popular politics has provided us with great detail about the form that popular politics took in various locations and periods and why these forms were adopted.[149] However, there has been far less work on the reasons why individuals became involved in politics. When this issue is addressed the focus has been on famous individuals or historians have tended to relate political activity to social status in a reductive fashion. This chapter has sought to present an alternative approach to understanding what drove individuals to take the political positions that they adopted. The limits of archival sources mean that this approach is necessarily selective. However, the four cases studies begin to recreate the potential political situation in a particular place. In other words, they examine some of the factors that opened up the possibility of adopting a radical political stance through involvement with the BPU. However, these factors are not posited as universal. Indeed, they clearly operated differently in other places. For example, the role of Unitarianism in radical politics in Birmingham was different to its place in Manchester. In Birmingham the memory of the Priestley Riots tended to reduce the radical political potential of Unitarianism. This, combined with the fact that Attwood was a Tory Anglican seems to have dissuaded many Unitarians from joining the BPU. In contrast, in Manchester, the Unitarian community joined in the opposition to the Tory faction that dominated local government. Thus, when the Manchester Political Union formed it was partly based on the Unitarian networks that had sustained opposition to the Tories since the 1790s.[150]

Plans for the Government and Liberal Instruction of Boys, in Large Numbers; Drawn from Experience (London, 1822), pp. 82-3.

[149] Epstein, *Radical Expression*; idem, *In Practice: Studies in the Language and Culture of Popular Politics in Modern Britain* (Stanford, CA, 2003); K. Navickas, 'Moors, Fields and Popular Protest in South Lancashire and the West Riding, 1800-1848', *Northern History*, 46/1 (2009), pp. 93-111; J. Vernon, *Politics and the People: A Study in English Political Culture, c. 1815-1867* (Cambridge, 1993).

[150] V.A.C. Gatrell, 'Incorporation and the Pursuit of Liberal Hegemony in Manchester, 1790-1839', in D. Fraser (ed.), *Municipal Reform and Incorporation* (Leicester, 1982), pp. 16-60; LoPatin, *Political Unions*, pp. 53-6.

The key point in all these cases is that neither a purely discursive nor a purely material reading is sufficient to understand the processes by which groups of individuals came together to form a social group, albeit one focused on politics. Each case study dealt with substantial propertied individuals who adopted radical political positions. However, each individual reached those positions by varied routes. As with much of this thesis, attention to the issue of practice and process provides an important way to approach the complex process of group formation and avoid both materially and discursively reductive explanations. In particular, the various mechanisms by which politicization could take place (through the family, schools, informal discussion, debating societies etc.) clearly contributed to pushing individuals towards a more active engagement with politics. Building up a rounded picture of these mechanisms of politicization is vital if we are to understand why individuals became involved in political issues without recourse to the reductive approaches suggested by many Marxian and non-Marxian accounts of politicization (notably in the latter case the idea of the public sphere). In Birmingham in the late 1820s these processes combined with the particular political history of that period to allow a large number of individuals from varying backgrounds to unite in the pursuit of political reform.

Conclusion.

This thesis has argued that historians need to rethink their approach to studying social-group formation. It has suggested that the social structure of Birmingham can be described and analysed, but that there were a plurality of social groups each defined by particular attributes or activities (rather than a set number of classes defined by a combination of attributes and activities), that these social groups overlapped, but that they are best understood as different groups rather than as divisions within a overarching class.[1] Furthermore, the relationship between them was not a simple hierarchy; instead, there were a series of overlapping but distinct elites in different areas of public life. This thesis has also aimed to return to structural analysis. However, the structures considered in this thesis were indeterminate and the relationship between attributes, structures and actions a complex one, best understood by considering the processes that allowed individuals to undertake particular actions and to understand the world in particular ways (as chapters 4 and 6 showed). Finally, this thesis has argued that propertied society was never an actor in its own right. In doing so it has sought to avoid the tendency by which concepts that begin as complex and divided models of social groups become reified during the process of historical analysis.[2] In this conclusion I will consider some of the implications of this approach to social-group formation for other areas of historical enquiry.

