

# Civic and municipal leadership: a study of three northern towns between 1832 and 1867

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the development of local government circa 1832-1867 by studying in depth the experience of three northern industrial towns, Halifax, Oldham and Rochdale. All were textile towns, all had rapidly growing populations and they are situated next to each other across the Pennines. Four institutions are examined in each town: the vestry, bodies acting under the authority of local improvement acts, the Poor Law board of guardians and the municipal corporation. The contribution of each of these bodies to the evolution of civic governance in each town is assessed. An examination of office holders in these bodies, their political and social background and relationships with other local civic activists and central authority helps to illuminate the character of contemporary local government. Attention is also given to the role played by parliamentary politics in the light of the Reform Act of 1832, which gave all three towns seats in the House of Commons. The role of radicals, Chartists, other reformers and the local press shed further light on this growth and development, leading to conclusions about the nature of civic governance by 1867. These conclusions highlight the close links between the institutions, the connected role they all play in developing civic governance and the impact of reform movements. They will show that the most important role is that of the leaders within these institutions, who are often the same people taking part in each movement. Their leadership was the driving force for civic governance within each town.

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**Abbreviations**

HACLL	Halifax Anti-Corn Law League
HBCM	Halifax Borough Council Minutes
HBGM	Halifax Board of Guardian Minutes
<i>HE</i>	<i>Halifax Express</i>
<i>HG</i>	<i>Halifax Guardian</i>
HPVM	Halifax Parish Vestry Minutes
HRL	Halifax Record Library
HTM	Halifax Trustees Minutes
<i>MG</i>	<i>Manchester Guardian</i>
<i>NS</i>	<i>Northern Star</i>
OBGM	Oldham Board of Guardian Minutes
OBP	Oldham Butterworth Papers
<i>OC</i>	<i>Oldham Chronicle</i>
OCM	Oldham Council Minutes
OLSL	Oldham Local Studies Library
OPICM	Oldham Police and Improvement Commission Minutes
OSMVM	Oldham St. Marys Vestry Minutes
<i>PP</i>	Parliamentary Papers
RBGM	Rochdale Board of Guardian Minutes
RCSVM	Rochdale Castleton Select Vestry Minutes
RLSL	Rochdale Local Studies Library
<i>RO</i>	<i>Rochdale Observer</i>
<i>RP</i>	<i>Rochdale Pilot</i>
RSSVM	Rochdale Spotland Select Vestry Minutes
RPICM	Rochdale Police and Improvement Commission Minutes
THAS	The Halifax Antiquarian Society
<i>TNA</i>	The National Archives
WYASH	West Yorkshire Archive Service: Halifax
WYASW	West Yorkshire Archive Service: Wakefield

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## Chapter One

### The Three Towns

The purpose of this thesis is to compare and analyse the development of three northern towns between 1832 and 1867 with particular reference to municipal governance. The three towns are Halifax in the West Riding of Yorkshire, and Oldham and Rochdale in Lancashire. They were not parliamentary boroughs before 1832 and had no history of a borough corporation or any other type of overall municipal control before that date. There have been previous examples of this tripartite approach, most notable in this area being the work of John Foster, whose selection of communities overlap with the present study (Oldham, Northampton and South Shields), and the study undertaken by John Garrard on Bolton, Rochdale and Salford.<sup>1</sup> The time span is defined by the two Parliamentary Reform Acts of 1832 and 1867. These Acts brought great change to local politics and the link between local and parliamentary politics form an integral part of the analysis. Though some reference beyond this period is necessary, mainly before 1832 to help understand the details, the major developments in municipal governance took place within this time frame. The thesis will examine the vestries, the bodies empowered by improvement acts, the poor law administration, the impact of radical groups and finally, the development of corporations. Within these areas, the focus is on those most actively involved, the leaders of local politics, to see who and what sort of people led these towns at the start of their municipal journeys.

In this introduction, the main features of the three towns in terms of area, population, industry and social settings are examined. The three towns are situated on the Pennines, in a relatively close geographical area. That area was made up of moorland and small farms,

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<sup>1</sup> John Foster, *Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution: Early Industrial Capitalism in Three English Towns* (London: Wiedenfield and Nicholson, 1974) and John Garrard, *Leadership and Power in Victorian Towns: 1830-1881* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983).

spreading out beyond the hills into wider farmland. There were a large number of small fast flowing streams, which played a major role in the development of textile production. The climate tended to be a damp one, another help in the production of yarn and cloth. Settlements were small and were linked by pack horse routes and between towns by turnpike roads. Two major canals connected Lancashire and Yorkshire, and later in the period, railways were built along the same two routes. The first ran from Rochdale to Halifax through Todmorden and the more southerly route ran between Oldham and Huddersfield.

The parishes had formed the basis of administration and social life since the time of the Reformation. Halifax, Oldham and Rochdale were adjacent to each other across the Pennine hills, and all of them could be classed as textile parishes, yet within that simple description lie a multitude of differences. The smallest unit was the township, which was often the same district used for the improvement commissioners, and later the municipality when incorporation was gained. These townships formed part of the parish and this was the main instrument of administration since Tudor times. Halifax had twenty three townships within the parish, whilst Rochdale had eight and Oldham six. The Poor Law Unions, established under the reforms of 1834, were imposed on this structure. In Oldham, the Union covered the same area as the parish. Halifax and Rochdale were split between two Unions and townships were taken from these parishes to form the separate Union of Todmorden. These units did not consistently correspond to the Petty Sessions districts. In Oldham, it was a constant source of frustration that the townships of Middleton and Alkington were part of the Rochdale Sessions courts and not Oldham's.<sup>2</sup>

Larger than these units was the county, for Rochdale and Oldham it was Lancashire and for Halifax it was the West Riding of Yorkshire. The Government appointed magistrates to the county in consultation with the Lord Lieutenant before 1832. All these parishes were

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<sup>2</sup> Oldham, OLSL, Poor Law Guardian Minute Book, (OBGM) PUO/1/1, 3 January 1849.

represented by county members in Parliament. After 1832, many householders in the newly enfranchised boroughs still had voting rights in the county seats. Hustings and electoral roll review courts were held for county elections in each borough throughout the period under study. After incorporation some magistrates might be appointed specifically for the borough, but the majority still remained for the county. Poor Law Unions could cross county boundaries, and parliamentary boroughs and municipal boroughs were not always co-terminus. The picture was very complex: this can be seen even more clearly when the area of the parishes are examined.

The following comparison of the parishes is taken from Baines' *Histories* for Yorkshire and Lancashire.<sup>3</sup>

<u>Parish</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Square Miles</u>
Halifax	82539	129
Rochdale including Saddleworth	58620	92
Rochdale	41828	65
Oldham cum Prestwich	22022	34
Oldham	12039	19

Halifax was the largest parish in Yorkshire and the third largest in England.<sup>4</sup> It originally formed part of the Diocese of York, within the Archdeaconry of Ripon. Larger dioceses were divided into archdeaconries under the jurisdiction of the bishop and York had five. Smaller areas helped better delivery of ecclesiastical oversight. In 1836, the archdeaconry of Ripon became a diocese in its own right, formed from parts of the dioceses of York and of Chester.<sup>5</sup> Halifax remained there till 1877 when it became part of the new Diocese of Wakefield.

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<sup>3</sup> Edward Baines, *The History, Directory and Gazetteer of the County of York Volume I: West Riding* (Leeds: Mercury Press, 1822) and *History of the County Palatine of Lancashire Volume 3* (London: Routledge, 1868).

<sup>4</sup> John Hargreaves, *Halifax* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p. 97.

<sup>5</sup> *London Gazette* no. 19426, pp. 1738-1742, 7 October 1836.



MAP OF HALIFAX

The vicar throughout this entire period from 1827 to 1875 was Charles Musgrave, whose brother Thomas was the Archbishop of York from 1847 till 1860.<sup>6</sup> Rochdale was part of the Diocese of Chester, but the living was in the personal gift of the Archbishop of Canterbury. In 1847 it became part of the new Diocese of Manchester. It had two vicars, Reverend William Thomas Hey from 1820 to 1839<sup>7</sup> and John Edward Nassau Molesworth from 1839 till 1879.<sup>8</sup> Oldham too became part of the new Diocese of Manchester in 1847, but it was for many years part of a larger parish called Prestwich cum Oldham in the Diocese of Chester. It spent a lot of time under four different vicars seeking unsuccessfully to free itself of this connection. They were John Fallowfield (1818-1842), Thomas Lowe (1842-1861) who was part time and often non-resident, David Alexander (1861-1864) and William Walters (1864-1873).<sup>9</sup>

In terms of religious affiliation in the main townships, there were interesting similarities shown by the Religious Census of 1851.<sup>10</sup> This census is an interesting document as it was the first and only religious census, and needs to be used with care.<sup>11</sup> Unlike the main census completion was not compulsory only voluntary. Each enumerator was asked to identify all the places of worship within their district and then give the form to the presiding ministers. Many forms were not returned and many were inaccurate because certain information was not given, or exaggerated. Some worshippers were counted twice after going to one place of worship in the morning and a different one in the afternoon or evening.<sup>12</sup> It was not a count of people, but of acts of religious worship. Some church ministers were reluctant to give numbers either on principle or because of not wishing to reveal how low some congregations were.

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<sup>6</sup> John Hargreaves, 'The Church of England in late Victorian Halifax, 1852-1914', *THAS* (1991), 27-60.

<sup>7</sup> James Croston, ed. *History of the County Palatine of Lancashire, Volume 3* (Manchester: Heywood Press, 1946) pp 33-35.

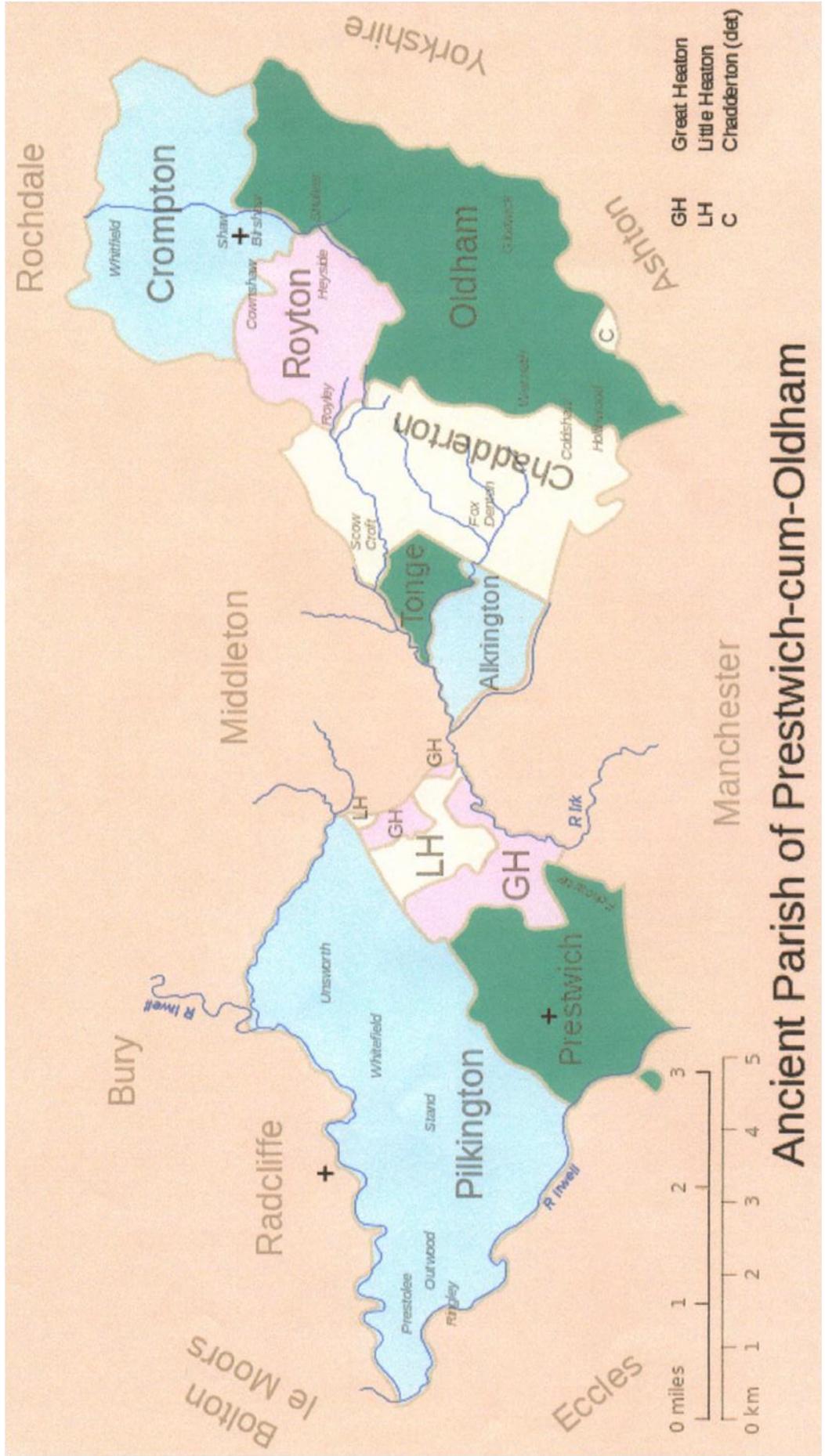
<sup>8</sup> Keith G. Bamford, 'The Reverend Dr. J. E. N. Molesworth: Vicar of Rochdale 1839-1877', *Transactions of the Historical Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, 141 (1991), 261-88.

<sup>9</sup> George Perry-Gore, *The Ancient Parochial Chapelry* (Oldham; W. E. Clegg, 1906), p. 83.

<sup>10</sup> *PP 1853 (89) Census of Great Britain: Religious Worship*.

<sup>11</sup> See John Wolffe, *The Religious Census of 1851 in Yorkshire*, Borthwick paper No. 108 (York: University of York, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> See Edward Royle, 'When did Methodists stop attending their Parish Church?' *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, Vol. 56 Part 6 (October 2006), 275-296, for more detail on the attendance at two churches.



MAP OF OLDHAM

Others did not wish to reveal the extent of divisions within Methodism in 1850.<sup>13</sup> Later forms were sent out that did not ask for as much detail, but even these were either not returned or incomplete. Even the day chosen, mid-Lent Sunday, was not ideal as many workers were away from their regular places of worship on what was a traditional day to visit parents, especially their mothers. Some areas suffer from loss of documents, especially in Halifax where all that remains are the printed summaries in the parliamentary papers.<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, as John Wolffe makes clear, the 1851 Religious Census can be exploited to provide comparisons, however imperfect.

We may well regret what it does not tell us, and need to interpret what it does tell us with considerable caution, but if it did not exist our knowledge and understanding of the role of religion in mid-nineteenth century Britain would be greatly lessened.<sup>15</sup>

There were contrasts between the overall totals given for each parish in the religious census and those totals given in the national census, but given the complexities of the areas they were not massive. The common features are clear such as there were very similar attendances at Church of England services. In Halifax it was 17% of the total population in 31 churches, in Oldham 16% in 17 churches and in Rochdale 14% in 13 churches.<sup>16</sup> One other area of similarity was the strength of Methodism. In Halifax there were four separate groups with a 17% share of the attending population. In Oldham there were four separate groups with 10% of the population. In Rochdale there were five groups with 14% of the population. Equally across all three towns the Quakers and the Unitarians together accounted for less than 1% of the total population. Given the prominence of people such as John Bright in Rochdale, a Quaker, and

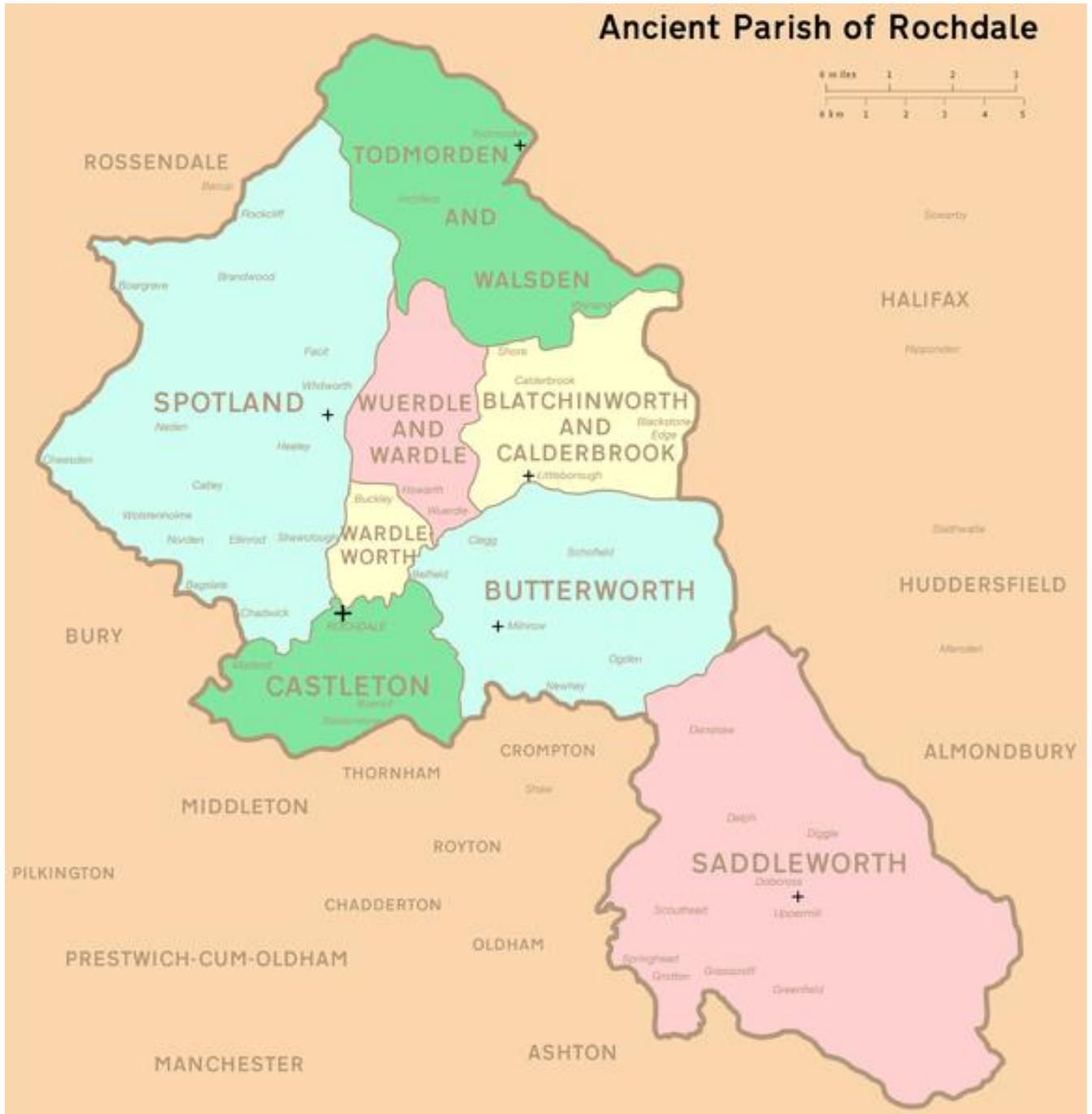
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<sup>13</sup> John Wolffe, *The Religious Census of 1851 in Yorkshire*, p. 11.

<sup>14</sup> John Wolffe, *Yorkshire Returns of the 1851 Census of Religious Worship Vol. 2: West Riding (North)* Borthwick Texts and Studies 31 (York: York University, 2005), p. 112, and also John Wolffe, 'The 1851 Census and Religious Change in nineteenth century Yorkshire', *Northern History*, 45 Vol. 2 (March 2008), 71-87.

<sup>15</sup> Wolffe, *Religious Census*, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Wolffe, *Religious Census*, Halifax p. 101, Oldham, p. 95 and Rochdale, p. 96.



MAP OF ROCHDALE

John Fielden, a Unitarian in both Halifax and Oldham, it was clear that individuals counted for more than numbers in the churches. The final figure worth looking at was the overall percentage of church going people. In Halifax it was 44%, in Oldham 34% and in Rochdale 41%. The Church of England, especially in Halifax, did a great deal of soul searching after this census.<sup>17</sup>

The overall population growth was clear across the parishes. The detailed figures are given in Appendix A, but Halifax grew from 93,050 in 1821 to 173,313 in 1871, an increase of 80,263 or 86%. Oldham rose from 52,510 in 1821 to 146,678 in 1871, a rise of 94,168 or 179%. Finally, Rochdale rose from 61,011 in 1821 to 139,114 in 1871, a rise of 78,103 or 128%. It must be remembered that these figures are for the whole parish. Specific townships within each parish often grew at a more rapid rate. Given the very large number of townships involved, twenty three in Halifax, six in Oldham and eight in Rochdale, there were considerable differences in the rates of growth within each parish. For example, Fixby in Halifax rose from 345 in 1821 to 469 by 1871, a growth of 124. Halifax Township grew from 12,628 in 1821 to 37,208 by 1871, a growth of 24,580. The rate of growth for the first was 36%, for the second 194%.

The Poor Law Unions covering these three towns were established between 1837 and 1847. Again the details will be examined later,<sup>18</sup> but in conformity to the vision of the 1834 Act the units were large so as to encourage uniformity and promote maximum efficiency. In Halifax, five of the townships within the parish were not in the union: Erringdon, Heptonstall, Langfield, Stansfield and Wadsworth (all of the chapelry of Heptonstall) became part of the Todmorden Union. Using 1851 as a benchmark just after all three Unions were finally established, Halifax Union had a population of 110,437, a drop of 21,571 on the Parish.<sup>19</sup> In Oldham, four townships were not part of the union. Great and Little Heaton and Prestwich

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<sup>17</sup> Chapter Four, p. 91.

<sup>18</sup> Chapter Six.

<sup>19</sup> *PP* 1852 (88 Pt.1.1) Population Abstracts from Census of 1851: Halifax, p.326.

were in Prestwich Union and Pilkington was in Bury Union. Oldham Union had a population of 71,866, a drop of 14,922 on the Parish.<sup>20</sup> In Rochdale Union, only two townships were not in the union. Todmorden and Saddleworth were set up as separate unions. Alfred Power, the Assistant Poor Law Commissioner, did consider placing Saddleworth within Oldham Union, but rejected that idea because it would make Oldham too unwieldy in area.<sup>21</sup> The population of Rochdale Union was 63,300, a drop of 29,227 on the parish, a considerable reduction in size.<sup>22</sup> This considerable drop, and the relative smallness of the union, helps to explain why the township of Spotland within the Rochdale Union was unsuccessful with three attempts after 1851 to gain its independence and become a union on its own.<sup>23</sup>

The next major area of administration was the parliamentary boundaries set up by the 1832 Reform Act. The census reports give figures for the populations of the parliamentary and municipal boroughs and here again there is a significant difference.<sup>24</sup> In Halifax and Rochdale the two boroughs had identical boundaries, but in Oldham the parliamentary borough was nearly twice the size of the township that became the municipal borough. None of them was a separate borough before 1832 but Halifax decided to request two members whilst Rochdale only ever wanted one. Both towns made no extra effort and yet they got the number of seats they wanted. Oldham, on the other hand, decided to request two seats, to help ensure they got them the proposers nearly doubled the size of the constituency by adding the townships of Royton, Crompton and Chadderton to Oldham. The effect on Oldham was recognised as early as 1837 when Butterworth set out the following table to show the size of the parliamentary

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<sup>20</sup> *PP* 1852 (88 Pt.1.1) Population Abstracts from Census of 1851: Oldham, p.174.

<sup>21</sup> Oldham, OLSL, OBP D: But/F.17, December 1837.

<sup>22</sup> *PP* 1852 (1691.1) Population Abstracts from Census of 1851: Rochdale, p. 174.

<sup>23</sup> *TNA*, MH 12/6176: February 1846, 12/6177: March 1848 and 12/6180: February 1858.

<sup>24</sup> *PP* 1843 (496) Abstracts from the Census of 1841, Volume 1, p. 465.

borough as opposed to the township, comparing it with other Lancashire towns. Butterworth was a local journalist who worked with the local papers and collected news items.<sup>25</sup>

<u>Town</u>	<u>Borough</u>	<u>Town</u>	<u>Difference</u> <sup>26</sup>
Liverpool	191284	182975	8309
Manchester	187022	180150	6872
Salford	50111	40786	9322
Oldham	50513	29000	21513
Bolton	41480	38839	2641
Preston	33871	32500	1371
Blackburn	27091	26300	791
Wigan	20774	20700	74
Rochdale	20156	20156	0
Bury	20400	13400	7000
Warrington	18184	16650	1534
Ashton	14673	14000	673
Lancaster	14066	13613	453
Clitheroe	9920	4200	5720

This shows the marked difference between Oldham and other Lancashire towns, and was probably assembled as part of Butterworth's work for *the History of Lancashire* published by Edward Baines in 1838.<sup>27</sup> It also shows the marked difference with Rochdale, and the figure of 1,764 shows the same picture for Halifax.<sup>28</sup> The final two governmental units within each parish were the improvement commission and the municipal borough and often they were identical. Commissions were the forerunners of the municipal councils and handed all their

<sup>25</sup> See Michael Winstanley, 'News from Oldham: Edwin Butterworth and the Manchester Press, 1829-1848', *Manchester Region History Review*, IV, 1 (Spring 1990), 3-10.

<sup>26</sup> The final column has been added to demonstrate the scale of the numbers.

<sup>27</sup> Winstanley, 'News from Oldham', p. 5.

<sup>28</sup> *PP 1843 (496) Abstracts from the Census of 1841 Volume 1*, p. 465.

powers over to the council upon incorporation. Improvement commissioners are a greatly neglected area of research. Halifax was one of the earliest areas to gain a commission. The initial Act was in 1762, with a further Act in 1768.<sup>29</sup> Later Acts extended and changed responsibilities in 1823, 1832, 1853 and 1862.<sup>30</sup> The main functions of the commissioners were to be responsible for the road building, street paving, maintenance and lighting in the township along with policing. Across the country improvement commissions went by many different names. In Halifax they were known as the Halifax Trustees. When first established Halifax had 240 names of leading townsmen as the members and this was increased by a further eighty in 1768. The names were written into the Act and new members were invited to join by the Trustees.<sup>31</sup> This body moved from the system of named individuals to a system of voting based on property ownership only in 1823.<sup>32</sup>

Rochdale established commissioners in 1825, and Oldham in 1827, both with a further up-date in 1843.<sup>33</sup> Oldham was incorporated in 1847, whereas it was 1856 before Rochdale became a municipal borough. In Oldham the commissioners were known as the Police Commissioners, but in Rochdale as the Improvement Commissioners, even though they had police powers as Oldham had. Initially, the members were self-elected, and the qualification for Rochdale was ownership or occupation of land to the value of £35 a year. A man simply had to prove he had the qualification, take the required oath and he was a member. By an Act of 1844, the commissioners were to be elected. Voters had either to have a parliamentary vote or be £10 householders. This spread the votes across the town using the three townships of Castleton, Spotland and Wardleworth. In Oldham the members had to have a qualification of possessing property worth £50 or occupying and renting premises worth £30 a year, and by

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<sup>29</sup> Halifax, HRL, Halifax Local Government Act 1762 Box 1.

<sup>30</sup> Hargreaves, *Halifax* pp. 109-110.

<sup>31</sup> J. W. Houseman, 'The Development of Local Government in the Parish of Halifax 1760-1848', *THAS*, (1929), 117-209, p. 158.

<sup>32</sup> Hargreaves, *Halifax*, p. 110.

<sup>33</sup> Oldham, OLSL. Police Commissioners Minute Book, (OPICM), 1827-1842, B-PCO 1.1, and Rochdale, RLSL. Improvement Act 1853, LA/THD/1/1/2.

1848 there were 360 of them. However, there is no evidence that they moved to an elective system before incorporation. This may have been because there was only one township involved before 1847. The eight wards used in the new corporation were all within the township of Oldham and were created for the borough. The municipal boroughs, once established, were changed fairly soon. Halifax was extended in 1865 to ten wards and both Oldham and Rochdale were changed after the 1867 Reform Act, to ten wards each.<sup>34</sup>

The size of the townships grew steadily. No parliamentary figures were available before the 1841 Census, and municipal figures were only available for Halifax and Oldham after 1851 and Rochdale after 1861. The figures were as follows:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Halifax</u>	<u>Rochdale</u>	<u>Oldham Town</u>	<u>Oldham Parliamentary</u>
1841	26694	24091		60109
1851	33582	29195	52820	72357
1861	37014	38114	72333	94333
1871	65510	63485	82629	113100

The number of voters after the 1867 Act shows how little had changed in thirty five years. In Halifax it was 10,083, just 15% of the total population, in Oldham it was 15,663 or 14% and in Rochdale it was 9,561 or 15% of the total population.<sup>35</sup>

The next area of comparison is that of industry and occupation. Each town had its own identity but all of them were textile towns, developing from the domestic industries that flourished in the hills of the area using the fast flowing streams for washing the cloth and yarn and for powering machines. There were support industries of fulling and dyeing, and a growing merchant class. These merchants used the transport network to move raw materials and finished cloth around the region and linked to the ports to export their goods as well as to

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<sup>34</sup> *PP 1871 (C.381)*, Abstracts of Population from the Census of 1871.

<sup>35</sup> *PP 1871 (C.381)*, Abstracts of Population from the Census of 1871.

import raw materials. There were two major textiles industries, cotton and wool and two smaller industries in silk and flax. This period also saw the final move from handloom weaving to power loom weaving and the end of domestic working and the growth of larger factories and mills.

There are two ways of approaching occupational figures for this period. There were hardly any figures for occupations or the number and type of work places. Almost all figures were collected and collated nationally. The most intense focus on the textile trade came from the regular reports of the Inspectors of Factories. These began as a result of the Factory Act of 1833 and were delivered to the Home Office and published half yearly. The first reports were published in 1835.<sup>36</sup> There are two problems associated with this source for the purposes of this study. The first is that the major focus of the majority of reports was the number of accidents and the development of schools for the children. Only occasionally were there reports on the state of the industries, and these tended to concentrate heavily on Lancashire. The report for the second half of 1841 was full of data dealing with Oldham and Rochdale but there is only passing mention of Halifax and simply to report that it had been visited.<sup>37</sup> There was one fuller report from 1838 which covers all three towns and this was based on the returns from the factories themselves. There seem to have been very few who did not make a return so the figures do represent an accurate picture.<sup>38</sup>

The other source of material is the abstracts taken from the census returns. These suffer from the changes made between each census as the nature of the answers required grew and better abstracts were produced. There was little detail collated from the 1831 Census and so the first useful figures were taken in 1841.<sup>39</sup> Changes were made before 1851,

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<sup>36</sup> *PP* 1834 (596) Report of the Inspectors of Factories.

<sup>37</sup> *PP* 1842 (294) Report of the Inspectors of Factories for half year ending 31 December 1841.

<sup>38</sup> *PP* 1839 (41) Return of the Mills and Factories August 1838.

<sup>39</sup> *PP* 1844 (587) Occupational Abstract from the 1841 Census: Part 1: England and Wales p. 70 and p. 223.

but then the figures for 1861 were not very different so a comparison over time is possible<sup>40</sup>. There is however one major problem. The figures were abstracted for males and females at and over twenty and for males and females below twenty. The figures for below twenty seem to have been set on narrower criteria. The figures for those over twenty were divided by enumerators' districts, whereas those for the under twenties used only principal towns. Only Halifax and Oldham were included as principal towns within the West Riding of Yorkshire and Lancashire. There were no figures for Rochdale. Comparison for those occupations that employed people below twenty can still be made from the factory returns, but they apply only to the textile trade and so weaken the value of the conclusions drawn. Overall, the figures can be used for comparison purposes, given the caveat entered by Higgs: 'with care, and based on an understanding of their limitations, census data can be used for historical research in the same manner as any other source'.<sup>41</sup>

It would be simplistic to describe Halifax as a woollen town and both Oldham and Rochdale as cotton towns. The reality was very different. Oldham was a cotton town, almost to the exclusion of any other textile work. Oldham was also very different in that it had a well developed industry working in cotton waste. Both Halifax and Rochdale however had mixed textile industries, with wool and cotton well developed in both. The transport packhorse route over Blackstone Edge was well used, with the Piece Hall in Halifax providing a major market for Rochdale cloth, and this route led to the site of major Chartist meetings for the two towns between 1839 and 1848. It is a telling illustration of this connection that the original coat of arms of the Rochdale Borough had a hung fleece as its centrepiece.

Before dealing with the textile trades in more detail, it is necessary to look briefly at the other known activities in the towns. The descriptions given of the occupations of the

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<sup>40</sup> *PP* 1852-53 (1691.1) Population tables from the 1851 Census: Volume 2: Occupation p. 647 and p. 724 and *PP* 1863 (3221) Occupation Abstracts from the 1861 Census p. 223 and p. 645.

<sup>41</sup> Edward Higgs, *Making Sense of the Census Revisited: Census Records for England and Wales 1801-1901* (London: Institute of Historical Research, 2005), p. 99.

householders in the early censuses need to be treated with care and there are examples of large groups of workers given vague titles.<sup>42</sup> The term 'Labourer: unspecified' covered a lot of people, and in textile matters the word 'weaver' was widely used, again not always with greater specificity.<sup>43</sup> In agriculture, the term labourer was also widely used, but tended to have the prefix 'farm'. There were several problems connected with the term 'farmer's wife'. The term could describe their marital status or their occupation. Sometimes there was a danger of double counting when their work was added to the term 'farmer's wife' as in 'cotton spinner and farmers wife'.<sup>44</sup> In Halifax there was a growth in agriculture. The number of farmers remained much the same between 1841 and 1861, but the number of labourers grew from 748 in 1841 to 1176 in 1861. The whole sector accounted for 3.5% of the workforce in 1841, rising to 5.4% in 1861. In Oldham agriculture had a much smaller profile. In 1841 it had only 1.3% of the workforce, rising to 2.8% by 1861. Rochdale lay between the other two, but there was no great rise, just a steady figure around 4%.<sup>45</sup>

Domestic service had a different profile.<sup>46</sup> Whilst there was great predominance of women, there were considerable numbers of men, 365 in Halifax in 1841 for example, which accounted for about 3% of the workforce over the period. In Oldham, the same pattern emerged, at about 2% of the workforce. Finally, in Rochdale it was at about 3.4%.<sup>47</sup> Coal mining, iron making and blacksmiths were another major area of labour. In Halifax these were not large, having only 1.2% in 1841, rising to 2.5% in 1861. In Oldham they had a much larger share of the workforce. It had 4.9% in 1841, rising to 9.7% in 1851 and then falling to 8.1% in

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<sup>42</sup> Higgs, p. 97.

<sup>43</sup> Higgs, p. 100.

<sup>44</sup> Higgs, p. 102.

<sup>45</sup> For a much more detailed examination of the percentages see Appendix B.

<sup>46</sup> See Higgs, p. 102.

<sup>47</sup> For the specific issues with Rochdale and domestic service see Edward Higgs, *Domestic Service and Householders in Rochdale 1851-1871* (New York, 1986).

1861. Finally, Rochdale was closer to Halifax. 2.8% were employed for these three industries in 1841, rising to 4.1% in 1861.

The overall picture is of similarity between the three towns, but within them each had its own area of growth subsidiary to textiles. Halifax had the largest agricultural profile, Oldham's was in coal, iron and blacksmithing and Rochdale's was in domestic service. Turning now to textiles, the difference is obvious. In 1841, Halifax had 28.2% working in this area, rising to 30.5% in 1851 and then falling back to 28.2% in 1861. Oldham had 37.7% in 1841 rising to 38% in 1851 and then falling to 36% in 1861. Rochdale had 27.4% in 1841, falling to 25.3% in 1851 then rising to 35.8% in 1861. Overall, this approximates to a third of the workforce being occupied in this trade. Within that seemingly consistent picture, however, were a multitude of complexities. The first is the inclusion in the 1841 figures of the category of 'Weaver' which was then subdivided into 'Any', 'Hand', and 'Power'. This category does not appear in either 1851 or 1861. No specific textile is recorded, so 'Any' and 'Power' could apply to both cotton and wool. It is more likely, though not certain, that 'Hand' would have applied to wool only. This figure represents 5.2% of the Halifax workforce, 13.5% of Oldham and only 2.4% in Rochdale.

It is easiest to deal with Oldham first because it had by far the simplest textile profile. In 1841 it had 2% working in wool, a total of 268 workers. By 1851 this had fallen to sixty six workers and by 1861 this stood at sixty eight workers. In the 1838 returns, only 200 cotton mills were listed, with no wool, silk or flax. In the Inspectors report of 1841, seven woollen mills were listed and one flax mill, employing seventy nine workers in wool and seventy four in flax. There were 222 mills recorded in 1841, of which 201 were cotton and fifty of those in cotton waste. The remaining twenty three were engaged in yarn doubling alone. There is a dispute as to whether these extra figures should be included. Gadion, in making his case

against Foster, believed they should.<sup>48</sup> Sykes in his study queries these figures and shows that if the waste cotton firms and the yarn doubling firms are taken out then the size of the work force per mill in Oldham is very little different to that of other Lancashire towns.<sup>49</sup>

Nevertheless, there were significant numbers engaged in cotton work in the town. The occupation figures show 22.1% in 1841, 28.8% in 1851 and 29.3% in 1861. It was clear that in Oldham at least, 'Cotton was King'.

Halifax and Rochdale showed a more mixed development. The 1838 Halifax figures show sixty three woollen mills and eighty worsted mills. There were seventy one cotton mills and seven silk mills. There were no figures in the 1841 Inspectors' Report, but the census figures showed 17.6% working in wool and worsted in 1841. The figure rose to 27.1% in 1851 and then declined to 22.4% in 1861. Silk remained at 0.5% throughout the period. Cotton declined from 4.9% in 1841 to 2.9% in 1851, but then rose again to 5.5% in 1861. Halifax was clearly a town that had close links with Rochdale, as the latter's wool trade went to Halifax for sale and its raw cotton would have come through Rochdale from Liverpool to reach Halifax. Rochdale too showed this same mixture. The 1838 report showed ninety five cotton mills as well as fifty six worsted mills. There was one flax mill and interestingly, Rochdale had the largest number of closed mills, seven, compared to only one in Oldham and none in Halifax. The picture was replicated in the 1841 report. The occupation figures show wool at around 12% for the whole period, a fairly steady picture. Cotton figures were 12.2% in 1841. There was a slight fall to 11.9% in 1851, but a considerable rise to 23.6% in 1861. One consequence of this mixed economy of textiles became clear in the Cotton Famine in the early eighteen sixties when Rochdale and Halifax were better able to help the cotton workers because nearly

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<sup>48</sup> David Gadion, 'Class Consciousness in Oldham and other North West Industrial Towns' *Historical Journal*, 21 (1978), 161-172.

<sup>49</sup> R. A. Sykes. 'Working Class Consciousness in Oldham, 1830-1842,' *Historical Journal* 23 (1980), p. 168.

half of the textile mills were still working, and thus could help with relief. The situation in Oldham was bleaker as will be shown later.<sup>50</sup>

There was a similarity in the social situation of the towns. During this period from 1832 to 1867, all three towns were growing and this was as much due to migration as the increase in the birth rate. A very brief glimpse at the place of origin in the census returns showed how many had come into the towns, especially from Ireland. There was never the sort of problem with the Irish as there was in Ashton, though some violence did overflow from there into Oldham in 1842.<sup>51</sup> Equally there were no single major land owners or powerful local magistrates in the towns, such as the Ramsay family in Huddersfield.<sup>52</sup> Halifax was part of the manor of Wakefield, and local gentry had a regulatory role through the meetings of the justices of the peace in quarter sessions. Manorial courts still operated in Halifax and it was only with the creation of the Town Trustees in 1762 that an alternative form of local government was established. Rising families such as the Rawsons, the Edwards, the Priestleys and the Listers combined owning land with manufacturing and the leading manufacturing families, the Akroyds and the Crossleys, had town houses in Halifax until they married and set up larger estates on the outskirts of the town. These families led the movement into greater local government as leading members of the Vestry, the Trustees and the Poor Law Board.<sup>53</sup>

In Oldham there was no surviving manorial jurisdiction, the town being part of a larger estate based on Werneth. This was an area in the south west of the township and later to be a ward for the Council. There were leading families such as the many branches of the Lees family, the Schofields, the Worthingtons and the Platts. As in Halifax, they combined land ownership with manufacturing, and were very active amongst the magistrates. The quarter

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<sup>50</sup> Chapter Six, pp. 182-186.

<sup>51</sup> OBP D: BUT/ F 17, 9 February 1842. See also Denis G. Paz, *Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid Victorian England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 256.

<sup>52</sup> David Griffiths, *Pioneers or Partisans? Governing Huddersfield 1820-1848* (Huddersfield: Huddersfield Local History Society, 2008).

<sup>53</sup> Hargreaves, *Halifax* p. 79.

sessions held the same power as in Halifax, but there was a much stronger radical movement visible in the town from the beginning of the nineteenth century. The Police Commissioners took over the running of much of the town following the Act of 1826.<sup>54</sup> Rochdale was different again. The Lords of the Manor were the Byron family, whose most famous member was the poet George, Lord Byron. The manorial court ran affairs till the creation of the Improvement Commissioners in 1827. The leading families of the Royds, the Entwistles and the Ramsays were joined by the leading manufacturers such as the Fentons, who went into banking. Later there were the Kelsalls, the Chadwicks, the Brights, the Heapes and the Howards, all of whom were Liberals and all of whom were to play a leading role in the development of Rochdale.<sup>55</sup>

The main features of the three towns have now been set out. Before proceeding to a closer look at each tier of local government, two additional major factors need to be examined: the nature of the source material for the history of local government in each town, and the important role played by public meetings. The source material for urban history is complex and varied, and the completeness of records uneven. This is especially so in the records of public meetings which were kept in a variety of forms. In the case of the Poor Law boards of guardians, specially printed ledgers were provided by the central Poor Law Commissioners.<sup>56</sup> Other bodies such as the improvement commissioners and, later on, the borough councils had their own specially purchased ledgers. Other groups just used printed exercise books. There are examples of all the records being consistently collected, as in the single volume of vestry records of the parish of Halifax which cover from 1819 till 1890.<sup>57</sup> Most meetings only happened once a year and only minimal information was recorded. The major problem is lost volumes which disrupt the flow of information at a critical time such as the

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<sup>54</sup> Baines, *Lancashire* p. 452.

<sup>55</sup> John Cole, *Conflict and Cooperation: Rochdale and the Pioneering Spirit 1790-1844* (Littleborough: George Kelsall, 1994), p. 6.

<sup>56</sup> See, for example Rochdale, RLSL, Poor Law Union Minute Book, (RBGM) PUR 6, 1849-1851.

<sup>57</sup> Wakefield, WYAS, Halifax Parish Registry Minute Book, (HPVM) D53/6/1, 1816-1899.

1862 Poor Law Union of Rochdale minutes which dealt especially with the peak of the Cotton Famine and which have now been lost.<sup>58</sup>

Some problems occur when searching for names. The first is not common but it is frustrating. When a meeting was very well attended, sometimes the clerk could not record all the names of those present, so they resorted to adding at the end 'and 75 others'.<sup>59</sup> Another problem is where there are two or more members of the same family with the same first name. The suffix 'Jnr.' can help but it was not universally used. Equally the use of the overall term 'Mr' is not helpful as it just gives a list of surnames. Finally, in such small communities, there were often a lot of people with the same surname and often the same first names as well. In the Improvement Commission of Rochdale there were at one time five people named 'Joseph Butterworth'.<sup>60</sup> This patchwork experience will be found at a national record level as well. In the National Archives, there are extensive records for the correspondence between the Guardians of Rochdale and Halifax, and the Commissioners. No records remain for Oldham and there is no obvious reason why.<sup>61</sup> Even within the Halifax and Rochdale records there are gaps, which seem surprising given that all the records were kept in one building for reference by the Commissioners themselves.<sup>62</sup>

When the records are examined there are difficulties. Often, the minutes were simply a record of the major decisions taken, and if a matter was not decided on then it disappeared from notice. Sometimes, if they exist, newspapers are a good corroborative source as they often include the details as well as some background which the bare minutes miss. Some records just give the name of the chair and the major decisions. Another problem comes with

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<sup>58</sup> RBGM PUR 11, 1862. This is now missing.

<sup>59</sup> Rochdale, RLSL, Rochdale Improvement Commission Minutes (RPICM) 1830-1839 CBR/1/1, 1 November 1833.

<sup>60</sup> RPICM 6 January 1830.