Besides social-group formation, there are other issues traditionally addressed by social historians that, despite their continued importance, have received less attention in recent years. Foremost among these is the study of relationships between social groups. Traditionally this issue has been addressed within the frameworks suggested by the concept of class. Thus, the main issues have been those of social control, class conflict, class co-operation,

1 See pp. 36-7 above.

2 See p. 36 n. 65 above for examples of this tendency.

appropriation and distinction. However, the understanding of structure and hierarchy adopted in this thesis means that although the limits of possible actions were set by the structures present in a particular society, the nature of relations between specific social groups were the outcome of contingent processes. This means that the nature of inter-social group relations becomes something that has to be explained, rather than an explanatory factor in their own right; neither social cohesion nor social conflict are *natural* states.

Approaching the issue of social relationships in this way can suggest new approaches to old problems and interpretations. For example, the contrast between Birmingham and Manchester has long been a mainstay of interpretations of nineteenth-century Britain.[3] The contrast is made between class conflict in factory-dominated Manchester and class cohesion in Birmingham due to its workshop-based economy. This view has led to simplistic and reductive claims that had Engels lived in Birmingham then the history of Marxism and everything that followed would have been very different.[4] However, if we suggest that the comparatively harmonious nature of Birmingham's local government, the popularity of a discourse of social cohesion and the frequent discussions of Birmingham's progress since the 1791 Priestley Riots all reflected a desire among individuals of differing social statuses and political beliefs to avoid another outbreak of rioting then Birmingham becomes the town in which there was significant tension between different social groups.[5] In contrast, Vic Gatrell has suggested that Manchester's elites felt secure in their economic, cultural and political

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[3] The contrast goes back, at least, to Tocqueville, see, *Journeys to England and Ireland*, trans. G. Lawrence and K.P. Mayer, ed. J.P. Mayer (New Haven, CT, 1958), pp. 104-5.

[4] A. Briggs, *Victorian Cities* (London, 1990), p. 116. Engels' understanding of Britain was not primarily the result of his experiences in Manchester; instead, his views were heavily influenced by his recent conversion to Feuerbachian communism with its emphasis on the loss of humanity, see G. Stedman Jones, 'National Bankruptcy and Social Revolution: European Observers on Britain, 1813-1844', in D. Winch and P.K. O'Brien (eds.), *The Political Economy of British Historical Experience* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 87-91; idem., 'Voir Sans Entendre, Engels, Manchester et L'Observation Sociale en 1844', *Geneses*, 22 (1996), pp. 4-17. Engels himself commented 'What is true of London, is true of Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds, is true of all great towns.', F. Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, ed. V. Kiernan (London, 1987), p. 69, his view of Birmingham was based on reading journalism and parliamentary reports, see pp. 78-9, 211-13.

[5] See chapters 2 and 5.

dominance and thus had little fear of the poorer inhabitants.[6] Using models of class conflict or class cohesion is insufficient for an understanding of the social history of these two towns. In fact, we still need further work on the social history of industrial towns, something Maxine Berg pointed out twenty years ago.[7]

This leads into the issue of power. Since there are multiple social groups in any population then power cannot be simply allocated to particular sections of society, as it tends to be in, for example, studies of 'middle-class' dominance of local government. This builds on Bruno Latour's observation that power is not a resource and should not be thought of in that manner.[8] Instead, power is something that needs to be explained. Thus, the ability of certain propertied social groups to force their will on other propertied and non-propertied groups, as in the example of the Street Commissioners and Guardians of the Poor, cannot be explained by appeal to the concept of power; rather, power simply refers to the processes, resources and discourses that enabled such dominance which themselves need to be analysed and evaluated. This does not deny the reality of inequalities of power but it does necessitate a more complex approach to understanding these inequalities.

Understanding social-group formation as this thesis does also has significant implications for the issue of social mobility. We tend to conceptualise social mobility in terms of moving either up or down a ladder-like hierarchy between classes. However, if there were a multiplicity of social groups arranged in a complex set of hierarchies then we need to think more in terms of individuals moving diagonally as well straight up and down. This would reflect the fact that an individual might advance in status in certain areas of life while maintaining a position or declining in others. Such an approach would require extensive

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6 V. Gatrell, 'Incorporation and the Pursuit of Liberal Hegemony in Manchester, 1790-1839', in D. Fraser (ed.), *Municipal Reform and the Industrial City* (Leicester, 1982), pp.16-17, 19-20.