<sup>61</sup> Jeremy Gibson and Colin Rodgers, eds, *Poor Law Union Records Vol. 2 The Midlands and Northern England*, (Bury: Family History Partnership), p. 29.

<sup>62</sup> TNA, MH 12/14974-85, Halifax and MH 12/16176-88, Rochdale.

“acts of God” as in Rochdale in 1883.<sup>63</sup> The tower of the Town Hall burnt down, and whilst it could be rebuilt what could not be recovered were all the early records of the Council which were stored in the tower and destroyed in the blaze. The town clerk suffered extensive burns to his hands as he tried to recover the records.<sup>64</sup> Fortunately, there were extensive reports in the newspaper of the time, though these too can be inconsistent.

Newspapers are very useful but here there were periods where no papers existed for a town. Oldham is indebted to Edwin Butterworth for the record of events from 1830 until his death in 1844.<sup>65</sup> The town’s major weekly paper did not start till 1856. Sometimes they have a very short life as with several papers in Halifax, or there were periods where no readable copies exist as with the *Pilot* in Rochdale.<sup>66</sup> Then there are the records that simply record a single event like the Parliamentary Committee of the Rochdale Improvement Commission,<sup>67</sup> or have a very specific span such as the Anti-Corn Law League minutes in Halifax.<sup>68</sup> These records from 1839 to 1846 cover the complete life span of the movement and they afford one of the most complete records of the Anti-Corn Law League to be found in the country.

At the core of all public bodies and public movements was the meeting. Following the Seditious Meetings Act of 1795, all public meetings of more than fifty people had to be officially approved, either by the local magistrate or the town constable. These officials were requisitioned to call a public meeting by householders in the town, of whom a minimum of seven was needed to sign the request. The officials were then responsible for calling the meeting, even if in fact it was run by others. The conduct of the meeting was undertaken according to strict rules which seem to have been accepted by everyone. Whether the meeting was indoors or in public rooms, for political or other purposes, celebration events or election

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<sup>63</sup> RO 14 April 1883.

<sup>64</sup> RO 11 February 1857.

<sup>65</sup> Winstanley, ‘News from Oldham’, 3-10.

<sup>66</sup> For example: *Halifax Observer* 1862 and *Halifax Reformer* 1847-1848 and *Rochdale Pilot* 1847-1867.

<sup>67</sup> RPICM: Parliamentary Committee Minute Book CBR/2/6, 7 October 1846 and January 1848.

<sup>68</sup> Halifax, WYAS, Halifax Anti-Corn Law League Minute Book, (HACLL) 1839-1846, HAS/B: 11/1.

meetings the rules remained the same. There were very few accounts of meetings that were abandoned because of the failure of the chair. They were often noisy and very intense, but it was commonplace to read in the press of the great desire of all present to act within the rules and through the chair.

Jeanette Martin has recently examined the conduct of these meetings as part of her study of political oratory and itinerant lecturing in the age of Chartism.<sup>69</sup> In it she sets out the methods of calling the meetings, the use of the town crier and the use of placards, as well as the impact made on some organisations such as the Chartists who had requests turned down or whose meetings were ignored by the town crier. Clearly the nature of these meetings affected how the rules were applied. Large outdoor meetings such as those used by the Chartists, and much looser sessions such as election hustings were by their nature freer and less controlled, but rules still applied. The right to hold a public meeting and the right to free speech were at the heart of democratic rights and seen as legitimate and important expressions of collective opinion. The origin of these rules seems to lie in parliamentary procedures and the practices already common in the conduct of church meetings such as the vestry or the Poor Law meetings.<sup>70</sup> There were manuals available to give advice but the process was, in any case, widely understood.<sup>71</sup> A chair was chosen, by formal proposal (and voting, if necessary), a debate was held with opportunity for discussion, and finally a vote would taken. Later meetings where the membership was limited and the chair was chosen for a specific period of time came from this system. Town councils and Poor Law Boards of Guardians with either elected or ex-officio members chose a chair for a year and usually had a legal guide in the form of a clerk who was a solicitor. The improvement commissioners worked to the same rules but the membership was much more fluid because it had a much wider base.

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<sup>69</sup> Jeanette L. Martin, *Popular Political Oratory and Itinerant Lecturing in Yorkshire and the North East in the age of Chartism, 1837-1860*, PhD Thesis University of York (2010).

<sup>70</sup> Martin, p. 91.

<sup>71</sup> Martin, p. 91, fn 87.

Correspondingly the choice of chair also tended to move around the group rather than fix on one individual. Vestry meetings were by custom chaired by the incumbent, or in his absence by a curate or the senior church warden.<sup>72</sup>

The role of chair was crucial. Whoever held it usually had full support from within the meeting and it was a sign of significant public recognition to be chosen as chair. Whilst in some cases the position came from their post as vicar or rector, mayor or chief constable, in others such as the improvement commissions or the poor law board of guardians, the chosen person was clearly recognised as a person of importance, fairness and public stature and thus appropriate to lead and control the work of the meeting. Men such as P. K. Holden in Halifax,<sup>73</sup> Richard Stump in Oldham<sup>74</sup> or Thomas Heape in Rochdale<sup>75</sup> were repeatedly chosen to lead meetings.

At the meetings resolutions were proposed, having been called by the chair. Each resolution had to have a proposer and a seconder. Amendments could be proposed, seconded and if approved incorporated into the resolution under consideration. Finally a vote was taken by a show of hands. In more structured meetings a record was kept of who voted for what and a record of the vote was taken, but for the majority of public meetings a show of hands was the norm. The meeting always concluded with a vote of thanks to the chair. Debate could be fierce, but there are constant requests to adhere to the rule of the chair, to speak through the chair and to allow others to be heard. Given that the vast majority of meetings were reported in the press, there were good opportunities for a meeting or organisation to get its point of view across.

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<sup>72</sup> For example, HPVM, 26 March 1857. Musgrave, the Vicar was ill and James Mallinson took his place.

<sup>73</sup> Halifax, WYAS, Minutes of the Halifax Trustees Meetings, 1780-1849, (HTM) HXM 36-40. P. K. Holden was chair 139 times from 1823 to 1847.

<sup>74</sup> OPICM B: PCO/1/1-2. Richard Stump was chair 23 times from 1831 to 1847.

<sup>75</sup> RBGM PUR: 1, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12. Thomas Heape was chair 311 times from 1849 to 1867.

Where there was conflict, it is notable that it often took place within the context of how to interpret these rules. The best recorded examples in these three towns concern the Anti-Corn Law League and the Chartists and both took place in February 1839. In Rochdale John Bright called a public meeting to discuss the Corn Laws and proposed George Ashworth, a leading manufacturer, as chair. James Taylor, a leading Chartist, proposed Job Plant, a local orator, instead. Plant won by a large majority, and Bright's motion that the repeal of the Corn Laws was in the interest of the working classes was defeated by an amendment from James Taylor stating that only when the working classes had their political rights would the repeal of the Corn Laws be passed.<sup>76</sup> This was followed in Halifax when the Anti-Corn Law League met under the leadership of Jonathon Akroyd. The Leaguers wanted George Whitely, the senior Constable in the chair, but the Chartists present voted for Henry Rawson instead. The League's response was to move to the Talbot Inn and to hold their meeting there, in private.<sup>77</sup> Groups took to holding ticket-only meetings or charging an entrance fee as a way of restricting the type of person admitted.

Two further aspects of this culture of public meetings should be noted. The first is the central role played by the local public houses and inns. Many meetings, particularly of a political nature, were preceded by a large meal. The pubs had the rooms for the meetings and they were usually licensed for public meetings by the magistrates. They were used for a whole variety of purposes. They were used by mill owners as wage paying offices, by coroners for inquests, as party committee rooms for both parliamentary and local elections, as well as providing smaller rooms for special groups to meet. Some groups, such as the Temperance Movement and the Chartists, sometimes established large meeting places for themselves but the typical meeting place remained the public house. The second aspect to stress is the sheer number of meetings, and the frequent presence at the main ones of the same set of people,

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<sup>76</sup> William Robertson, *The Life and Times of John Bright* (Rochdale, 1877) pp. 72-73, *Blackburn Standard* 6 February 1839, and *Northern Star and Leeds General Advertiser* 9 February 1839.

<sup>77</sup> HACLL 13 February 1839.

be it magistrates, Chartists, mill owners or leading tradesmen. Civic activists attended a lot of meetings, even more so when the municipal corporations began to operate. Furthermore, records and reports show that very few meetings were inquorate. One mayor in Rochdale, Samuel Stott, was recorded in his mayoral year as attending 153 full and committee meetings, an average of three per week, exclusive of the non-corporation meetings he went to during the year.<sup>78</sup> Clearly two major requirements for public life were a strong digestive system and a lot of stamina. The toll could be high. Two leading figures, Jonathon Akroyd of Halifax and John Holladay of Oldham both died on the platform after addressing large meetings, and Thomas Livsey of Rochdale died at the early age of forty eight after a life of constant civic activity.<sup>79</sup>

These then are the three towns. They had many similarities and some important differences, and Halifax and Rochdale underwent the process of moving from manorial courts to municipal councils in just over fifty years. Oldham was able to establish its own municipal council. One thread will emerge from this time which is that despite differences of social and economic structure, politics, religion and wealth, all of them were determined to run 'their town for the good of their people'.<sup>80</sup> The process and institutions by which they did that now needs closer examination.

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<sup>78</sup> RO 12 November 1864.

<sup>79</sup> *Halifax Guardian* 31 July 1848, *Manchester Times* 22 October 1852 and RO 30 January 1864.

<sup>80</sup> RO 21 November 1863, a speech by Thomas Livsey at a dinner in his honour.

## Chapter Two

## Historiography

This thesis attempts to examine civic governance in industrial textile towns as a key facet of nineteenth century urban history. To cover the work of select vestries, improvement commissions, the Poor Law and municipal corporations is to survey a wide field without any consideration of other areas such as the 1832 Reform Act, Chartism, other radical movements, the police and the press. The scale of the task is somewhat reduced by the very small amount of work done on some of these topics. Radical reform, which will be examined more closely in Chapter Seven, was central to the changes in the parliamentary system, factories, the Poor Law and in municipal governance, with Chartism and the Anti-Corn Law League as its most visible expressions. One of the key aspects will be the work of John Foster, not only because it centres on Oldham, one of the three towns under study, but also because it caused a lively debate that goes to the heart of what radicalism was in this period and how it can be defined.

The starting point has been an examination of the three towns, setting them in the context of the changes during the nineteenth century, such as the growing population, the increasing effect of industrialisation, as well as the growing impact of religious changes across the whole sphere of local life. This detailed study has to look at the impact of the 1832 Reform Act, what it produced in the towns and what it failed to do, especially in the area of the franchise.<sup>1</sup> The most recent general study of the era is to be found in Boyd Hilton's work, written in 2006.<sup>2</sup> After that Act, the parliamentary politics in the three towns flourished and

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<sup>1</sup> See the work of Philip Salmon, *Electoral Reform at Work: Local Politics and National Parties 1832-1841* (Royal Historical Society: Boydell Press, Suffolk, 2002) and with C. Jones and M. Taylor, eds., *Party and Politics: Principle and Reform in Parliament and the Constituencies 1689-1880* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> Boyd Hilton, *Mad, Bad and Dangerous People? England 1783-1846* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) and for the Act itself, Eric J. Evans, *Britain before the Reform Act: Politics and Society 1815-1832* (Harlow: Longman, 1989) and *The Great Reform Act of 1832* (London: Routledge, 1994). A later work is Edward Pearce, *Reform!: The Fight for the 1832 Reform Act* (London: Jonathon Cape, 2003)

this had an impact on voting patterns, civic franchise and the nature of the councils themselves.

The basis of civic governance in the towns was the select vestries and the improvement commissions. The major work written on both of these subjects was that of Sidney and Beatrice Webb written in 1908.<sup>3</sup> They cover the workings of the vestries and the commissions, but in an overview. There has been very little written about the varied development of the vestries during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Apart from the Webbs, the only other work of note was that of Tate on the Parish Chest written in 1946.<sup>4</sup> He deals with the records of the vestries and where they can be found, but there is very little on their development. Both of these institutions are of critical importance in understanding the underlying structure of municipal governance in the nineteenth century, yet they are clearly in need of further work and study.

The only part that has received attention is that of the development of the police in the towns. An excellent starting point for this is the work of David Taylor and especially his work on Middlesbrough which gives an insight into the policing of an industrial town.<sup>5</sup> A much earlier writer was Eric Midwinter, who examined the growth of the Police in Lancashire. He examines both Oldham and Rochdale, and the fact that Lancashire had the largest county force in the country gives added significance to his work.<sup>6</sup> Bailey and Emsley examined the national

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<sup>3</sup> Webb, Sidney and Beatrice, *English Local Government from the Revolution to the Municipal Corporation Act (Vol. 2) the Manor and the Borough: Part One* (London: Longmans Greene and Co., 1908).

<sup>4</sup> Tate, William E., *The Parish Chest: a study of the Records of Parochial Administration in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1946).

<sup>5</sup> David Taylor, *Policing a Victorian Town: The Development of the Police in Middlesbrough c.1840-1914*, (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002)

<sup>6</sup> Eric C. Midwinter, 'Law and Order in early Victorian Lancashire' (University of York: Borthwick Papers No. 34, Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, 1968) and *Social Administration in Lancashire, 1830-1860: Poor Law, Public Health and Police* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1969).

picture.<sup>7</sup> Taylor also examined the national growth of police.<sup>8</sup> A much deeper examination was undertaken by David Phillips and Robert Storch which casts light on the conflicts between county and borough forces, and the disputes over the size of a force and its cost to a town.<sup>9</sup> All three towns had a police force by 1830, and the different forces were a factor in the control of the towns over the following two decades.

The first major Act after the Reform Act was the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834. Developing a historiography for this issue is very complex because of all the elements making up the Act, its implementation and the opposition to it. There are studies of the influence of Malthus and Bentham, the work of the Royal Commission and the central part played by Chadwick and Senior, as well as the passage of the Act itself. Chadwick was a central character in this whole period, not just for his role in the Poor Law but also in the police and public health. Both Finer and Brundage look carefully at his work, his drive to develop central government control and the Prussian label he acquired.<sup>10</sup> Mark Blaug's work on the Royal Commission centres on the effects on the rural south,<sup>11</sup> as does the work of Anthony Brundage<sup>12</sup> and Peter Dunkley.<sup>13</sup> Anne Digby focuses on East Anglia.<sup>14</sup> Specific issues can be found in the studies of the workhouse by Margaret Crowther and Norman Longmate,<sup>15</sup> as well

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<sup>7</sup> Victor Bailey, ed., *Policing and Punishment in Nineteenth Century Britain* (London: Croom Helm, 1981) and Clive Emsley, *The English Police: a Political and Social History* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991).

<sup>8</sup> David Taylor, *The New Police in Nineteenth Century England: Crime, Conflict and Control* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997) and *Crime, Policing and Punishment in England 1750-1914* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998)

<sup>9</sup> David Phillips and Robert D. Storch, *Policing Provincial England 1829-1856: The Politics of Reform* (London: Leicester University Press, 1999).

<sup>10</sup> S. E. Finer, *The Life and Times of Sir Edwin Chadwick* (London: Methuen, 1952) and Anthony Brundage, *England's 'Prussian Minister': Edwin Chadwick and the Politics of Government Growth, 1832-1854* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University Press, 1988).

<sup>11</sup> Mark Blaug: 'The myth of the old Poor Law and the making of the new' *Journal of Economic History* 23 (1963) pp. 151-84.

<sup>12</sup> Anthony Brundage, *The making of the new Poor Law: the politics of inquiry, enactment and implementation, 1832-1839* (London: Hutchinson, 1978).

<sup>13</sup> Peter Dunkley, *The crisis of the old Poor Law, 1795-1834* (New York: Garland, 1982).

<sup>14</sup> Anne Digby, *Pauper palaces* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1978).

<sup>15</sup> Margaret Crowther, *The workhouse system, 1834-1929* (London: Methuen, 1981), and Norman Longmate, *The Workhouse* (London: Temple Smith, 1974)

as Felix Driver's study of the workhouse system.<sup>16</sup> In looking at the north and at opposition to the Poor Law Act, four historians stand out. Derek Fraser emphasises the central role of the Poor Law system and its impact across the north, in electoral issues, as the central registry, as a health agency and its connections to police, highways and justice. It affected everyone and opposition came from all areas. The magistrates and landowners resented the interference with their customary powers and the imposition of the new form of central control, the Poor Law Commission, which was seen as outside Parliamentary influence. The working class, especially women, were afraid of the workhouse and all it implied and everyone felt that it was not a problem for the northern towns where relief had been handled well and much more cheaply than the south.<sup>17</sup>

Michael Rose raises the issues of unemployment and under-employment, either of which could lead to dependency.<sup>18</sup> He limits the opposition to the period from 1837 to 1839, and concentrates on outright opposition such as that in Oldham and Huddersfield. When these had collapsed, he seems to feel that the protest had ended.<sup>19</sup> Englander supports this view stating that 'the vast majority of the new Poor Law Unions had erected a new workhouse before 1870'.<sup>20</sup> This was not the case as it omits the more passive resistance of places such as Rochdale which, whilst eventually compliant in having a Board of Guardians, resisted a new workhouse till 1871.<sup>21</sup> Nicholas Edsall shows the links with the other protest movements particularly the ten hour movement. He argues that the knowledge gained in the factory protest and the mechanisms that had been used to harness opposition provided a ready-made

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<sup>16</sup> Felix Driver, *Power and Pauperism: the Workhouse System, 1834-1884* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

<sup>17</sup> Derek Fraser, *The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Macmillan, 1976).

<sup>18</sup> Michael Rose, ed., *The Poor and the City: The English Poor Law and its urban context* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1985).

<sup>19</sup> Michael Rose, 'The Anti Poor Law Movement in the North of England' *Northern History* 6 (1966), pp. 70-91.

<sup>20</sup> David Englander, *Poverty and Poor Law Reform in Britain: From Chadwick to Booth, 1834-1914* (London: Longman, 1998), p.14.

<sup>21</sup> See Chapter Six below; also John Cole, *Down Poorhouse Lane: the Diary of a Rochdale workhouse* (Littleborough: George Kelsall, 1984).

and almost instant basis for anti-Poor Law protests.<sup>22</sup> John Knott in his work attacks the other three and earlier writers.<sup>23</sup> He claims that they see the opposition being caused by 'ignorance'. Fraser sees the movement as 'spurred on by fear and anger'.<sup>24</sup> Rose speaks of 'emotional propaganda playing on the fears of the working class'.<sup>25</sup> Edsall is reluctant to admit that the opposition was organised.<sup>26</sup> Knott himself sees the movement as a 'self conscious process guided by a coherent and rational system of beliefs and assumptions'.<sup>27</sup>

Others see the opposition as quite limited. Brundage sees it as quite contained and says the 'Oldham was unique'.<sup>28</sup> King also speaks of 'the intemperate reaction of some northern and midland Poor Law authorities, which saw little conflict generated'.<sup>29</sup> Despite King's examination of the north, he is highly selective in his choice of unions to be considered. He looks at ten unions in Lancashire but only three are urban, Bolton, Leigh and Colne. The other seven are rural, such as Garstang. In Yorkshire he examines four unions around Leeds such as Horsforth, but makes no mention of the large urban centres of the West Riding, all of which have extensive Poor Law records.<sup>30</sup>

Another area that deserves examination was the impact of the Cotton Famine in the first half of the eighteen sixties. In Lancashire it was a major problem for the Guardians, as Oldham and Rochdale show. Kidd argues that 'it proved once and for all that the Poor Law was inadequate to deal with mass unemployment in the industrial economy'.<sup>31</sup> He also outlines what he describes as the 'subterfuges' used by guardians to get round Poor Law rules. One was

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<sup>22</sup> Nicholas Edsall, *The Anti-Poor Law Movement 1834-44* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1971).

<sup>23</sup> John Knott, *Popular opposition to the 1834 Poor Law* (London: Croom Helm, 1986).

<sup>24</sup> Fraser, *The New Poor Law*, p. 47.

<sup>25</sup> Michael Rose, *The English Poor Law and its Urban Context* pp. 79-81.

<sup>26</sup> Edsall, pp. 31, 38 and 258.

<sup>27</sup> Knott, p. 10.

<sup>28</sup> Anthony Brundage, *The English Poor Laws, 1700-1930* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2002), p. 75.

<sup>29</sup> Steven King, *Poverty and Welfare in England, 1700-1850. A Regional Perspective*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 228.

<sup>30</sup> King, p. 227.

<sup>31</sup> Alan Kidd, *State, Society and the Poor In Nineteenth Century England* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1999), p. 47.

to fund relief for the unemployed through the highways rate, not the poor rate<sup>32</sup>. These however cannot be seen as opposition to the Commissioners as they never knew about them. Rosalind Hall in her work on Clitheroe showed a possible reason why the unions were slow to react to the Famine. Of thirty six guardians elected to the Clitheroe board in 1864, thirty were farmers with no connection with the cotton industry. They did not see it as a problem.<sup>33</sup>

The implementation of the Act was delayed in the north and even then it was never as fully implemented as it was in the south. Far greater discretion was given to guardians, especially over the granting of outdoor relief and the latitude they were allowed to manage their own affairs. Opposition in the northern towns played a major part in slowing the Commission down and giving the north a different form of system to the south. One area that is not given great prominence in any of the works is that of the leadership of the protest movement. Several works identify the local leaders and a lot of specialist work has been done, for example in Oldham and Huddersfield, but there has not been any studies that examine the phenomenon that the radical protest leaders in any town were the same people, be they the ten-hour factory reformers, Poor Law protesters or Chartists.

There is general agreement, however, that opposition to the Poor Law led many people into Chartism. Chartism is a complex and intricate area which has stimulated debate, with issues over the language, the use and meaning of the word 'class' and the extent of working class movements. Two other points must be made. It is clear that there is constant change with individual historians moving their positions as new areas are examined and their standpoints are challenged. Secondly, all the writers agree that there is still a lot of work to be done on the details of the period and the movement as it is locally based.

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<sup>32</sup> Kidd, p. 31.

<sup>33</sup> Rosalind Hall, 'A poor cotton weaver. Poverty and the cotton famine in Clitheroe', *Social History*, Vol. 28, 2, 2003, p. 232.

John Foster's work provides the basis and material for much of the subsequent debate.<sup>34</sup> It is critical to this study as its main focus is Oldham and most of his arguments are based on the records held there. Foster was also a Marxist historian and uses the methodology of Marxism-Leninism to analyse the development of Oldham.<sup>35</sup> The details and conclusions will be examined in Chapter Seven.<sup>36</sup> Whilst there had been previous studies of the Chartist movement such as Gillespie<sup>37</sup> and Briggs,<sup>38</sup> this work opened the debate. The work is a study of Oldham, Northampton and South Shields to see to how they developed in a period of class struggle and industrial change. They were chosen because of their different forms of economic organization. Using them, Foster seeks to understand the development of the capitalist society. Within this he develops the ideas of liberalisation, false consciousness and the labour aristocracy. He then seeks to define 'false consciousness' as the sectional content of class culture, that by insulating one section of the labouring class from another, it actually blocks the development of any effective class consciousness. He argues that these are historical, concrete expressions of culture. This involved the concept of a 'labour aristocracy'. The leadership protects and develops this culture. It either develops it and moves it forward, or defends its traditional role and seeks to define its standards and rights against others. False consciousness contains within itself the trigger that can upset the whole system. Then the system is overthrown or has to be modified. That brings liberalisation. Foster defines three periods of social change, of which the first, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, is labour consciousness. In the 1830s and 1840s this is converted into a form of class consciousness. Finally from the late 1840s there is the development of new patterns of social subdivisions within the labour force, lasting in some cases up to the First World War.

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<sup>34</sup> John Foster, *Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution*, (London: Wiedenfield and Nicolson, 1974).

<sup>35</sup> John Foster, 'Revolutionaries in Oldham', *Marxism Today* (1968), 335-353. This was the first exposition of his thesis.

<sup>36</sup> See Chapter Seven, pp. 208-215.

<sup>37</sup> Frances Gillespie, *Labour and Politics in England 1850-1867* (North Carolina, 1927, and reprinted 1966).

<sup>38</sup> Asa Briggs, ed., *Chartist Studies* (London: Macmillan, 1959).

Foster's approach is criticised by Robert Gray who examines the concept of a Labour Aristocracy, a leadership group within the working class.<sup>39</sup> Gray argues that it was all part of a wider picture which was very fragmented and uneven. He argues that Foster raised issues but does not solve them. The progress across northern England was patchy. Calhoun, as a social scientist, takes issue with Foster's methods. He argues that the three towns chosen are very, very different and as such it is stretching analysis to reach any comparison. Equally he accuses Foster of using statistics selectively and then forces his analysis backwards in time in order to reach a conclusion.<sup>40</sup> This thesis would tend to support Gray and Calhoun's findings on Foster. The debate is central to this present work since one of the main contentions is that radicalism cannot be seen as just a working class movement but that it has a wider base, crucially embracing the lower middle class, and that together they are the impetus for much of the change that takes place.

The nineteen eighties saw the development of the debate about continuity for the Chartist movement. There are two dimensions to this debate. The first looks at the early development of the movement and examines to what extent it was simply a continuation of radical trends from the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth century. Gareth Stedman Jones is the leading exponent of this view.<sup>41</sup> The second dimension is the extent to which there was continuity between the Chartist movement and the later Liberal reforms of the time of Gladstone and trade union growth at the end the nineteenth century. Gareth Stedman Jones's work on the language of Chartism, first published in 1983, has become one of the major works in its field and has produced a fierce debate. In his work, he examines the views of contemporaries of Chartism arguing that they show it as a social movement, moving from the

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<sup>39</sup> Robert O. Gray, 'Labour Aristocracy', *Society for the Study of Labour History*, 40 (1980).

<sup>40</sup> Craig Calhoun, *The question of class struggle: social foundations of popular radicalism during the industrial revolution* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982).

<sup>41</sup> Gareth Stedman Jones, 'Rethinking Chartism' in *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History 1832-1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), published in an abridged form in *The Chartist Experience* (London: Macmillan, 1982) ed. by James Epstein and Dorothy Thompson.

radical agenda of anti corruption, to Chartism. To them, it was not primarily a political force but a social phenomenon. This view can be traced back to Engels and is embodied in the Marxist notion of 'class consciousness'. Later writers always assumed Chartism was a social movement and this limited their understanding of the movement.

Stedman Jones examines the language of Chartism in some detail. He argued, on the basis of a close attention to the meaning of Chartist rhetoric, that the movement was not an expression of class consciousness. It did not develop along the lines of the Marxist-derived argument that had dominated much earlier historiography, but rather it was a reiteration of essentially eighteenth century anti-corruption arguments about the state. He clearly sees Chartism as a political movement which had a shared conviction with other political solutions. The outcome of a social view was to see the demands as a legacy not the focal point of activity and Chartism was seen as the first manifestation of a working-class movement. Attention was then in turn focussed on the divided leadership of the movement. It gave an atomised picture, which was also the result of the popularity of local studies of the movement. It will be a key point of this work that these local studies form the basis of the understanding of Chartism, and that the overall view of the movement is taken from them.<sup>42</sup>

Stedman Jones rejects this social analysis. He quotes the examples of both Birmingham and London to show how areas developed without this labelling. He stresses that Chartism was a national movement. He traces the development of the views of Hovell,<sup>43</sup> Briggs<sup>44</sup> and Gammage<sup>45</sup> and then traces the origins of the language of Chartism in the radical movements of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This movement's critique was of a corrupt concentration of power and its corrosive influence on a society largely denied the means of

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<sup>42</sup> See Chapter Seven, Chartism pp. 231-241.

<sup>43</sup> Mark Hovell, *The Chartist Movement* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1925).

<sup>44</sup> Briggs, *Chartist Studies*.

<sup>45</sup> Robert Gammage, *A History of the Chartist Movement, 1837-54* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Browne and Browne, 1894).

political representation. He traces this back to the Puritans and the movements of 1688 and 1714. The American Revolution developed this critique and events in France gave it a distinct revolutionary edge and as such it was repressed by the Government. His view is that the eighteenth century anti-corruption tradition was being forged. In this way it shared the intellectual inheritance of the later liberalism once the events of the 1830s and 40s had passed. In the early part of the nineteenth century there was the impact of a new social order and Owenism. This alienated former middle class support and left a vocabulary of political exclusion that became the property of the working class. The working class became 'the people' and the middle class ceased to be the people and became part of the oppressive forces of the political establishment. This was reinforced by the 1832 Reform Act.

He then poses the question as to why the Charter was desirable. Power and law making were in the hands of the monopolists. Whilst the working class had property, their labour, they could not influence the law makers. It could be argued that in this drive for the Charter the links to radicalism declined. Stedman Jones rejects this and argues that radicalism was still the predominant ideal. He then traces the development of the trade union experience, Owenism and the Ricardian socialism to show how they all kept a radical agenda but did not produce the political reform that the Charter wanted. The middle class were attacked mainly because their political beliefs and attitudes failed to support the working class people and the emphasis shifted from landowners to factory owners. He argues that the success or failure of a movement depended on the extent to which they follow radical demands. He examines the Anti Corn Law League and the moves against the Poor Law Amendment Act. The crucial hinge was the middle class and in particular the changes that came after the 1832 Reform Act. For the Chartists this centred on the role of the Convention and middle class support for it. He argues that this support was heavily pushed in 1839, was only half hearted in 1842 and was gone in 1848, despite the Convention of that year and the National Assembly. Equally as other movements were successful, then Chartism suffered. In

the 1840s Peel and Russell changed their approach and the economic conditions improved and thus Chartism declined.

Dorothy Thompson's work on the Chartist movement challenges the views of Stedman Jones.<sup>46</sup> She was unequivocal that the movement was a political one and traced its development carefully. She poses some interesting questions. Was it doomed to failure? Was it too premature, on too broad a base? Did it have poor leadership? She argues that the movement needs analysing in terms of political thought and not just language. She criticises Stedman Jones for lacking a clear definition of class, for basic misjudgements about the movement and for choosing only selective and inadequate reading. There were two threats to Parliament. One was rational persuasion, the other was the threat of force. She argues that Stedman Jones ignores the second one. In her later work on outsiders she conducts a review of the historiography.<sup>47</sup> She argues that his support for the concept of false consciousness is not matched by the events, and does not fit the picture. His view ignores the complex ethical and religious nature of the leadership and the role of women. She concludes that:

The history of Chartism reminds us that the division between 'economic' and 'political' is an arbitrary one, made for the convenience of historians and not necessarily obvious to the actors in history.<sup>48</sup>

Two other works are relevant. The first is that of Kate Tiller's study on Chartism in Halifax after 1848, which shows there was clear continuity from that point. One key factor was the return of Ernest Jones and his role within the town. She shows clear links to the later Gladstonian Liberalism. At times this is fractured, but it is clearly there in Halifax. The other

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<sup>46</sup> D. Thompson, 'The language of class, a review of Gareth Stedman Jones's book' in *Bulletin for the Society for the Study of Labour History* 52 (1987).

<sup>47</sup> D. Thompson, *Outsiders: Class, Genders and Nation* (London: Verso 1993).

<sup>48</sup> Thompson, *Outsiders*, p. 42.

work is the largely unpublished work of David Gadion on Oldham.<sup>49</sup> The element he draws out is the continuity of leadership across the various reform movements. In any particular town the same people will be found leading the Chartists, the 10 hour movement, opposition to the new Poor Law and the development of incorporation. This is also clear in Halifax and Rochdale.

The work of Patrick Joyce throws a different perspective into the debate about Chartism.<sup>50</sup> He sees it as much wider than just social or political. He argues that there are economic strands there as well. He defines class consciousness as: 'the capacity through organisations like parties and unions to convert sectional conflicting struggles and interests into solidaristic and political forms'.<sup>51</sup> He also argues that the concept of class only emerges after 1880 and even possibly only after 1900. He differs from Gareth Stedman Jones in looking at populism as opposed to class. Struggle is the defining term in the Marxist view of class. Populism on the other hand is beyond economic, is inclusive and looks for social justice and reconciliation. It may be that populism rather than class is the best descriptive term to apply. Consciousness of a class is not necessarily consciousness of class per se. By this he means that belonging to a group or class does not necessarily involve understanding how that group or class relates to others or what the concept of class is. Joyce goes on to suggest that there are wider considerations. He sees a role for dialect and religion in the development of class. Finally, he argues that there is still a lot of work to be done at a local level. Given his viewpoint, it is clear that the current picture is only intense in certain places, for example Oldham or Birmingham, whilst other areas are untouched. More detailed work should provide evidence to support his views.

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<sup>49</sup> David Gadion, 'Class formation and class action in new industrial towns' in R. J. Morris (ed.) *Class, Power and Social Structure* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1986).

<sup>50</sup> Patrick Joyce, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class, 1848-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

<sup>51</sup> Joyce, p. 9.

Like Joyce, Neville Kirk also examined industrial Lancashire.<sup>52</sup> He disagrees with Gareth Stedman Jones, but in a much more detailed and specific sense. His critique argues that Stedman Jones altered his views over time, and that his view of class as political is not borne out by the evidence in Lancashire. Equally, he challenges the point of continuity with pre-Chartist radicals, and uses the evidence of Peter Murray McDouall, a surgeon from Ramsbottom, to show how thinking changed. Kirk's work produced a spate of articles, with Lawrence and Taylor attacking Kirk.<sup>53</sup> They argue that Stedman Jones has been misread and misinterpreted.

It is perhaps important to pause at this point, to examine the debate about the nature of Chartism and whether it was a class based movement. That only followed from a debate about how class is defined. Is it political, social or economic, or a mixture? The view taken on that will depend where the particular historian starts from. For example, if that starting point is a Marxist analysis, certain lines will follow and events within the Chartist history will be interpreted in a certain way. The basic problem with any analysis of the Chartist movement is that whilst it became a national movement, it did not start as one but grew from a myriad of local developments and more importantly, from a myriad of local leaders. Each of them had their own developments and these came from many sources and backgrounds. Hall examines the different roles of local leaders and followers and sees considerable differences between Ashton, Oldham or Bolton.<sup>54</sup> He argues that a variety of issues need to be examined. To what extent were middle class or industrial owners involved? Clearly in Oldham they were but not in Ashton. Is the leadership at local level mainly manual working class? He raises interesting questions about literacy levels. Clearly the local leaders were educated but to what level?

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<sup>52</sup> Neville Kirk, *The Growth of Working Class Reformism in Mid-Victorian England* (London: Croom Helm, 1985) and 'In Defence of Class' *International Review of Social History*, 32 (1987), 2-47.

<sup>53</sup> Jon Lawrence and Miles Taylor, 'The poverty of protest: Gareth Stedman Jones and the politics of language' *Social History* Volume 18 (1993), 1-15.

<sup>54</sup> Robert G. Hall, *Voices of the People: Democracy and Chartist Political Identity, 1830-1870*. (Monmouth: Merlin Press, 2007).

Could they read and write? Numbers for reading only were roughly equal to those who could read and write.

Equally there were large regional differences in the development of this national movement. This depended on the type of industry prevalent in each area, its speed of industrialisation and the type of development. Certain areas were central to the development of Chartism, such as the textiles areas of Lancashire and Yorkshire and the industries of the North East. Birmingham and London had a major role but they each developed in different ways and at different rates. The other element was the variation within the Chartist spectrum, the various emphases and interests. These included temperance work, the role of women, education, religion, and of course the land programme. M. J. Turner even goes so far as to identify a strand he calls 'Sensible Chartism', in which reformist (rather than directly confrontational) Chartists made common cause with middle-class reformers.<sup>55</sup> All of these appeared at different times and in different degrees depending on locality and the strengths of the local leadership.

Finally, the local leaders were not involved in Chartism to the exclusion of all else. Many of them were involved in a variety of movements. There is evidence of involvement in the 10 hour movement, factory reform and opposition to the new Poor Law. There were debates surrounding incorporation, a very local issue, and there was the movement to cooperation. There is also the issue of the Anti Corn Law League and its relationship to Chartism, which will be examined later.<sup>56</sup> Given all this, to arrive at an overall view of the nature of Chartist leadership is very complex. One of the best studies is by Michael Winstanley in his examination of Oldham.<sup>57</sup> He rejects Foster's standpoint and analyses the make-up of the leadership within Oldham. He identifies two strands, one linked to William Cobbett and

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<sup>55</sup> M. J. Turner, 'T. P. Thompson, 'Sensible Chartism' and the Chimera of Radical Unity' *Albion*, 33 (2004).

<sup>56</sup> Chapter Seven on Chartism, pp. 231-241.

<sup>57</sup> Michael Winstanley, 'Oldham Radicalism and the Origins of Popular Liberalisms 1830-1852', *Historical Journal*, 36 (1993) 619-643.

semi-rural in origin. The other is an urban group formed from the artisan class in Oldham. He traces the development of their ideas from before 1832. He argues that the popular radicalism of 1830 was not part of the industrial class conflict found in textiles, hatting and mining. The radicals defended the right of workers to organise themselves and wanted fiscal and tax reform. For them, 1832 was a disappointment and they wanted further reform. Throughout the period they sought to avoid violence so as to keep the support of the middle class, who were generally supportive in the town. He shows how they became involved in local institutions, such as the select vestry and the police commission, to help further their aims. Even within the movement, there were divisions between Cobbett supporters and those of John Fielden, the other M.P.

From all these varied backgrounds the national role of Chartism developed after 1832. It was clearly influenced by the radical thinking of the earlier period, but again this depended on the nature of the exposure to radical ideas in each area and the extent to which the local leaders had absorbed them. In Oldham the influence of Cobbett was clear whilst Livsey in Rochdale grew up with radicalism, as his uncle was a leading light of that movement in the town.<sup>58</sup> There was a clear link with the earlier tradition of opposition to the old corruption as Stedman Jones argues, but it was always refracted through the light of local experience. Movements particularly one as large as Chartism, do not arrive fully developed. Rather they evolve and the analytical approach taken by a historian (class-based, linguistic or cultural), will determine the conclusion reached as to the nature, style and content of the movement.

Work in the second half of the nineties tended to move towards an examination of the period after 1848, to look at issues such as the impact of the failure of the 1848 Chartist petition, the different nature of the national leadership and the role that Chartism and its leaders played in the development of the movement towards the Second Reform Act of 1867,

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<sup>58</sup> William Robertson, *The Social and Political History of Rochdale* (Rochdale, 1889), p. 9.

as well as Liberalism and the different working class movements from the 1880s onwards.

Writing at the same time as Michael Winstanley, Miles Taylor looks at the period from 1847 to 1860.<sup>59</sup> He examines the nature of the period after the petition of 1848 and argues that there is considerable continuity. He rejects the view that there was a split between the middle-class support for parliamentary reform and the non-political working class. He argues that the Chartist leadership moved back to mainstream radical and liberal politics and carried on the campaign. He supports Stedman Jones in his view of the movement as a political one but qualifies this by stressing the diverse nature of the localities.<sup>60</sup> He contends that this regional aspect was an important element in its decline. John Saville in his work rejects Stedman Jones and argues that, coupled with the economic improvements of the 1850s and the fragmentation of the movement after 1842, the impact of state coercion and repression in the 1840s were major factors in the decline of Chartism.<sup>61</sup>

As well as looking at the views of historians on the movement itself it is equally illuminating to see how they view the period after 1850. It would be wrong to see this as post Chartism, as there were very clear links with many other reform movements leading up to the emergence of the Gladstonian Liberals. Equally it would be wrong to see this period as a seamless progression, as some Liberals sought to portray. Anthony Taylor in his work on the 1885 Chartist dinner in Halifax shows that any idea of a clear connection was not as rosy as it seemed.<sup>62</sup> Chartism seen through the eyes of Liberals was merely a prism reflecting Liberal values. Ben Wilson bought a gun.<sup>63</sup> Pikes were made. Chartism was radical and often illegal.

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<sup>59</sup> Miles Taylor, *The Decline of British Radicalism 1847-1860* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

<sup>60</sup> Taylor, p. 9.

<sup>61</sup> John Saville, *1848: The British State and the Chartist Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). See also Malcolm Chase, 'The Chartist Movement and 1848' in *John Saville, Commitment and History* ed. by David Howell, Dianne Kirby and Kevin Morgan (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2001) pp. 155-175.

<sup>62</sup> Anthony Taylor, 'Commemoration, Memorialisation and Political Memory in Post Chartist Radicalism: The 1885 Halifax Chartist reunion in context' in Owen Ashton, Robert Fyson and Stephen Roberts, eds., *The Chartist Legacy* (Woodbridge: Merlin, 1999).

<sup>63</sup> Benjamin Wilson, *Struggles of an old Chartist* (Halifax, Nicholson, 1887) and reprinted in David Vincent, *Testaments of Radicalism* (London: Europa, 1997), 195-242 p. 209.

Once again, the work and views of the leadership needs to be examined. The post Chartism period tended to assimilate Chartism to a broader narrative about the evolution of free trade and hence into the emergence of Liberalism.

Ernest Jones came out of prison and sought to regain a foothold in Halifax as Kate Tiller showed.<sup>64</sup> Yet by the end of his life he was seeking nomination as a Liberal candidate in Manchester. His sons were liberals. Other major leaders died, such as O'Connor. The remaining leadership has to be seen in its local setting and in the movements supported. As Kate Tiller stated, 'The collapse of the Convention and the failure of the Petition threw the weight of continuity on to the locality.'<sup>65</sup>

The concept of a Post Chartism period is spurious because the aims of the movement were carried on by some of the national leaders, mainly at the local and regional level, into reform movements after the eighteen forties. Eugenio Biagini has examined this period in detail and edited collections of papers that looked at different aspects of how the Liberal Party of W. E. Gladstone became the inheritor of the ideas of the Chartists. Biagini is strongly convinced of the clear sense of continuity between the Liberal party and not only the Chartists but, through them, to the Radicals of the earlier part of the nineteenth century.<sup>66</sup> He begins by looking at the nature of Gladstonian Liberalism in general and the support of the working class in particular. He rejects the views of John Vincent and D.A. Hamer that the support of the working class was purely symbolic and psychological.<sup>67</sup> He describes that as an irrational

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<sup>64</sup> Kate Tiller, 'Late Chartism: Halifax, 1847-1858', in *The Chartist Experience: studies in working class radicalism and culture 1830-60* ed. by J. Epstein and D. Thompson (London: Macmillan, 1982), 311-344, p. 2.

<sup>65</sup> Tiller, p. 23.

<sup>66</sup> Eugenio F. Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform: Popular Liberalism in the Age of Gladstone, 1860-1880* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) p.5.

<sup>67</sup> Eugenio F. Biagini, and Alastair Reid, eds., *Currents of Radicalism: Popular Radicalism, Organised Labour and Party Politics in Britain, 1850-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) p.5.

approach, an assessment he extends to D. C. Moore and Patrick Joyce (who see electoral behaviour by the working class as based on tribal or feudal loyalties).<sup>68</sup> He also rejects the notion of a labour aristocracy. He argues that the idea of the working class liberal has deep roots, going back to the Radicals and Thomas Paine. He acknowledges the central role of Gladstone himself, a key factor here was the strength of non-conformity. This thread runs through from the radicals to the Chartist to the Liberals. It was particularly clear in the debates over educational provision during Gladstone's time. Biagini sees the impact of the American Civil War as a major factor through the issues of slavery and the impact of the Cotton Famine. At the same time as the working class was developing liberal views some of the ruling elite were developing populist ideas. This allowed a Liberal 'coalition' to develop and last.

Biagini analyses the ideas of a social contract and of the social question. Whatever was decided, there was a clear move from social issues towards political ones during Gladstone's time and the Chartist idea of electoral reform being the precursor to social reform gained much more prominence. Like the Chartists and the Anti-Corn Law League before them, the Liberals were not far apart on ideas and principles, just on the way forward and the best first steps. 'All were agreed that whatever the change, it was best managed from below, not imposed from above.'<sup>69</sup> The area of education had two main fields of dispute, those of religion and political control. The working class nonconformists did not want Anglicanism used to keep them in subservience. Equally the political questions of who ran the School Boards, their elections and rates, all had echoes of the conflict of ideas during the 1840s over church rates, select vestries and incorporation. Politically, 'No single issue illustrates the continuity between Chartism and working class liberalism better than the popular commitment to the enlargement

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John Vincent, *Formation of the British Liberal Party 1857-68* (London: Constable, 1966) and David A. Hamer: *Liberal Politics in the Age of Gladstone and Rosebery: a Study in Leadership and Policy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).