7 M. Berg, *The Age of Manufactures: Industry, Innovation and Work in Britain*, 2nd edn. (London, 1994), pp. 282-3.

8 B. Latour, 'The Powers of Association', in J. Law (ed.), *Power, Action and Belief: A New Sociology of Knowledge?* (London, 1986), pp. 264-80.

prosopographical work in order to trace individuals as they exhibit certain status indicators and move in and out of various social groups. This develops Lawrence Stone's argument from 1966 that social mobility is best analysed by thinking in terms of 'a series of vertical towers upon a hill' in which the hill represented the poor, and the towers a series of hierarchies 'with their own internal elevators'.[9] This is a helpful approach, though I would suggest that the poor had their own multiple hierarchies that interacted in complex ways with the 'towers' rather than simply existing as an 'amorphous mass'. Social mobility is important to many of the main narratives of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century history: the rise of the middle and working classes, the emergence of the public sphere and politeness, the industrial revolution, professionalization; rethinking social mobility will reveal new interpretations of these old issues.

The conclusions of this thesis also support those historians who seek to complicate cultural history.[10] Since there were a multiplicity of social groups, particular systems of meaning are unlikely to fall neatly into categories such as 'working-class culture'. Instead, they cut across temporary social groups. Furthermore, a lack of sources means that it is hard to trace the discourses and beliefs held by all the members of any social group; for example, the discussion of the social and geographical understandings in this thesis is weighted towards wealthier individuals because of the records available. These factors makes it much harder to explain events through recourse to socio-cultural explanations of the kind seen, for example, in Davidoff and Hall's association of the domestic ideology with the middle class. We cannot argue that individuals within a social group undertook particular actions because of their culture if that culture is not confined to one social group or if we do not know whether it applied to all members of a social group. This is not to argue for a realm beyond meaning; all individuals within society understand the world through the lens of culture. However, actions

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9 L. Stone, 'Social Mobility in England, 1500-1700', *P&P*, 33 (1966), pp. 16-55.

10 See also the discussion on pp. 24-8 above.

are never simply caused by the choices of wholly free individuals, material and other factors influence activities. Thus, we should examine the particular combination of cultural and material factors that made particular actions possible.[11] However, to judge the causal importance of culture we need to undertake more comparative studies similar to that carried out by Richard Biernacki on the German and British woollen industries.[12] For example, with regards to the discussion of social understandings in this thesis, if I wished to argue that such discourses contributed to the formation of social groups I would need to compare Birmingham with other similar situations where different social discourses circulated and isolate the precise role of such discourses in the process of social-group formation.

If these issues complicate the place of culture in social history, then it is also necessary for cultural historians to think more consistently about the social history of such a system of meaning; it is not sufficient simply to describe such a system. They need to consider who used the system of meaning they discuss and when and where such a system was used. For example, I have tried to do this with regards to the particular use of 'middle' and 'upper class' in Birmingham.[13] They need to examine to what extent those systems of meaning drove the formation of types of identity. To what extent did they create self-identities, perceptions of others or understandings of commonality? Cultural historians need to pinpoint exactly what the explanatory power of such systems of meaning is; did they directly drive events or were they simply window dressing disguising the influence of other systems of meaning or material structures? Finally, they should examine the processes and mechanisms of cultural transfer and through this start to think about how systems of meaning change. All of these connect the study of particular systems of meaning to the history of the populations that used, changed, perpetuated and were affected by these systems.[14]

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[11] See chapter 6.

[12] R. Biernacki, *The Fabrication of Labor: Germany and Britain, 1640-1914* (Berkeley, CA, 1995).

[13] See pp. 129-2 above.

[14] Something that Joanne Bailey sets out to do in her *Parenting in England, 1760-1830: Emotion, Identity, and Generation* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 6-8.

These are all significant historical issues and I would echo those scholars who call for historians to return to tackling large problems of the kind addressed by Thompson, Hobsbawm and others for political and historical reasons.[15] We can no longer answer these questions with the type of large-scale structural analysis that they deployed but this does not mean that we can abandon trying to find another way to answer such questions. In this thesis I have sought to use a case study in order to illuminate a wider problem in historical scholarship. More comparative work is required to discover how applicable the findings derived from this study of Birmingham are to other places and times but it represents a starting point in rebuilding a social history that re-engages with issues of causation, collectivities and structures – a process that is vital if we are to respond to historical and political criticism.

[15] For example, F. Mort, 'Intellectual Pluralism and the Future of British History', *HWJ*, 72 (2011), pp. 214-18.

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