<sup>68</sup> David C. Moore, *The Politics of Deference* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1976) and Patrick Joyce, *Work, Society and Politics* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980).

<sup>69</sup> Biagini, *Liberalism, Retrenchment and Reform*, p. 191.

of the franchise'.<sup>70</sup> The impact of freedom, of the Civil War and the slaves and the desire to extend the franchise all came together. Equally, Biagini shows further continuity of thought on the issue of land ownership, quoting Prothero and Stedman Jones in support of his case.<sup>71</sup> It is in this area of political continuity that Biagini's arguments are the strongest.

One of the major features of the Chartist movement was that though it had a central theme, a clear text and a national leadership, one of its greatest strengths was the many regional differences and emphases. In the two sets of essays that Biagini edited, several writers explored these differences within the theme of continuity. Ulster, Ireland, Scotland and Wales are examined,<sup>72</sup> as are the issues of women's suffrage, free trade and disestablishment.<sup>73</sup> Biagini makes a very strong case for the clear continuity of ideals and principles from the Radicals to the Chartists and into working-class liberalism. From there this thread joined the other two major threads of working-class development, the trade unions and the Co-operative Movement to create the Labour party. He argues that the fall in Chartist support had begun in 1842, and that the petition of 1848 had more in common with that of 1839 than it did with 1842. He examines the changes within the Chartist and radical press and looks closely at the later Chartist leadership. He concludes that after 1848, many of the followers abandon politics and protest. The leaders such as Ernest Jones, moved on to liberalism and further political reform. Thus there is a clear continuity between radicalism from before 1832, through Chartism and into later Victorian liberalism.

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<sup>70</sup> Biagini, *Liberalism, Retrenchment and Reform*, p. 257.

<sup>71</sup> I. Prothero, *Artisans and Politics in Nineteenth Century London. John Gast and His Time* (Folkestone: Dawson, 1979) p. 258 and Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class* pp. 153-158.

<sup>72</sup> Graham Greenlee, 'Land, Religion and community: The Liberal Party in Ulster 1868-1895', pp.253-275; Claire Fitzpatrick, 'Nationalising the Ideal: Labour and Nation in Ireland 1909-1923', pp. 276-304; John Shaw, 'Land, people and nation: Historical Voices in the Highland Land campaign c1850-1883', 305-324; Richard Lewis, 'The Welsh Radical tradition and the ideal of a democratic popular culture', pp. 325-340, all in Eugenio F. Biagini, (ed.) *Citizenship and Community: Liberals, Radicals and Collective Identities in the British Isles, 1865-1931* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>73</sup> Martin Pugh, 'The limits of Liberalism: Liberals and women's suffrage 1867-1914' pp. 45-65; Anthony Howe, *Towards the 'hungry forties': Free Trade in Britain 1880-1906*, pp. 193-218; Ian Machin, *Disestablishment and Democracy c1840-1930*, pp. 120-148, in Biagini., *Citizenship and Community*.

It is important to look at the role of the press. Joan Allen and Owen Ashton examine the Chartist papers and Donald Read surveyed the provincial press.<sup>74</sup> He sees the Chartist press as outside the normal flow of the local press.<sup>75</sup> Both he and Bob Clarke examine the provincial press in detail, but the absence of a major study of the local press is a problem.<sup>76</sup> Read and Clarke concentrate on the *Leeds Mercury* and the *Manchester Guardian* which were provincial and available in most towns along with the *Northern Star*. At this time Halifax had seven local papers, Oldham had eight and Rochdale had six. They were of different political persuasions and some had very brief existences, but all added to the texture of local politics and all influenced, through support or opposition, the leaders in the towns.<sup>77</sup>

In his book *Speaking for the People* Jon Lawrence provides the classic overview of Chartist historiography.<sup>78</sup> He analyses the views of continuity from the turn of the century. The Webbs and the Hammonds from 1890 saw the reform movement as continuous, as did Frances Gillespie in the 1920s.<sup>79</sup> After that a view of discontinuity prevailed, seeing three distinct periods. Firstly there was the militant period of the Chartists up to 1848, then there was a period of quiescence during the mid-Victorian period. Finally this was followed by the second militant phase from 1880. After the Second World War, opinions differ, with Hobsbawm<sup>80</sup> seeing the growth as discontinuous, whilst Thompson wavers.<sup>81</sup> Lawrence warns

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<sup>74</sup> Joan Allen and Owen Ashton, eds, *Papers for the People: A Study of the Chartist Press* (London: Merlin Press, 2005).

<sup>75</sup> Donald Read, *Press and the People, 1790-1850: Opinion in Three English Cities* (London: Arnold, 1961).

<sup>76</sup> Bob Clarke, *From Grub Street to Fleet Street: an Illustrated History of English Newspapers to 1899* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004).

<sup>77</sup> See also George Boyce, James Curran and Pauline Wingate, eds., *Newspaper History: from the seventeenth century to the present day* (London: Constable, 1978) and Joanne Shattock and Michael Wolff, eds., *The Victorian Periodical Press: Samplings and Soundings* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1982).

<sup>78</sup> Lawrence: *Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England 1867-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>79</sup> Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism* (London: Longmans Green, 1902), John L. Hammond and Barbara Hammond, *The Age of Chartism, 1832-54, a Study of Discontent* (London: Longmans Green & Co., 1930) and Gillespie, *Labour and Politics*.

<sup>80</sup> Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire from 1750 to the present* (London: Penguin, 1968).

against exaggerating the disjuncture. In the 1960s and early 1970s, there is a development of electoral sociology but he argues this only provides a theoretical description, not an explanation. Finally in the later seventies there is a move away from this to the views of Joyce and others as outlined above.

The first major work of the 'post Chartist' period of the twenty first century is that of Keith Flett.<sup>82</sup> There are three major difficulties to his approach. First of all he has a very left wing political approach, which limits the way in which he examines the evidence. Secondly he argues that the concept of 'post Chartism' is valid and useful. There is little or no evidence for this either in the detail of the time, or in the work of any other writer. Finally, he seeks to link this period to the development of education, without ever seeming to define what he understands by the term 'education'. He veers between education as the pursuit of knowledge and as such widespread across the working class, and education as a narrowly defined term, meaning the role of the school and a fixed time and place. As a result he ends up giving a confused picture that is not easy to decipher.

Joan Allen concentrates on the North East.<sup>83</sup> She supports the continuity approach and refers to the earlier work in this area done by Kate Tiller in Halifax.<sup>84</sup> Allen explores another facet of Chartism, its international links, by looking at the life and work of Joseph Cowen Jnr., and especially with the Hungarian, Kossuth. Cowen was a newspaper entrepreneur and Allen brings out the importance of the Chartist press particularly after 1848 in keeping the ideas of the movement before the public.<sup>85</sup> She also draws attention to the use of banners in

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<sup>81</sup> E. P. Thompson, 'The Peculiarities of the English' in *The Poverty of Theory and other essays* (London: Merlin, 1978) pp. 35-91.

<sup>82</sup> Keith Flett, *Chartism after 1848: The Working Class and the Politics of Radical Education* (London: Merlin, 2006).

<sup>83</sup> Joan Allen, *Joseph Cowen and Popular Radicalism on Tyneside 1829-80* (Monmouth: Merlin Press, 2008).

<sup>84</sup> Allen, p. 4

<sup>85</sup> Joan Allen, "Resurrecting Jerusalem": The late Chartist Press in the North-East of England, 1852-1859', in *Papers for the People: A Study of the Chartist Press*, ed., by Joan Allen and Owen Ashton (London: Merlin, 2005) pp. 168-189.

the Chartist approach, a use which has clear links to the land plan and the Anti-Corn Law League. Her work also shows another regional aspect to the diverse nature of Chartism with the importance of the coal mines in the North East.

Before moving to a conclusion it is important to examine links with the Anti -Corn Law League. The League has been portrayed as middle class and incapable of attracting working-class support. This was not quite accurate, as Paul Pickering and Alex Tyrrell have attempted to show.<sup>86</sup> As is clear with Chartism, there are various levels at which links between the two organisations worked. At a national level O'Connor was always opposed to the League. Chartists viewed the League in a variety of ways. They could support the idea of freer trade and an end to high bread prices. There was suspicion that the removal of the Corn Laws would lead to more taxation on the lowest levels of society, as well as lower incomes and higher rents. This was particularly a problem for the agricultural workers. There was the view that the League leaders were supporting the Whig ministries and even a view that the League was formed primarily to form a centre of opposition to the Chartists. Equally the early statements of many of the League leaders, that cheaper bread would allow employers to reduce wages, were at best unhelpful. Many of the supporters of the League were employers so there was opposition between them and the Chartist leaders on the question of the 10 hour movement, and the Poor Law. Equally, the fact that many League members signed up as special constables at the time of the 1842 Plug Plot riots caused ill feeling in the areas affected. Many Chartists blamed the Anti-Corn Law League activists for engineering the 1842 stoppages.

Nevertheless there were areas of co-operation. Pickering and Tyrrell<sup>87</sup> identify that areas outside of England do seem to have better relationships, especially in parts of Scotland. Within England there were areas of agreement and several attempts by the League to get working class support. These included Operative Associations and the links with trade

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<sup>86</sup> Paul Pickering and Alex Tyrrell, *The Peoples' Bread, a History of the Anti-Corn Law League* (London: Leicester University Press, 2000).

<sup>87</sup> Pickering and Tyrrell, pp. 48-61.

operatives such as in Sheffield. The most successful and long lasting were the freehold building societies, though these did not emerge until the later 1840's, very close to repeal and towards the demise of Chartism. After 1846 they gave a focus for League supporters seeking new directions. Many leading League leaders joined the movement but this caused a split within the Chartist ranks. Some saw freehold building societies as using the franchise to extend the vote. Others saw it as an attempt to reduce the role of the Chartist land plan and so opposed them.<sup>88</sup> Most of the attempts seem to have been initiated by the League. Many Chartists however held to the view that a reformed parliament, in line with the Charter, was the only route to achieve social reform.

Central to this issue was the position of Richard Cobden. As John Prest makes clear, Cobden did not support universal suffrage.<sup>89</sup> Prest is somewhat critical of Chartists who had the vote for their apparent failure to make greater use of it in parliamentary seats. He argues that they could have done this in four ways. They could just be a nuisance vote, they could vote in greater numbers in popular constituencies to gain a possible victory, they could affect the result in marginal seats and they should have had a higher profile in county seats.<sup>90</sup> This seems to miss the point that they wanted wholesale reform and had felt betrayed by the last major reform of 1832. Equally, Cobden's position was clear. He admired the 40/- freeholders for their thrift and steadfastness and saw them as a means of thwarting universal suffrage.<sup>91</sup> Given the position of O'Connor, Harney and O'Brien, agreement at national level was unlikely. This is not to say that there was not common support at local level and there was a high level of support for repeal, providing that the benefits were enjoyed by the working class and not solely by the middle class. Equally, Chartist support for this idea was the same as it was for all the other movements that the local leaders were involved in.

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<sup>88</sup> See Malcolm Chase, 'Out of Radicalism: the mid-Victorian Freehold Movement' *English Historical Review* 419 (1991) p. 332.

<sup>89</sup> John Prest, *Politics in the Age of Cobden*, (London: Macmillan, 1977).

<sup>90</sup> Prest, pp. 116-118.

<sup>91</sup> Prest, p. 114.

There has been much work done recently on Richard Cobden, and Anthony Howe has edited the letters of Richard Cobden.<sup>92</sup> In a recent work there has been a reassessment of Cobden and the view taken of his role in domestic politics both before and after the Repeal of the Corn Laws.<sup>93</sup> The clear consensus is best expressed by Roland Quinault.<sup>94</sup> He sees Cobden as a pragmatist and his support for parliamentary reform as 'often fitful and seldom sustained'.<sup>95</sup> He does not say he is opposed to reform but he did not support universal suffrage. F. M. L. Thompson describes him as an 'opportunist' and sees him as a pragmatist.<sup>96</sup> David Brown, in the same work, shows how he hoped to use the press to put his views over though this proved to be a mixed blessing.<sup>97</sup>

The latest work is that of Malcolm Chase, *Chartism, A New History*.<sup>98</sup> He argues that if it is nothing else, Chartism is a political movement. He also draws the conclusion that it was 'a movement of small victories and a multiplicity of small endings'.<sup>99</sup> He argues against a crude perception of rise and fall. Chartism switched amongst a variety of forms. Like Dorothy Thompson, he surveys the whole range of the movement but gives prominence to the development of the histories of the local leaders. In a review of the book Robert Saunders laments the lack of a concluding chapter and comments that this makes it difficult to know where Chase stands.<sup>100</sup> In his reply Malcolm Chase gives his reasons for not having a

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<sup>92</sup> Anthony Howe, ed., *The Letters of Richard Cobden, Vol. 1 1815-1847 and Vol. 2 1848-1853* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>93</sup> Anthony Howe & Simon Morgan, *Rethinking Nineteenth Century Liberalism: The Richard Cobden Bicentenary essays* (Aldershot, 2006).

<sup>94</sup> Roland Quinault, 'Cobden and Democracy' in Howe and Morgan 59-67.

<sup>95</sup> Quinault, p. 67.

<sup>96</sup> F.M.L.Thompson, 'Cobden, Free Trade in Land and the road to the Abbey National' in Howe and Morgan, p. 69.

<sup>97</sup> David Brown, 'Cobden and the Press' in Howe and Morgan 80-98.

<sup>98</sup> Malcolm Chase, *Chartism, a New History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2007).

<sup>99</sup> Chase, p. 358.

<sup>100</sup> Robert Saunders, 'A review of Chartism: a New History', *Reviews in History by the Institute of Historical Research* November, (2008) <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/paper/saunders.html> (accessed 26 March 2009).

concluding chapter.<sup>101</sup> To him, Chartism was first and foremost a constitutional movement both in its objectives and in its form of agitation. Its demise was equally multi-faceted involving the decline of the role of women, the rapidly reducing effectiveness of O'Connor and the cumulative blunting of Chartist energies. Chase's work has also been described as a cultural history of Chartism which would seem to give support for continuity into the second half of the century, but also some notable successes on the more limited stage of local politics.<sup>102</sup>

The range of work done on this movement is immense, yet there is still more to do, to carry on uncovering the details of the local leaders who seem to be at the centre of what the movement was. This current study will also show how the case for seeing the movement as one of continuity is strengthened by local studies, with examples of men still proudly proclaiming themselves to be Chartist in the late eighteen sixties. Chartism was undoubtedly a political movement born out of social and economic distress. Its focus was to achieve political reform to gain universal suffrage. Given that wider franchise, other reforms would surely follow. The difficulty was that the other reforms were seen as just as vital in different parts of the country and in different ways. Chartism was part of the reform movement of the first half of the nineteenth century, but it was only a part, not the only vehicle.

Finally, the study of municipal history itself must be examined. It is a highly complex area and in order to try to deepen understanding, an attempt needs to be made to look at the development of urban history, and then try to see how the working class, the main group excluded from the franchise in 1832, became involved in local politics. The study of urban politics began at the turn of the last century and was initially part of a constitutional history. The initial work was that of Rudolf von Gneist, a German legal expert, who saw in England's

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<sup>101</sup> Saunders: 'A reply by Malcolm Chase', *Reviews in History by the Institute of Historical Research*, November (2008) <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/paper/saunders.html> (accessed 26 March 2009).

<sup>102</sup> Katrina Navickas, Review of 'Chartism: a New History' in *Cultural and Social History; The Journal of the Social History Society*, Vol. 5 Issue 3 (2008) pp. 369-70.

system the development of public service.<sup>103</sup> This work was carried on by Shaw in 1902 and Redlich and Hirst in 1903.<sup>104</sup> They saw the development as the growth of liberal democracy through towns and Hirst was close to Sidney and Beatrice Webb, whose major work on urban government was written at this point.<sup>105</sup> This remained the focus till the 1970s when Redlich and Hirst work was republished by B Keith-Lucas.<sup>106</sup> He and Derek Fraser were the leading historians of the second wave of study.

They trace the development and highlight the great complexity of organisations involved in the running of the locality. Keith-Lucas identifies four main types of body. These were the quarter sessions of the magistrates, the parish vestries, especially the select vestry, the improvement commissions and special Acts and municipal corporations<sup>107</sup> Fraser identifies four problems that had to be addressed in the first part of the nineteenth century. These were law and order, working class crowds and the new middle class, the appointment of members and the link to the 1832 Reform Act.<sup>108</sup> They both see a clear link between the Acts of 1832 and 1835 and also emphasises the central role played by Bentham and Chadwick. They see the development arising from a combination of national legislation and a response to local need. They also draw clear attention to the fact that some forms of control and administration lay outside the remit of the corporations, namely the Poor Law (1834) and public health (1848). Finally, they see a clear linkage with parliamentary elections and politics. One area that is of interest is the focus of these studies. London was always accepted as a special case but there is a lot of use of the title 'Victorian City' without ever defining what the difference was between

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<sup>103</sup> Rudolf von Gneist, *The History of the English Constitution* translated by P. A. Ashworth, (London: W. Clowes and Sons, 1889).

<sup>104</sup> A. Shaw, *Municipal Government in England*, (London, 1902) and Joseph Redlich and Francis W. Hirst, *The History of Local Government in England: Being a re-issue of Book 1 of Local Government in England* (London: Macmillan, 1970).

<sup>105</sup> Sidney & Beatrice Webb, *English local government from the Revolution to the Municipal Corporations Act, (Vol. 2), The manor and borough: part one* (London: Longmans Greene and Co., 1908).

<sup>106</sup> See note 13 Second Edition (1970) London.

<sup>107</sup> B. Keith-Lucas, *English Local Government in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: Historical Association, 1977).

<sup>108</sup> Derek Fraser, *Power and Authority in the Victorian City*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979), p. 4.

a 'city' and a 'town' in the nineteenth century. Fraser in particular slides between city and town without ever giving a clear distinction. Asa Briggs also writes on Victorian Cities but includes Middlesbrough.<sup>109</sup> Part of this may be due to the rapidly changing nature of towns and cities in the nineteenth century. Other perspectives come from other disciplines such as geography. Dennis Smith sees the growth of towns as a social development, and highlights the role played in the North by the dissenting and nonconformist groups. He also highlights the growing role played by experts, the specialists who became such a part of the municipal system. These included surveyors, engineers, secretaries and later on the town clerk.<sup>110</sup>

The final body of work was undertaken at the turn of this century. The link is Robert J. Morris who maintains the threads of the earlier analyses. He looks at the issue of centralization versus the local autonomy, the strength of urban society, the exercise of power and finally the growth of urban administration.<sup>111</sup> Rosemary Sweet, whilst underlining the power and control issues also raises the vital part played by the desire to meet needs, not least in sewerage, water supply, gas and later electricity, clean air, street lighting and planning.<sup>112</sup> All seem narrow areas but put together, they had a major impact on a town. The studies of Joanna Innes relate mainly to the eighteenth century, but she has many insights that help understanding of the later century.<sup>113</sup> John Garrard is also crucial to the present work, as he undertook a political leadership comparison between Bolton, Rochdale and Salford.<sup>114</sup> In his

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<sup>109</sup> Asa Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, (London: Odhams, 1963).

<sup>110</sup> Dennis Smith, *Conflict and Compromise: Class Formation in English Society 1830-1914: a Comparative Study of Birmingham and Sheffield* (London: Routledge Keegan and Paul, 1982).

<sup>111</sup> Robert J. Morris & Richard H. Trainor (eds.), *Urban Governance: Britain and Beyond since 1750* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000).

<sup>112</sup> Rosemary Sweet, *The English Town 1680-1840: Government, Society and Culture* (Harlow: Longmans, 1990).

<sup>113</sup> Joanna Innes, *Inferior Politics: Social problems and social policies in eighteenth century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). See also David Eastwood, *Government and Community in the English Provinces 1780-1870* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997).

<sup>114</sup> John Garrard, *Leadership and Power in Victorian Industrial Towns: 1830-1880* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983).

later work, along with Morris he looked at the development of urban history as providing a tool to examine the later period of major municipal development after 1874.<sup>115</sup>

Several strands are clear. Municipal development after 1832 had many roots. Municipal reform was closely linked to parliamentary reform, but it also had links to social reform through the work of Bentham and Chadwick. The role of the working class and the new middle class were central to the development of municipal power and administration and these two groups played a major part in the formation of new municipal corporations. Another area needing further study is that of the non-electors. Fraser highlighted the main effect of the 1835 Act as being the creation of new openings for urban areas.<sup>116</sup> The Act dealt with the existing 178 boroughs. By 1855, twenty two new ones had been added, eighteen of those in the industrial North, including Oldham and Rochdale. By 1900 another 113 had been added.

The most recent work is that of James Chandler.<sup>117</sup> He starts by comparing our development with that of France and America, where regional and local government is much stronger and clearer. Central control was the issue in Britain. He sees the evolving relationship between local and central government as being the interaction of a network of agencies and the elite of central policy makers. At local level the main group was the landowners, but they were superseded by the factory owners and capitalists. All had a deeply ingrained hostility to centralisation. It was not a completely hostile system, but the relationship was worked out in Parliament. Between 1800 and 1854 twice as many private acts were passed as public ones. The introduction of the New Poor Law system was critical to this process as it introduced a new element of central control through the Poor Law Commission, a body distinct from parliament and thus not amenable to the normal moderation developed through Parliament.

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<sup>115</sup> Morris and Trainor, *Urban Governance*, and John Garrard, *Democratisation in Britain: elites, civil society and reform since 1800* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002).

<sup>116</sup> Fraser, *Power and Authority in the Victorian City*, p. 18.

<sup>117</sup> James A Chandler, *Explaining Local Government: Local Government in Britain since 1800*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

Municipal politics gave the local people greater control over their own affairs. The town council was to last largely unchanged in format till the nineteen seventies.

The following chapters will seek to examine in detail the development of the vestry, the improvement commission and the Poor Law boards to show how they were the key elements in the formation of municipal governance. Equally, the role of Parliamentary elections, and the impact of radical reformers will show how each town had its own unique character, yet follows a clear pattern in the formation of local government in Britain during the nineteenth century.

## Chapter Three

### The Impact of Parliamentary Reform and National Elections

The movement for the reform of Parliament, the system of constituencies and voting rights had a deep effect on people of all classes across the country. The debates and the suggested reforms showed the full range of views from wanting to keep things as they were to the need for a radical reform of the entire system. Coming as it did, just after the three towns had started new improvement commissions, there was intense interest in the debates. Inevitably, this level of involvement threw up fears and expectations amongst all classes of the country in equal measure. The results of the Reform Act of 1832 not only changed parliamentary systems but had a major impact on the development of the franchise for the board of guardians, the improvement commissions and finally the new borough councils.

In the period between 1830 and 1868 there were ten general elections. These not only had an impact across the country, but equally had a deep impact within the towns and cities where they were held. None of the three towns studied Halifax, Oldham or Rochdale, was a constituency in its own right before 1832. They were all part of much larger county seats, of Lancashire and Yorkshire, and the new constituencies formed in 1832 were to add another layer to the complex picture of boundaries and areas of influence outlined in Chapter One. It will be necessary to look at the impact of the debate surrounding reform in the 1830s, the nature of the seats and the number of MPs, as well as the character of the candidates and the impact they had on each of the three towns. A town by town approach conveys a fuller picture of the impact of these elections.

Historical research in this area has been quite thin. Most of the works stress the need for further research<sup>1</sup> and look mainly at those boroughs that already had corporations before

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Salmon, *Electoral Reform at Work: Local Politics and National Parties*, (London: The Royal Historical Society, 2002) p. 5 and with C. Jones and M. Taylor, eds, *Party and Politics: Principle and Reform in Parliament and the Constituencies 1689-1880* (Edinburgh: University Press, 2005).

1832.<sup>2</sup> There have been detailed studies such as the work of Hopper on the one hand and Wasserman and Jaggard on the other,<sup>3</sup> both of which look at the problems of violence in elections of the period. Both however have limitations for the present study, as Wasserman and Jaggard do not start their review till 1855 and Hopper looks at a comparison between England and Ireland. Cragoe makes interesting points in his study of the growth of Conservative associations.<sup>4</sup> Little has been undertaken on the growth and development of non-electors' groups or the impact of working class groups on municipal elections.

The period between the end of 1829 and the first election of the reformed parliament in January 1833 was one of intense debate and discussion. Press reports for Halifax show the large number of public meetings about reform, the breadth of interest and the depth of knowledge shown by all who spoke.<sup>5</sup> Equally, there were very detailed reports of the proceedings of Parliament, the complex workings of the debates over voting rights and constituency boundaries and the involvement of the King.<sup>6</sup> No such detailed reports exist for Oldham or Rochdale as the local press was not as well developed.<sup>7</sup> Butterworth's reports on Oldham shed light on the debates over the Act.<sup>8</sup> The details of the debates, changes, manoeuvrings and arguments within Parliament are well documented and need not be repeated here.<sup>9</sup> It is their impact on each town that is the main question.

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<sup>2</sup> Philip Salmon, 'Reform should begin at home: English municipal and parliamentary reform, 1818-1832' in *Partisan Politics, Principle and Reform in Parliament and the Constituencies, 1689-1880*, ed. by C. Jones, P. Salmon and R.W. Davis (Edinburgh: University Press, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> K. Theodore Hoppen, 'The Franchise and Electoral Politics in England and Ireland, 1832-1885' in *History*, 70 (1985) pp. 202 – 217 and Justin Wasserman and Edwin Jaggard, 'Electoral Violence in mid nineteenth century England and Wales', in *Historical Research*, 80 number 27 (2007), pp. 24-155.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew Cragoe, 'The Great Reform Act and the Modernisation of British politics: The Impact of Conservative Associations, 1835-1841', in *Journal of British Studies*, 47 (July 2008), pp. 581-603.

<sup>5</sup> *HE*, 1830 to 1833, *passim*

<sup>6</sup> *HE* 10 December 1831.

<sup>7</sup> *MG* 22 May 1830.

<sup>8</sup> Oldham, Butterworth Papers (OBP) D/BUT/F1 to F11.

<sup>9</sup> Boyd Hilton *A Mad Bad and Dangerous People: England 1783-1846* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), pp. 411-438.

From the very start Rochdale was more than happy to become a single seat constituency. There do not appear to be any reports in the regional press of agitation for two seats. This was not the case in the other two towns. Halifax campaigned from the very start to have two members and the town appeared in the first draft reform bill in March 1831 in Schedule B as being a constituency that would be awarded two seats.<sup>10</sup> Oldham did not appear at all.<sup>11</sup> The bill was defeated in April 1831. The King hastily dissolved Parliament and an election was held under the existing system. There was a victory for the reformers, but when the Bill was reintroduced in July 1831, Halifax had been downgraded to a single seat constituency.<sup>12</sup> Oldham appeared for the first time with only one seat.<sup>13</sup> Further debate followed and in October 1831, the Bill was defeated again, this time in the Lords. This time there was no election but initially a new ministry was formed by the Whigs and a further bill was introduced in December 1831. In its schedules, Rochdale remained with one seat in Schedule D, but both Halifax and Oldham were in Schedule C with two seats.<sup>14</sup> In order to achieve this status Oldham had had to increase the size of the constituency. This was done by a public petition of 10 June 1831, organised after a series of public meetings led by the Oldham Political Union, which had been set up by John Knight and William Fitton. This added three other townships, Royton, Crompton and Chadderton.<sup>15</sup> The bill was finally passed in June 1832 and arrangements started for the election of new members.

Attention now moved from the national debate to the local one and the various groups started to select their candidates for the election. It is important to keep the changes in perspective. Although there was to be a lot of talk and many meetings, the result was still in

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<sup>10</sup> HE 5 March 1831.

<sup>11</sup> Benjamin Grime, *Memory Sketches*, (Oldham: Hurst and Rennie, 1887) p. 4. Grime was a strong critic of the election process. 'There is little regard for veracity, less for consistency, and no regard whatsoever for civility or courtesy', he wrote in his introduction.

<sup>12</sup> HE 2 July 1831.

<sup>13</sup> Grime, p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> HE 17 December 1831.

<sup>15</sup> Butterworth had proposed the increase in April 1831, and a public meeting sent a petition in June 1831. OBP, 13 April and 10 June 1831.

the hands of a very small number of people, and voting was open to public scrutiny. John Vincent still provides the best research on this aspect of voting.<sup>16</sup> None of this prevented a very lively political debate. In Rochdale in 1833 at the first election, only 632 votes were cast in total. There were 687 registered voters, which was 3.4% of the population.<sup>17</sup> In Oldham, where there were two seats, there were 1576 votes cast with a registered electorate of 1131.<sup>18</sup> This represented 2.2% of the population.<sup>19</sup> Finally in Halifax 837 votes were cast for two seats from 536 registered voters, who represented 1.7% of the population.<sup>20</sup>

Three factors applied in all the towns and at every election in varying degrees. The first was the hustings, the public meeting that allowed all the candidates to make a speech to all the people of the town and be questioned on their views. There would then be a show of hands for each candidate. Almost invariably the more radical candidates won on the show of hands. Equally, most of them lost in the actual poll of votes. The hustings attracted great interest and were one of the few occasions when the non-electors in a town could question the candidates and get their views aired to a wider audience. The local press usually gave considerable coverage to the meetings.<sup>21</sup>

The second factor was the use made by the various parties of the registration revision courts. Prest and Chase throw light on these institutions and their use.<sup>22</sup> These were held at regular intervals between elections to check on the electoral role, remove unqualified voters and add newly qualified ones. They were conducted by a barrister appointed for the task. Every voter was, in theory, open to challenge and parties made great use of this to try to increase the number of their supporters and reduce the number of opponents. It was

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<sup>16</sup> John Vincent, *Poll books: How Victorians voted*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967).

<sup>17</sup> Rochdale, RLSL, Election Register for 1832.

<sup>18</sup> W. Duncombe Pink and Rev. Alfred B. Beaver, eds, *The Parliamentary Representation of Lancashire County and Boroughs* (London: Henry Gray, 1889) p. 309.

<sup>19</sup> Oldham, OLSL, Reform Voters List for 1832, JFG: 1.

<sup>20</sup> Halifax, HRL, Electoral Register 1832-1833, Microfilm.

<sup>21</sup> *HE* 15 December 1833.

<sup>22</sup> John Prest, *Politics in the Age of Cobden*, (London: Macmillan, 1977), and Malcolm Chase, 'Out of radicalism: the mid-Victorian freehold land movement', *English Historical Review* 419 (1991).

sometimes taken to extremes as when in Rochdale, the Tories challenged the right of John Bright to vote in the town.<sup>23</sup> Given the small size of the electorate and the very small size of majorities, careful use of this tactic could yield electoral success, as was clear in Halifax in 1835. Jowitt argues that the Liberals lost the election of 1835 because they did not work as hard as the Tories in the election revision courts and therefore lost voters.<sup>24</sup>

The third factor was that of exclusive dealing. This was the practice of using economic pressure to get voters, particularly tradesmen and merchants, to support a particular candidate through the threat of the withdrawal of custom if they did not. The exclusive part was that shoppers dealt only with those who openly supported their preferred candidate. This allowed the non-electors to exercise considerable influence, albeit a threatening one, on the voters and supporters in an election. There is clear evidence that this was threatened and used in all three towns, certainly in the elections before 1850.<sup>25</sup> Hanson, the editor of the *Halifax Reformer* argued that this type of dealing was often in response to the trade voting where one group of businessmen voted for a particular candidate.<sup>26</sup> Both types of action caused a lot of problems and certainly contributed to the death of Alex Taylor in Oldham.<sup>27</sup> It could also be a source of great profit and wealth.<sup>28</sup>

The impact of the national elections on local affairs seems to have been lowest in the town of Halifax. The contests were mainly between the Tory or Conservative group and the Whig or Liberal group. There were only two radical candidates, Michael Stocks in 1832 and Edward Miall in 1847, and there was one Chartist candidate Ernest Jones who stood in 1847 and 1852. It is clear that both Miall and Jones were radicals, whilst Michael Stocks called

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<sup>23</sup> MG 23 October 1847.

<sup>24</sup> J. A. Jowitt 'Parliamentary Politics in Halifax 1832-1847' in *Northern History*, X11, 172-201 p.183.

<sup>25</sup> Grime, p.62, for Oldham, HG 12 September 1837 and Benjamin Wilson, 'The struggles of an old Chartist' in *Testaments of Radicalism, Memoirs of Working Class Politicians, 1790-1885*, ed. by David Vincent (London: Europa, 1977), p. 205, for Halifax, and John Cole, *Conflict and Cooperation* (Rochdale, 1994), p. 39 for Rochdale.

<sup>26</sup> *Halifax Reformer* 8 September 1847.

<sup>27</sup> Chapter Seven, pp. 214.

<sup>28</sup> Grime, p. 59.

himself a radical. He was a magistrate before 1830 but was removed from the list by the Earl of Harewood, the Lord Lieutenant for Yorkshire, and this resulted in a long legal battle.<sup>29</sup> He was in favour of voting by ballot and a system of national education. He wanted no children under 12 in factories but he was against the Ten hour movement.<sup>30</sup> However he was not returned to the list. He was described as a 'ruthless business man'<sup>31</sup> and was a member of the Anti-Corn Law League.

The Tories chose J.S. Wortley as their candidate in 1832. He had been a Yorkshire MP between 1820 and 1826 but he was not their first choice. Three local men, George Howroyd, Christopher Rawson and John Waterhouse had all refused, as did W.S. Lascelles. As the son of the Earl of Harewood who had removed Michael Stocks from the magistrates list, he felt it unwise to stand. The Whigs agreed on two candidates, Rawdon Briggs, a local banker and Charles Wood. Wood had previously been an MP for Great Grimsby between 1826 and 1831, and then for Wareham from 1831 till 1833. Wood represented Halifax until 1865, a period of 33 years, after which he moved to Ripon. He was created Viscount Halifax in 1866 and died in 1885. He rarely visited Halifax, possibly only once a year, other than at election times. He had other connections. Educated at Eton and Oxford he was the son of wealthy parents. His election to Grimsby in 1826 had cost £4000. He was the son-in-law of Earl Grey, the Whig Prime Minister, a man not noted for his like of radicals. He succeeded to his father's baronetcy in 1846, as well as being made a Privy Councillor. He was a member of the cabinet in a succession of governments. He held the offices of Chancellor of the Exchequer, President of the Board of Control, First Lord of the Admiralty, Secretary of State for India and Lord Privy Seal.

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<sup>29</sup> *HE* February to April 1830.

<sup>30</sup> Jowett, p. 178.

<sup>31</sup> D. Warrington 'The Stocks family of Upper Shibden Hall', *THAS*, (1971) pp.67-86 and p.78.

Apart from the last post, he held all these offices whilst he was MP for Halifax.<sup>32</sup>

Despite this high level of national prominence, he was not consistently the most popular candidate in Halifax. He fought eight elections, but only topped the poll twice, plus one return unopposed. Twice, in 1835 and 1847, the other MP was a Tory. As might be expected, his views were not radical. Wood agreed with his father-in-law when he said he felt that the Great Reform Act of 1832 was a 'final Act of concession, not the start of a reform process'.<sup>33</sup> He was reported as being 'not in the least afraid of the working class' in 1867.<sup>34</sup> He was, by nature, a compromiser. His nickname was 'the spider' constantly weaving webs to hold together the party, either as chief whip or over India. He was not a good speaker, but he was an effective parliamentarian. Such was the man who dominated the early parliamentary life of Halifax.

Six different people were elected with him over that time and a further one up to 1868. The first was Rawdon Briggs, a banker, magistrate and a very prominent figure in the town. He was a Whig. When he stepped down in 1835 his place as the Whig candidate was taken by Edward Protheroe. Their opponent was James S. Wortley who had stood in 1833. The Tories had used the electoral revision courts to good effect and the count of the votes produced considerable controversy. Wortley won by one vote but the Whigs claimed that the Returning Officer had wrongly recorded four votes which should have gone to Protheroe. They mounted a challenge, unsuccessfully, and Wortley remained as MP.<sup>35</sup> He was defeated in 1837

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<sup>32</sup> *Who's Who in British members of Parliament: A Biographical Dictionary of the House of Commons based on Dod's Parliamentary Companion* ed. by Michael Stenton, (London: Harvester Press, 1976-78) Charles Wood, first Viscount Halifax (1800-1885) politician, p. 416, and *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (ODNB) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004-2011) entry for Charles Wood.

<sup>33</sup> Eric Webster, 'Parliamentary Elections in the Parish of Halifax', *THAS*, Vol. 1 (1993), pp. 43-61 and p. 56.

<sup>34</sup> Stenton, Sir Charles Wood, p. 146.

<sup>35</sup> *HE* February, 1835.

by Protheroe, who remained as MP till 1847. The opponent in 1841 was Sir George Sinclair, a Tory, who had been the MP for Caithness.<sup>36</sup>

The election of 1847 was a very different affair as there were two radical candidates, Edward Miall<sup>37</sup> and Ernest Jones, the Chartist.<sup>38</sup> Miall was the editor of *The Nonconformist*, first published in 1841, and the leading member of the British Anti-State Church Association, later the Liberation Society, dedicated to the disestablishment of the Church of England. Wood's other opponent was Henry Edwards, a Tory. Initially, Protheroe had agreed to stand with Woods, but he withdrew before the hustings began.<sup>39</sup> Hanson argued that:

Protheroe's withdrawal was to allow a Tory – Whig coalition to stop Miall, but the Tories in order to agree, wanted a seat and so Protheroe went into sorrowful and sulky retirement.<sup>40</sup>

Edwards was the first major Tory candidate to actually come from the borough, and the *Halifax Guardian* made great play of this to support him. It worked as he recorded the highest number of votes with 511, and Wood gained 508. The interest was in the two radical candidates. Miall gained 349 votes and Jones 281. These were very respectable totals and reflect the changing nature of local power within Halifax after the troubles of 1842. The election campaign was marred by the death of Jonathon Akroyd. He was the leader of the textile manufacturers in the area who died from a heart attack at an election meeting packed with Chartist hecklers.<sup>41</sup> The emotional impact of the loss of such an important figure does

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<sup>36</sup> Stenton, Sir George Sinclair, second baronet (1790-1868) politician, p. 351 and *ODNB* entry for Sir George Sinclair.

<sup>37</sup> Stenton, Edward Maill (1809-1881), politician, journalist and Congregational minister, p.265 and *ODNB* entry for Edward Miall.

<sup>38</sup> Miles Taylor, *Ernest Jones, Chartism and the Romance of Politics 1819- 1869* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>39</sup> *HG* 24 July 1847.

<sup>40</sup> *Halifax Reformer* 18 August 1847.

<sup>41</sup> *HG* 31 July 1847, and Malcolm Chase, *Chartism: a New History*, pp. 158-159.

seem to have helped the Whig candidate.<sup>42</sup> After the election Miall moved on and was elected as MP for Rochdale in 1852.

The Halifax municipal elections also took place for the first time in May 1847. It seems that there was a concerted effort to avoid splits along party lines but this was only partially successful.<sup>43</sup> The aim seems to have been to obtain the best for the running of the town, not seek to gain party advantage at a time when there was already tension over the General Election, to which the presence of Miall and Jones added. There were six wards, four of them electing six councillors each and two electing just three. Then the new council would elect ten aldermen. The aim was to elect two members in the four large wards from each group, Tory, Liberal and Radical, and in the smaller wards just one each. In North West ward the plan went very well and three councillors were elected with no opposition. In North ward three alternative candidates stood against the agreed list, and Samuel Dennis was elected in place of George Beaumont, an agreed candidate. In Market ward there was only one extra candidate to the agreed list but Isaac Swaine gained a seat at the expense of John Holdsworth, a chosen person.

In St John's ward there was agreement on only three candidates, but the radicals put up a full list as well and all their candidates were elected.<sup>44</sup> In both St James' ward and Trinity ward the radical list was successful, with only one person being elected from the chosen list, Joshua Appleyard in Trinity ward at the expense of William Barraclough. Given that only two aldermen were elected from outside the council, and it took two attempts to find a mayor, there was constant change for nearly a month before the council settled down. There was more change when fresh elections were held for one third of councillors in November 1847.

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<sup>42</sup> Jowett, p. 194.

<sup>43</sup> *HG* 6 May 1848.

<sup>44</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the term 'radical' see Chapter Seven, on Radical Reformers, pp. 208-225.

Wood, Edwards and Jones all stood again in 1852. For Jones the force of Chartism was dying out, and he had been imprisoned.<sup>45</sup> He only polled 38 votes. Edwards also lost but with 521 votes. Wood topped the poll with 596 votes and he had a new partner, John Crossley. He was a member of the Crossley family who were major textile manufacturers and employers in the town. They, along with the Akroyd family, dominated the textile industry in the area, but the two families had a somewhat fractious relationship. Wood had always managed to remain above these divisions and had worked with both families.<sup>46</sup> The same combination triumphed in 1857 with Edwards again being the loser.

By 1859, the Tory group had retreated and this left Wood to be elected unopposed. He had a new partner in James Stansfield, a more radical liberal than Wood and a local man. After this, Wood decided to seek election for the much less trying seat of Ripon and so he ended his long connection with Halifax.<sup>47</sup> In 1865, Stansfield was again elected unopposed, and this time his partner was Edward Akroyd, a son of Jonathon and a colonel in the local militia.<sup>48</sup> This combination won again in 1868 against a radical candidate E.O. Greening. This election was the first under the widened franchise and Stansfield took 5278 votes, Akroyd 5141 and Greening 2802. From then on the elections had a much larger electorate and the parties had settled down into the positions that took them through till the next century. Interestingly up to that point there had never been a by-election in Halifax although in the same period, Rochdale had two and Oldham had four.

The impact of this on local government involves a number of factors. It will be argued in Chapter Five that the very early development of the Improvement Commissioners in Halifax gave the area stability and a profile that was never present in the other two towns. The Halifax

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<sup>45</sup> *HG* 15 July 1848 and 20 July 1850. See also Wilson, pp. 208-216, Chase, pp. 337-339, and Kate Tiller, 'Late Chartism: Halifax, 1847-1858', in *The Chartist Experience: Studies in working class radicalism and culture 1830-60*, ed. by J. Epstein and D. Thompson (London: Macmillan, 1882) 311-344 pp. 321-325.

<sup>46</sup> J.A. Jowett 'From Whiggery to Liberalism: Sir Charles Wood and Halifax 1832-1865, *THAS* Vol.2 (1994) 43 – 54, p. 46.

<sup>47</sup> Stenton, Sir Charles Wood, p, 416.

<sup>48</sup> R. Bretton, 'Colonel Edward Akroyd', *THAS* (1948) p. 61.

Trustees as they were known came into existence in 1762, over sixty years before the other towns and the control exercised by the middle class was almost entrenched by the 1830s.<sup>49</sup> The select vestry too, given the immense size of the parish of Halifax, was a very settled body, a picture not present in Rochdale or in Oldham for very different reasons. J.A. Jowitt identified other factors present during this period.<sup>50</sup> The first is the small size of the Tory group within the constituency and their continued greater concern and interest in the West Riding seats for Yorkshire, which they were very concerned to keep. They were energetic in the revision courts as the 1835 election results showed. They were never able to mount a consistent and prolonged campaign against the Whig-Liberal group. That group itself was very united and dominated by the two major families of Akroyd and Crossley. Jonathon Akroyd in particular was a leading figure in the elections. He was totally opposed to factory reform and led what must have been one of the most highly organised groups of manufacturers anywhere in the country. They devised a list of fourteen points which were used throughout the country to counter the arguments for factory reform.<sup>51</sup> This brought them into conflict with both Richard Oastler, an inhabitant of the parish, and John Fielden of Todmorden.<sup>52</sup> The Liberals were the leading figures of the Anti-Corn Law League and major opponents of the Chartists. They were magistrates and their establishments provided most of the special constables summoned during the disturbances of 1842.

Equally, the working class was very weak. Very few of them were voters or landowners. Given the power of the textile owners the workers were not in a position to challenge them and when serious disruption occurred in 1842, they were defeated because

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<sup>49</sup> G.R. Dalby, 'Halifax Town Trustees' *THAS* (1957), pp. 93- 109.

<sup>50</sup> Jowett, 'Parliamentary Politics in Halifax', *Northern History*, XII, 1976, pp. 172-190.

<sup>51</sup> J. A. Jowitt, 'A Crossroads in Halifax Politics: The Election of 1847' *THAS*, (1973), 2- 37.

<sup>52</sup> Jowett, p. 176. See also John Hargreaves and E. A. Hilary Haigh, eds., *Slavery in Yorkshire: Richard Oastler and the campaign against child labour in the Industrial Revolution* (Huddersfield: Huddersfield University Press, 2012).

they did not have enough support and were unable to defeat the military.<sup>53</sup> Chartism offered a source of opposition, but this was mainly restricted to countering the Anti-Corn Law League and disrupting its meetings.<sup>54</sup> At first there was support for a more physical approach but this died down after the Newport rising and the events of 1842, when in Halifax, there were three fatalities.<sup>55</sup> The presence of dragoons billeted in the town also made things quieter.<sup>56</sup> There were no dragoons in Rochdale for most of this period and only sporadically in Oldham. In Oldham and Rochdale there were no large powerful manufacturers, but a lot of much smaller ones, many of whom were the leaders of the radicals, such as Livsey in Rochdale and Holladay in Oldham. Another factor in Halifax was the different impact of the dissenter or non-conformist voice in the area. They were clearly there as the number of chapels showed, but the impact came from the major figures such as Akroyd, rather than men such as Holladay and Knott in Oldham or the Brights in Rochdale.

There was an impact. The stimulus of the debate around the 1832 Reform Act, the sense of anger that the final form of the Act produced, and the impact of later acts such as the New Poor Law, did energise interest and political activity in the town. The problem was the nature of the many layers of administration stretching over a vast area and the small size of the constituency within those layers. The radicals had been active before Peterloo, they met on Blackstone Edge and in other places as Chartists, but they were unable to gain access to the local institutions.<sup>57</sup> The arrival of Miall and Jones for the election of 1847 did lift the reformers and this was clearly seen in the elections to the council held in 1847, and the control of the ruling group was stretched, as will be seen later and was shown above pp. 65-6.<sup>58</sup> Chartism as

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<sup>53</sup> Wilson, pp. 199-201, Tiller, pp. 312-313, and Chase, pp. 217-219.

<sup>54</sup> Halifax, HACLL, 13 February 1839 HAS/B: 11/1.

<sup>55</sup> Chase, pp. 217-219.

<sup>56</sup> W B Crump, 'Halifax Visitors Book Vol. 3 1801-1860' THAS Correspondence with Sir Charles Napier pp. 97-100.

<sup>57</sup> See Chapter Five, p. 119.

<sup>58</sup> HG 6 May 1847.

a force remained active for much longer in Halifax than elsewhere, as Kate Tiller has shown, partly because of the role of Ernest Jones.<sup>59</sup>

Rochdale represents a much simpler picture in the sense that it only had one MP, but in other respects it was equally complex. As a parish it was huge in area, like Halifax. The township on which the Parliamentary Borough was based was only a small part of this parish. The living was in the personal gift of the Archbishop of Canterbury, until the inclusion of the parish in the new Diocese of Manchester in 1848.<sup>60</sup> The two incumbents between 1820 and 1850 are both worthy of note. In 1820, a new vicar was appointed, the Reverend Hey. He was the vicar of a small living in the centre of Manchester, but his role at Peterloo as the magistrate who read the Riot Act made him much more prominent. It is clear from the private papers of Lord Sidmouth, the Home Secretary, that Sidmouth persuaded the Archbishop to grant this appointment implicitly as a reward for Hey's actions at Peterloo.<sup>61</sup> The vast majority of the town were very unhappy at this appointment. It helps to explain the great opposition to the paying of Church rates, a struggle that lasted for over thirty years and involved Church courts, graveyard meetings and the creation of a powerful alliance of radicals, Dissenters and non-electors that was evident in the town from then on.

The second Vicar from 1839 was the Reverend Doctor J.E. Nassau Molesworth, a chaplain to the Archbishop of Canterbury. He was a very high church Tory, and very much a supporter of the Tory group. He too had problems over the church rates where his opponents were Thomas Livsey and John Bright. Bright was a member of the family who owned very large mills in the town. He was an active non-conformist and went on to great prominence in

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<sup>59</sup> Tiller, 'Late Chartism', pp. 319-323.

<sup>60</sup> Keith Bamford, 'The Reverend Dr. J. E. N. Molesworth, Vicar of Rochdale 1839-1877', *Transactions of the Historical Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, 141 (1991), 261- 288.

<sup>61</sup> Lord Sidmouth to Lord Bathurst, 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1820: Devon County Record Office, Sidmouth Papers 152 M/C/1820/07. My grateful thanks go to Professor Malcolm Chase, University of Leeds, for this reference.

national politics.<sup>62</sup> Thomas Livsey was a local man, a blacksmith and later a cotton merchant, who was to play a very prominent role in the development of the town.<sup>63</sup> As with Halifax, there was a great deal of public interest in the passage of the Reform Act and an equal measure of unhappiness at the limited outcome. The first group of candidates reflected this in that the choice of the Tories was a member of a closely connected group. The Entwistle family were closely linked through marriage to the Ramsay and the Royds families. All were owners of large mills. Between 1832 and 1859 this extended family group was to provide all but one of the Tory candidates in Rochdale.<sup>64</sup>

The mainstream Liberal group of mill owners and manufacturers chose John Fenton, a very wealthy member of the group whose family had started in cotton manufacturing but had also moved into banking. The third candidate was James Taylor, a local hatter and Unitarian preacher. His platform was one of universal suffrage, annual parliaments and vote by ballot. He also wanted an end to the slave trade and the Corn Laws. These last two issues also had the support of Fenton as well as the spread of religious liberties and an end to monopolies. Entwistle in his address seems to have just listed all the people who had asked him to stand.<sup>65</sup> It is worth noting that all the candidates were local and none of them had stood for Parliament before. It was 1841 before any candidate from outside the borough stood for election, possibly because the leading men of the town could agree on a choice of candidates. This was clearly not the case in either Oldham or Halifax.

The actual election followed the same pattern as in all other towns. Hustings were held outside the Wellington Hotel in the centre of the town. All three candidates spoke and then the returning officer asked for a show of hands to determine which candidate was to be the MP and Taylor won by an overwhelming majority. In the poll conducted the next day,

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<sup>62</sup> Keith Robbins, *John Bright* (London: Routledge, Keegan and Paul, 1979).

<sup>63</sup> John Cole, *Conflict and Cooperation* p. 28.

<sup>64</sup> Cole, p. 25.

<sup>65</sup> William Robertson, *The Social and Political History of Rochdale* (Rochdale, 1889), p. 169.

Taylor gained 109 votes, nearly one third of the votes cast. Given that very few of his main supporters had the vote this can be seen as a good result.<sup>66</sup> Fenton was the winner with 277 votes whilst Entwistle got 246 votes.

Fenton was not a success as a local MP, after he voted for the Poor Law Amendment Act in 1834. Even his Liberal supporters were horrified. Thomas Chadwick, a mill owner and later a magistrate wrote to John Fielden 'I feel ashamed that I have been instrumental in sending to Parliament a man who voted against honesty and common sense'.<sup>67</sup> The radicals led by Taylor were very angry and at the election of 1835, they decided to vote for the Tory as a way of removing Fenton. Taylor himself did not stand, but led his supporters to the hustings. In a last minute switch of allegiance he rejoined Fenton and even went so far as to propose him.<sup>68</sup> Many others however were not happy and the poll result was 326 to Fenton and 369 to Entwistle. Rochdale had a Tory MP. In April 1837, Entwistle died and a by-election was held. This time the Tories chose Clement Royds, a local banker and magistrate, whilst the Liberals returned to Fenton, who polled 383 votes. Royds had 339. In the General election that followed in September 1837, the Tories chose Sir Alexander Ramsay, Entwistle's son-in-law, and after a lot of discussion the Liberals chose Fenton. The Liberals won with 374 votes and the Tories took 349 votes. In 1840, Fenton announced that he would retire at the next election, so the parties began to search for new candidates.

The Tories made an interesting choice in James Fenton, brother of John but a Tory, not a Liberal. The Liberal choice was more complicated. For electoral purposes they had formed themselves into a Reform Association. George Ashworth, the magistrate and leader of the Liberals wanted to choose Thomas Milner Gibson. He had been the Tory MP for Ipswich in 1837, but had then resigned in 1839 as his views had changed, he supported the Anti-Corn Law

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<sup>66</sup> Robertson, p. 189.

<sup>67</sup> Rochdale, RLSL, Correspondence of Thomas Chadwick to John Fielden, February 1833.

<sup>68</sup> Robertson, p. 207.

view and he had become a Liberal.<sup>69</sup> This sort of candidate was not acceptable to the radical section of the party. Thomas Livsey organised a meeting of non-electors, and their choice was William Sharman Crawford, a well known Radical and the former MP for Dundalk. Although he was a very wealthy landowner, Sharman Crawford had developed very radical views, especially about Ireland, and he was very close to the Chartist movement. He was endorsed by Chartism at a national level in the elections of 1841 and 1847.<sup>70</sup> Livsey was a Chartist and this may go some way to explain the choice of Crawford.

At a meeting of the Reform group it was agreed, on the advice of Bright, to check Sharman Crawford's record and then make a choice. The overriding consideration was to avoid any sort of split that would allow the Tories to regain control of the seat. Eventually, they decided to accept Sharman Crawford as their candidate and he duly won the election.<sup>71</sup> He gained 397 votes whilst James Fenton got 333 votes. Sharman Crawford was to hold the seat till 1852. At the election of 1847 he was unopposed. He was very popular in the town even after he left the constituency. This was shown by the letters sent to his family when he died.<sup>72</sup> His first act on arriving in the town was to visit the very poor areas to see for himself the levels of poverty and difficulty that the inhabitants faced.<sup>73</sup> Like many MPs he paid an annual visit to the town to meet his constituents and explain his record and discuss forthcoming political issues. The 1841 election saw the emergence of the Non-Electors Committee in Rochdale. There are references to such a group in Halifax but they are infrequent and there is no sense that they operated as an organised group or in any way outside of parliamentary elections.<sup>74</sup> There is no evidence that they were active in Poor Law Guardians' elections or later municipal

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<sup>69</sup> Stenton: Thomas Milner Gibson, (1798-1869) politician p. 154 and *ODNB* entry for Thomas Milner Gibson.

<sup>70</sup> Stenton: William Sharman Crawford (1781-1861), politician and landlord in Ireland, p. 95 and *ODNB* entry for William Sharman Crawford. See also Chase, *Chartism: a New History*, pp. 181, 194 and 363 and Malcolm Chase, "Labour Candidates': Chartist Challenges at the Parliamentary Polls 1839-1860' *Labour History Review*, Vol. 74 No.1 (April, 2009), 64-89.

<sup>71</sup> Cole, *Conflict and Cooperation*, p. 40.

<sup>72</sup> *RO* 19 October 1861.

<sup>73</sup> *HG* 21 August 1841.

<sup>74</sup> *HG* 19 June 1847.

elections. There was a more structured group in Oldham, but care needs to be taken when looking at it. It was called 'The Committee of the Working Man' but this seems to have been a pressure group made up of Fielden's supporters.<sup>75</sup> They were very active at the time of the 1847 election which was a major event in the history of the town. Their role was to identify the people who voted against Fielden and then apply the sanctions of exclusive dealing. They seem to have been under the leadership of Alexander Taylor, the leading supporter of Fielden and J.M. Cobbett. The other two radical leaders, James Holladay and William Knott organised non-electors meetings' and sought to use them in the events of the town, but they were slight and not highly developed.<sup>76</sup>

This was not the case in Rochdale. Organised and led by Livsey, the non-electors were a powerful force in the issues affecting the town. John Vincent, in an article entitled 'The Electoral Sociology of Rochdale', shows clearly how powerful they were in the town.<sup>77</sup> He attributed this to the organisation of the group which had a committee and meetings and formed an inner group to work with the Reform Association, a liberal body. He argues that: 'The non-electors had a powerful interest in the system which excluded them; having perhaps more influence without the vote than if they had had it.'<sup>78</sup>

Apart from parliamentary elections, they were clearly evident in elections to the Poor Law Board and the work of the Vestry, especially on the issue of the Church rate.<sup>79</sup> When the discussion began on the question of incorporation, they were very involved in the ward question and the issue of voting rights. To what extent this group was truly independent, and to what extent they were an instrument for Thomas Livsey is a matter of debate. Livsey was referred to at one hearing as being like the Tsar of Russia,<sup>80</sup> and the *Rochdale Pilot* never

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<sup>75</sup> Grime p. 59.

<sup>76</sup> Grime p. 132.

<sup>77</sup> John Vincent, 'The Electoral Sociology of Rochdale', *Economic History Review* (1963), 76-90.

<sup>78</sup> Vincent, p. 78.

<sup>79</sup> Robertson, *Social and Political History*, p. 31.

<sup>80</sup> RO 26 April 1856.

ceased to complain of the power of this 'local tyrant'.<sup>81</sup> Vincent also says that this group had to be 'properly worked', and if they were the orchestra of the town's radical views, then Livsey could be said to be the conductor. As became clear from later election speeches, attention had to be paid to the views of this large group in the town. As late as 1865, in a meeting to select Thomas Potter as the Liberal candidate, John Bright was still making reference to this group when he said: 'If any feeble brethren amongst the electors are halting between the evil policy of Mr. Brett and the wise policy of Mr. Potter, let the non-electors help these feeble brethren'.<sup>82</sup>

In the election of 1852, the radicals seized control of the Liberal selection process again, and Edward Miall was chosen. Raised in London, he was the unsuccessful radical candidate from Halifax in 1847. Two factors helped his selection, his opposition to the Established Church and his non-conformity.<sup>83</sup> The Tories chose Sir Alexander Ramsay, the 5<sup>th</sup> Baronet of Balmaine, and more importantly, John Entwistle's son-in-law. At the hustings, Ramsay was questioned by Livsey, as Fenton had been before him. He was against universal suffrage and the giving of the vote to those who just paid rates and taxes, but he would support the abolition of church rates.<sup>84</sup> At the polls Miall got 529 votes and Ramsay got 375. Robertson believed that Ramsay was very depressed by his second defeat in the town.<sup>85</sup>

In 1855, the town began the process of moving towards incorporation. Some such as Livsey were not keen supporters of the move but others such as Bright wanted more local control. The issue that decided the case was that of the police. The growing cost of the County Constabulary and their increasing ineffectiveness, as seen by the Board of Guardians, pushed the leaders to seek incorporation in that year. The major issue was the number of wards. Livsey had always sought the greatest suffrage for the town and he also wanted the greatest

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<sup>81</sup> RP 26 December 1857.

<sup>82</sup> Robertson, p. 424.

<sup>83</sup> Robertson, p. 64 and Chase, pp. 193-196 and D. W. Bebbington, *Edward Miall*, ODNB.

<sup>84</sup> Robertson, p. 396.

<sup>85</sup> Robertson, p. 397.

degree of control for the radicals. This was best done with fewer wards, each one with more voters. The leading Tories however, wanted greater control for themselves and a much more restricted suffrage. The parliamentary commission under Captain Warburton looked at three options. The Tory one was for eight wards. The radicals wanted three. In between was John Bright who wanted five and said his brother Jacob agreed with him. His brother said he did not and wanted three.<sup>86</sup> After a long investigation, in July 1856 the three ward party were victorious. Also, as Vincent points out:

Democratic feeling was so strong in the town that Rochdale managed somehow to avoid the anti-popular provisions of the Municipal Corporations Act and secured a lower municipal franchise than any other large town in the country.<sup>87</sup>

In the elections that followed in 1856 the two sides did some deals to keep seats uncontested, but the Liberals and Radicals were victorious. Jacob Bright was chosen as the first mayor.<sup>88</sup> Once again, the tactics of pressure from the non-electors and the use of the electoral roll, used and developed over national elections were applied to the municipal ones and were victorious.

The same two candidates fought the 1857 general election, but this time the poll result was reversed, with Miall gaining 488 votes and Ramsay getting 532. For only the second time in nearly forty years the town had a Tory MP. The result was contested by the Liberals. During the day they found that twenty voters having promised to vote for Miall had switched sides.<sup>89</sup> Two points need to be made. The first was that there was a general defeat for many Liberals and Cobden, Bright and W.J. Fox in Oldham all lost their seats. Secondly changes of allegiance were very common and often influenced on the day, especially by the application of drink. The poll results showed that whilst only sixteen beer sellers supported Miall, sixty three

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<sup>86</sup> RO 1 March 1856.

<sup>87</sup> Vincent, *The Electoral Sociology of Rochdale*, p. 81, fn. 4.

<sup>88</sup> RO 20 December 1856.

<sup>89</sup> Robertson, *Social and Political History*, p. 405.

supported Ramsay.<sup>90</sup> Of greater concern however were nearly forty four voters who could not be found. Ramsay's majority was forty four. Interference was alleged and on May 11<sup>th</sup> 1857 Charles Hindley presented a petition to the House of Commons against Ramsay's election on the grounds of bribery by his agents. In considering the case the House heard the tale of Peter Johnson, an election agent of Toad Lane who was alleged to have offered £50 to Abraham Rothwell of Packer Street, to go to New Orleans to see his brother-in-law and so miss the election. Johnson was summoned to appear before Parliament. After a chase round London, Johnson disappeared and a warrant had to be issued for his arrest.

Vincent identifies the beer sellers and publicans as the most organised and efficient voting group within the town. Under the leadership of Peter Johnson they supported the Tories. John Lord, who was alleged to be his accomplice, was brought before the Commons, and it was decided to refer the matter to a Committee to meet the following day. The Committee included the Attorney General. They met behind closed doors and even members of the House were not allowed to enter. The case was adjourned till the following Monday and heard evidence from Liberal supporters. The press gave detailed reports of the evidence and then the verdict was reached on the sixth day.<sup>91</sup> The committee reported to the House that the allegations had not been sustained and that the evidence was very contradictory. Johnson was never brought to the House and returned to Rochdale three months later when the warrant had expired. He had, said Robertson, 'taken a trip to the country'. He then became the election agent for the Tories in 1859.<sup>92</sup>

The new Ministry was short lived and in the election of 1859, the Tories again chose Alexander Ramsay. The Liberals had debated for some time after the defeat of 1857, and they

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<sup>90</sup> Vincent, p. 77.

<sup>91</sup> RO 20 and 27 June and 4 July. RP 20 and 27 June and 4 July.

<sup>92</sup> There was a Select Committee and two Reports. PP 1857 Session 2 (128) Report from the Select Committee on the Rochdale election (Newall's petition) and 1857 Session 2 (185) Rochdale Election: Minutes of evidence taken before the Select Committee on the Rochdale Borough Election Petition.

had finally approached Richard Cobden to stand. His work alongside John Bright is well recorded, and given his role in the Anti-Corn Law League, he was clearly a Liberal and not a Radical candidate.<sup>93</sup> Cobden was unable to attend the meeting to accept his candidacy on April 13<sup>th</sup>, but the same week Ramsay accepted the Tory nomination. However on April 26<sup>th</sup> Ramsay withdrew. Cobden was elected unopposed and held the seat till his death in 1865.<sup>94</sup> At the subsequent by-election, the Liberals chose T.B. Potter, a close friend of Cobden's and a native of Salford.<sup>95</sup> The Tories chose W.B. Brett, a Queen's Counsel. Potter won 646 votes to Brett's 496 votes. Potter was to hold the seat for thirty years. The election was marred by violence when a mob of quarrymen and colliers entered the town and began to attack Liberal election offices, most of which were based in public houses. It was alleged that the Tories had invited them to disrupt the vote. The rioting cost a police superintendent his life.<sup>96</sup> At the general election in August of the same year there was no repeat of the violence and the Tories chose not to contest the election so Potter was returned unopposed. In 1868, following the second Reform Act, Potter was opposed by W.W. Schofield, a local man and a magistrate. It was a very sedate poll and Potter received 4,455 votes and Schofield 3,270.<sup>97</sup> The process and contests of the national elections in the town did have a big impact. The number of leading characters was small and, since at the start the candidates were local men, connections to local affairs were inevitable. The use made of the non-electors was important, and the national prominence of some of the leading figures such as Cobden and Bright as well as Sharman Crawford and Miall gave the town a much larger voice than its size would seem to warrant. Nowhere was this clearer than during the Cotton Famine of the 1860s and the British response to the American Civil War.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Donald Read, *Cobden and Bright, a Victorian Political Partnership*, (London: Edward Arnold, 1967).

<sup>94</sup> Robertson, p. 418.

<sup>95</sup> Stenton, Volume II, Thomas Bayley Potter (1817-1898) politician, p. 290.

<sup>96</sup> Robertson, p. 429.

<sup>97</sup> Robertson, p. 438.

<sup>98</sup> See Chapter Six, pp. 198-204 and Philip S. Toner, *British Labor and the American Civil War* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1981).

Oldham was different again. Like Rochdale and Halifax it was part of a very large parish, but whereas the other two were the leading townships of that parish, Oldham was seeking to gain its independence from Prestwich.<sup>99</sup> It was nominally a chapelry, but it was practically independent. There was a second group of churches, called the Ancient Parochial Chapelry, covering Royton, Crompton and Chadderton about which very little has been written. The Vicar of Oldham used his independence as a means to force his choice of churchwardens on to the outlying parishes, despite the fact that this was what had most annoyed Oldham about the power of Prestwich.<sup>100</sup> Oldham had a long tradition of radical action before 1832. Two men personified this. The first was John Knight who had been arrested before 1819 on suspicion of administering illegal oaths and was the victim of internal rendition on the orders of the Home Secretary in 1817. He was arrested at Peterloo and imprisoned. He lost his business and his wife lost her health. He did not live long enough to see the growth of Chartism, dying in 1838.<sup>101</sup> The other was William Fitton, a surgeon from Royton. His marriage suffered and twice his wife appeared before the Vestry asking for funds to live.<sup>102</sup> Both these men were very active in 1832 and were great supporters of William Cobbett and John Fielden.

Like Rochdale but unlike Halifax, there were no powerful textile manufacturers, just lots of smaller ones. From the very start of the agitation for a Reform Bill, the key movers within the town wanted not only to have an MP but to have two. In order to gain two MPs however they had to expand the area of the constituency beyond the town of Oldham itself. This led them to include Royton, Crompton and Chadderton, the other parts of the Ancient Chapelry of Oldham. This expansion created a new layer of administration and raised an

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<sup>99</sup> See Chapter Four, pp. 99-100.

<sup>100</sup> George Perry-Gore, *The Ancient Parochial Chapelry of Oldham*, (Oldham: WE Clegg, 1906)

<sup>101</sup> *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, Volume IX, eds. Joyce M Bellamy and John Saville (London: Macmillan, 1972) Entry for John Knight, 166-168.

<sup>102</sup> OBP February 18<sup>th</sup> 1834, D: But/F17.

interesting problem highlighted by Butterworth, the local recorder of events in 1837.<sup>103</sup> He compared the size of the towns with the size of the parliamentary constituencies in terms of population. In Rochdale they were exactly the same size at 20,156 people, but in Oldham there was a huge difference with the township at 29,000 people and the constituency at 50,513 people, a difference of 21,513. This made Oldham the third largest constituency in Lancashire behind Liverpool and Manchester.<sup>104</sup>

New radicals joined Knight and Fitton. The three main people were James Holladay, a millwright, Alexander Taylor a grocer and William Knott a hatter.<sup>105</sup> Holladay and Taylor died within months of each other around the end of 1852.<sup>106</sup> This group of three were to be found together at every election or radical meeting and all three were Chartists. It was to be the split between them that led to a major change in the electoral nature of the town and within the Municipal Borough. This happened during 1847, the time of the election and of the first Council elections. From then on the town moved firmly in a Liberal direction.

At the first election in 1832, apart from gaining two seats, the main aim was to gain radical candidates. The choice of William Cobbett was critical. He was considering standing for Manchester but was persuaded to move to Oldham.<sup>107</sup> He was recognised as one of the leading radicals of his day and he brought John Fielden with him. Fielden made it clear that he would only stand as Cobbett's partner. He was a cotton manufacturer from Todmorden. His economic sphere was Halifax but he was never comfortable there as the other main manufacturers, led by Jonathon Akroyd were set against the reform of factories and this was Fielden's lifetime work.<sup>108</sup> The 10 hour movement for children in factories was the major

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<sup>103</sup> OBP 1830-1844.

<sup>104</sup> OBP 28 August 1837.

<sup>105</sup> OBP: D/BUT/F17. 2.94.

<sup>106</sup> Grime, p. 186.

<sup>107</sup> George Spater, *William Cobbett, the Poor Man's Friend* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

<sup>108</sup> Stewart A. Weaver, *John Fielden and the Politics of Popular Radicalism, 1832-1847*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

preoccupation of Fielden in Parliament, and he achieved most of that whilst he was the MP for Oldham.

The opponents in 1832 were R. H. Bright, a Liberal, W. Burge, a Tory and the Reverend Stephens, a radical and a preacher.<sup>109</sup> Burge was in favour of slavery and this was why Stephens stood against him. The hustings went totally in favour of Cobbett and Fielden as did the poll. Cobbett gained 677 votes, Fielden 645, Bright 150, Burge 101 and Stephens 3. In the 1835 election the same pair stood again, but there was disquiet at the speeches and activities of Cobbett, especially from Knight.<sup>110</sup> They were unopposed in February, but in July Cobbett died and in the by-election three candidates stood. One was J. F. Lees, a Tory and a local manufacturer. The second was Feargus O'Connor, later to be the leader of the Chartists and the third was John Morgan Cobbett, son of William and destined to be one of the most divisive figures in Oldham's parliamentary history. O'Connor only gained thirty two votes but he was accused of robbing Cobbett of the seat by splitting the radical vote.<sup>111</sup> Cobbett got 381 votes and Lees took the seat with 394 votes.

In 1837, the picture was very different. The influence of John Knight was waning due to ill health, and he died the following year.<sup>112</sup> The leadership of the radicals passed to Fitton but mainly in Oldham to Holladay, Knott and Taylor. Fielden stood again, but without J. M. Cobbett. His partner was General William Johnson, another well known radical and a friend of Charles Wood, MP for Halifax. J.F. Lees stood for the Tories again with J. Jones as his partner. The radical victory was complete. Fielden had 541 votes and Johnson got 545. For the Tories, Jones got 315 votes and Lees 279. In 1841, Fielden and Johnson were elected unopposed.

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<sup>109</sup> Michael S Edwards, *Purge This Realm: a Life of Joseph Rayner Stephens* (London: Epworth, 1994).

<sup>110</sup> Grime p.19.

<sup>111</sup> OBP: D/BUT/F17.35. The Liberals remembered it eighty years later. See Arthur Marcroft, *Landmarks of Local Liberalism: Oldham Liberal Bazaar Souvenir* (Oldham: Wildgoose, 1913).

<sup>112</sup> OBP, 5 September 1837.

During the latter part of this Parliament, Johnson let it be known that he would not be standing again, so the radicals began the search for a new partner for Fielden.

The run up to the General Election of 1847 and the actual election split the radical group in the town and it never really recovered. The first problem was the stance taken by Fielden himself. He would stand only if John Morgan Cobbett was his partner. By now Cobbett was engaged to Fielden's daughter and he was adamant, despite three visits from the radical leaders, that it was Cobbett or nothing. Grime, writing in 1885 used the word 'dictation' about Fielden's insistence on Cobbett.<sup>113</sup> This was not his term but was used on election posters of the time.<sup>114</sup> Exclusive dealing was widespread and Holladay and Knott, two of the leading radicals, formed a coalition against Cobbett. The problem was the view, held by certain radicals especially Holladay, that Cobbett was a Tory. Holladay constantly challenged Cobbett to say where he stood on the issue of disestablishment, and Cobbett always insisted that he supported the establishment. Holladay decided to stand himself rather than allow Cobbett an unopposed contest.<sup>115</sup>

This split the radicals in the town and it split the leadership. Alexander Taylor was deeply committed to Fielden, and felt that everything must be done to ensure his re-election, even if that meant electing Cobbett. Fielden's Committee was known as 'Taylor and Co' in the town.<sup>116</sup> Their opponents selected W. J. Fox another well known Unitarian radical to stand against Fielden and Cobbett.<sup>117</sup> The Tories acted carefully and sought to make the most of this split with their choice of candidate. They chose John Duncroft, a local man, a cotton manufacturer and a member of the Police Commission. He was well known and respected in the town. At the last minute, Holladay withdrew, so only four candidates stood for election.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Grime, pp. 42-43.

<sup>114</sup> Oldham, OLSL, Election poster, 'The Committee of the Working Men' 1847.

<sup>115</sup> *Manchester Times and Guardian* 14 March 1846.

<sup>116</sup> Grime, p. 65.

<sup>117</sup> Stenton, William Johnson Fox (1786-1864), preacher and politician, p. 213.

<sup>118</sup> Grime, p. 52.

The hustings were very violent and in the end the Riot Act was read and the military were called in.<sup>119</sup> The poll result showed that Fox topped the list with 723 votes, Duncroft the Tory came second with 692 votes, Cobbett got 624 votes and Fielden came last with 612 votes. It was to be Fielden's last action in parliamentary life. He bitterly criticised Holladay, Knott and their supporters at a dinner held in his honour just after the election. He blamed them for his and Cobbett's defeat but they replied that it was Cobbett's views that had brought defeat.<sup>120</sup> What made this conflict all the more important was that, at this point, Oldham had a Poor Law Board of Guardians imposed upon the town. Given the long history of opposition, it was a sign of the split that this imposition passed almost unnoticed. The Board had a majority of Tory magistrates as ex-officio members. Then the town achieved its Charter of Incorporation and it was in this atmosphere of recrimination that the first set of elections was held for the new council.<sup>121</sup> The radicals would have expected to gain control of the council but they were routed. The Tories gained control winning 18 out of the 24 seats. Holladay, Knott and Taylor all stood for election and all were defeated.<sup>122</sup> In the case of Oldham, Parliamentary elections had a major impact on the local elections.

From that point on the radical and liberal men of the town fought to regain control. Their efforts on the council will be seen later.<sup>123</sup> In parliamentary terms the next election was in August 1852, and there was no Fielden. The other three candidates stood again with Cobbett styling himself as a Liberal. Fox was defeated and Duncroft and Cobbett were elected, Duncroft with 957 votes and Cobbett 868. Fox gained 783 votes. That situation was short lived as in December of the same year another by-election was held when Duncroft died unexpectedly. The Tories quickly recruited J Heald, previously of Stockport. Fox stood again

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<sup>119</sup> Grime, p. 64.

<sup>120</sup> *Manchester Times* 1 December 1849.

<sup>121</sup> Oldham, OLSL, Charter of Incorporation 13 June 1849.

<sup>122</sup> County Borough of Oldham, *Jubilee Celebrations of the Charter of Incorporation 1849-1899*, (Oldham: 1899) p. 8.

<sup>123</sup> See Chapter Eight, p. 255.

and won with 895 votes to 783. At the following election of 1857, Cobbett and Fox stood again and a new candidate appeared for the Liberals. He was James Platt, a brother in the engineering firm and a very well known local man.<sup>124</sup> Fox was defeated with 898 votes and so Cobbett, (949 votes), and Platt, (934) votes, were elected. Cobbett was still calling himself a liberal but a lot of his support was coming from the Tory voters in an attempt to keep the liberals out. This too lasted only six months before James Platt was killed in a hunting accident.<sup>125</sup> Fox came back and was elected unopposed.

By 1859, it was another all Liberal contest on paper, with Cobbett, Fox and J. L. Hibbert. Fox got 1039 votes, Cobbett got 966 and Hibbert got 955. Again a by-election was necessary in 1862 when Fox resigned due to ill health. Hibbert was returned unopposed. There was more change by the general election of 1865. Cobbett was by now fully absorbed into the Tory party and stood as a Tory.<sup>126</sup> His partner was F. L. Spinks. Hibbert stood again and his partner was John Platt, older brother of James and a councillor and Mayor.<sup>127</sup> The Liberals won convincingly with Hibbert getting 1,105 votes and Platt gaining 1,076. Cobbett got 898 and Spinks 845. The same four candidates stood in 1868 under the system of the 1867 Reform Act. The outcome was the same as before with Hibbert getting 6,140 votes and Platt 6,122. The Tories had improved with Cobbett getting 6,116 votes and Spinks 6,084. The Liberals were firmly in control of the Parliamentary seat.

The impact of the parliamentary elections and politics on the local elections from 1847 was clear to see in Oldham. The fracture within the radical group that had dominated politics in the town since 1832 had a direct effect on the municipal elections and on the control of the town. These events coupled with the slow demise of Chartism after 1848 and the death of Holladay saw an end to any radical control of politics in the town. This decline was matched by

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<sup>124</sup> Stenton, *The Platt Family (1815 – 1930)*, Textile machinery manufacturers, p. 313.

<sup>125</sup> Pink and Beaver, p. 312.

<sup>126</sup> Pink and Beaver, p. 313.

<sup>127</sup> *OC* 1 February 1862.

the rise of a much more liberal control under the leadership of the Platt family. The only survivor in all this was William Knott who became a councillor, an Alderman and finally mayor in 1865.<sup>128</sup> He was not always popular but he did not back down.<sup>129</sup> He died in 1886 still professing his Chartist beliefs.<sup>130</sup>

The link between the two types of politics in Oldham is also clear with members of the local hierarchy moving over time from local to national politics in the persons of John Duncroft and the two Platt brothers. The same is true with the Akroyds and the Crossleys in Halifax. There the local control always stayed within the same group. In Rochdale it was the reverse with the local men at the centre of the national scene at the start with the Fentons and the Entwistle group. They were replaced by outsiders at national level and attention switched to the local bodies with Jacob Bright and Thomas Livsey.

In conclusion, it is clear that there were extensive links in each town between the parliamentary and municipal elections. From 1832 onwards the interest in the question of suffrage and representation was brought to a local level first of all by the general elections, the Board of Guardian elections, and then by the municipal ones. Over the period under study, party lines became much clearer as did forms of party organisation. Equally, those without the vote used all forms of pressure, including exclusive dealing, to influence the outcome in their favour. Elements of all these developments are to be found in all three towns to varying extents. In Halifax, given the social and economic nature of the town and its long standing Trustee system, the voting system tended to develop alongside the middle class control and apart from the elections of 1847, that control was hardly affected. In Rochdale, given there was only one MP, the impact was more marked over a longer period of time. Equally, the existence of a well developed non-electors organisation helped to keep the more radical

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<sup>128</sup> OC 11 November 1865.

<sup>129</sup> OC 13 November 1859.

<sup>130</sup> OC 20 August 1892.

section of the electorate in control. This was reflected in the nature of the first municipal elections and the council chosen. Finally in Oldham, the effect of parliamentary issues had a major impact on the future direction of control in Oldham, following the major upheaval of 1847. The radical group was split and this division was taken over into municipal elections the same year. It was another fifteen years before a liberal majority was secured on the council. Parliamentary elections help to explain the changes and nature of the earliest municipal elections but it is now necessary to examine the structures that existed before the councils came into being to see what underpinned these first councils.

## Chapter Four

## Vestries

The role of vestries in the development of municipal life in the nineteenth century has hardly been examined, and little has been uncovered of the part they played in the development of municipal government.<sup>1</sup> Apart from the work of W.E. Tate, first published in 1946,<sup>2</sup> and dealing mainly with the records, the major work is still that of Sydney and Beatrice Webb written in 1904.<sup>3</sup> Yet the vestry and its variants the open vestry, the closed vestry and the select vestry, formed the basis of all municipal governance outside of major boroughs and cities from the time of the Reformation. They were first formed in the fourteenth century, mainly as an ecclesiastical organisation which was based on the parish and took its name from the vestment room where it met. After the Reformation they became responsible for many areas of local life the most important of which was the relief of the poor. The second area of responsibility was roads. These two aspects formed the major link with the nineteenth century through the Poor Law board of guardians and the improvement commissioners.

By 1835 there were 15,600 vestries in England and Wales and they were responsible for spending nearly one fifth of the budget of the national government.<sup>4</sup> Areas they looked after included the church and burial grounds, parish cottages and the poorhouses, common lands and endowed charities, market crosses, pumps, pounds, whipping posts, stocks, cages, watch houses, weights and scales, clocks and fire engines. Put another way they were responsible for the maintenance of the church and its services, the keeping of the peace, the

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<sup>1</sup> Joanna Innes, *Inferior Politics: social problems and social policies in eighteenth century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) for the eighteenth century development.

<sup>2</sup> William E. Tate, *The Parish Chest: a study of the Records of Parochial Administration in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1946).

<sup>3</sup> Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *English Local Government from the Revolution to the Municipal Corporations Act (Vol. 2), The Manor and the Borough: Part One* (London: Longman Greene and Co., 1908). See also Josef Redlich and Francis W. Hirst, *The History of Local Government in England: Being a Reissue of Book 1 of Local Government in England* ed. by Bryan Keith Lucas, (London: Macmillan, 1958). The original was published in 1903.

<sup>4</sup> Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *English Local Government*, p. 485.

repression of vagrancy, the relief of destitution, the mending of roads, the suppression of nuisances, the destruction of vermin, and the support of the military. These were some of their tasks imposed by law.<sup>5</sup> Gradually, during the latter half of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century, many of these duties passed to other bodies, such as improvement commissioners, the Poor Law board of guardians and eventually municipal corporations. Nevertheless, vestries kept control of many functions throughout this period, not least the appointment of the overseer of the poor and his assistants.

The nature of the vestry differed from locality to locality, as did the terms used to describe the different organisations. At the core was the vestry meeting, the annual meeting of the rate paying inhabitants to select new officers and often to agree a new rate of tax. This was also referred to as the open vestry and it used to meet around Easter time. There was then the select or closed vestry. These also differed in nature. Some were formed by election of members at the annual vestry meeting; others were formed from co-option by the existing members and became a sort of closed shop. The key to membership was the ownership or renting of property and the paying of rates. Again the level of this ownership or renting differed from place to place. The Anglican incumbent was, ex-officio, a member of the vestry and his involvement depended very much on the individual. This role potentially gave clergy a very important power base in local government, as will be seen. The other aspect of significance is the use of townships as part of the parish to sub-divide the administration of the system and to offer manageable communication with the people.

In an article on Halifax written in 1929, J.W. Houseman set out the structure of the parish, and in particular the roles of the leading officers.<sup>6</sup> His analysis applies equally well to both Rochdale and Oldham. There were three major sources of power. The first were the

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<sup>5</sup> Tate, pp. 13-25.

<sup>6</sup> J. W. Houseman, *The Development of Local Government in the Parish of Halifax 1760-1848*, THAS, (1929), 117-209.

Justices of the Peace appointed by the Crown. Then there was the incumbent who was himself often a magistrate. Finally there was the lord of the manor whose main role was to appoint the constables. Under them were four main sets of officials: the churchwardens, the overseers of the poor, the constable and the surveyor. In Halifax the outlying chapelries had their own officials but all the churchwardens met together to carry out parish business and to set the parish rates.

The churchwardens were responsible for the administration of the parish, the upkeep of the church and the running of the services, the allocation of seats within the church, moral delinquency in the parish and working with the overseer to relieve distress for the poor. Originally they were chosen by the incumbent at a vestry meeting every Palm Sunday, with the outlying townships chosen by the curate alone. There were two wardens, one known as the vicar's warden and chosen by him, the other known as the town warden and chosen by the vestry meeting. From 1830 onwards they were elected by the vestry meeting in Halifax and in the outlying townships. Rochdale and Oldham worked in a similar way with members chosen within the townships to sit on the vestry meetings.

The overseer had the following tasks; to grant relief to the poor either as a payment or with a place in the poor house; to inquire about the right to settlement in the parish or seek a certificate of settlement; to pay out the allowances for the wives and children of the militia; to try to get single men to take the places of married men in the militia, as this had no cost; to attend the Quarter Sessions at times of assessments for rates; to apprentice the pauper children to employers and keep checks on the masters, and finally to run the poorhouse and assess people for rates under the office of the JPs. All this work was unpaid which perhaps explains why most people only held the post for one year or two at the most. The overseers were chosen officially by the magistrates, but these posts had usually been sorted beforehand by a meeting of the leading inhabitants. They had to work with the churchwardens to agree

the rates. The constable however was a paid man. He was the magistrates' man with the duty to preserve law and order. As he was paid he had to render his accounts for audit annually to the vestry, usually in September. Finally there was the surveyor. He was responsible for the maintenance and repair of the roads. He called in the gangs of workers or collected the commutation fee that had to be paid to avoid such work. He was also responsible for the cutting of hedges and draining the ditches.

The three towns studied here exhibit all the variations of these systems, primarily because they were either very large parishes or formed part of large parishes. Halifax was one of the largest parishes in England covering over sixty square miles of the West Riding of Yorkshire.<sup>7</sup> The parish had three subdivisions in place by 1750. There was Halifax which had nine townships, the chapelry of Elland which also had nine townships, and finally the chapelry of Heptonstall with five townships. Rochdale too was large, illustrated by its division into thirty three separate parishes by the Bishop of Manchester after 1880 when the Reverend Molesworth died.<sup>8</sup> It had eight townships. Oldham, large in its own right was a township and also a chapelry within the much bigger Parish of Prestwich with which it enjoyed a chequered relationship as it sought to establish itself as a separate parish.<sup>9</sup> Three further townships were added in 1831 as part of the drive to get two seats in Parliament. A further anomaly was the inclusion of Saddleworth in the parish of Rochdale even though it was between the borders of Halifax and Oldham parishes.<sup>10</sup>

The parish of Halifax lay within the jurisdiction of the Archbishop of York and had at one time been in the control of the monks of Lewes Priory in Sussex. The records for its vestry are all in one volume consisting mainly of a record of those who were present at its meetings,

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<sup>7</sup> John A. Hargreaves, *Halifax* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> Keith B. Bamford 'The Reverend Dr. J. E. N. Molesworth Vicar of Rochdale 1839-1877', *Transactions of the Historical Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, 141 (1991), 261-88.

<sup>9</sup> George Perry-Gore, *Ancient Parochial Chapelry* (Oldham: W.E. Clegg, 1906).

<sup>10</sup> PP 1812 (316) House of Commons Order Papers Census Abstracts and Returns for Rochdale, p. 157.

the major appointments made and some record of the decisions taken. They are not detailed in the way the poor law records are detailed. Simply to realise that one volume for Halifax covers nearly eighty four years is to see the lightness of these accounts. Equally, as over half the meetings recorded for Halifax before 1847 deal with the financial accounts of the major post holders, it is clear that they offer only a glimpse of what went on. There are few figures given, only an acceptance of the accounts themselves.<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps the single most contentious issue faced by the Halifax vestry and these officials was that of the rates. It needs to be borne in mind that there were two rates set by the vestry. The first was the rate to meet the cost of the poor, either through the poorhouse, or by outdoor relief. This was rarely contentious. There were requests for re-valuations from time to time and requests for fresh individual assessments due to changed circumstances. Towards the end of the life of the Trustees there were problems between them and the new council. In March 1852, there was a resolution that 'payment out of the Poor rate for Municipal purposes was objectionable in principle and that the Council should be required by law to do their own rates'.<sup>12</sup> A further resolution in 1853 showed that the problem had not been resolved. It stated that 'there would be great and insuperable legal difficulties if rates collected through the overseers were to be used for Corporation purposes'. They decided unanimously to petition the House of Lords to make the council do their own collecting.<sup>13</sup>

There was considerable opposition however to paying rates to the Church of England as there were a large number of non-conformists in Halifax. Hargreaves sums up the struggle as follows: 'What was really taking place is a struggle for freedom from contributing to the upkeep of a Church to which they did not belong'.<sup>14</sup> The Religious Census of 1851 showed that whilst 44% of the population were listed as church goers, only 17% of the population were

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<sup>11</sup> Wakefield, WYAS, Halifax Parish Vestry Minute Book (HPVM) 1816-1899: D 53/6/1.

<sup>12</sup> HPVM 11 March 1852.

<sup>13</sup> HPVM 23 January 1853.

<sup>14</sup> Hargreaves, *Halifax*, p. 179.

Anglican and an equal number belonged to the Wesleyan- Methodist group of churches.<sup>15</sup> In 1825, the meeting in Northowram, one of the Halifax townships, refused to pay the church rates. This action was led by the large number of non-conformists in that township.<sup>16</sup> In the parliamentary returns of 1852, it notes that Halifax had set eight rates between 1831 and 1852, and two were refused, in 1836 and 1842. It then adds that 'since 1842, no Church rate has been forced on account of the great opposition experienced'.<sup>17</sup>

There is no evidence for the length of opposition seen in Rochdale but it is clear that church rates were not popular. Houseman identifies a specific cost that was rejected, that of the visitation costs for either the Archbishop or his assistants. It was clearly felt that this should be paid by the vicar himself.<sup>18</sup> The Census of 1851 caused considerable heart searching in the Anglican community in Halifax.<sup>19</sup> The vicar also began to look at the number of churches and a major programme of church building began, as it did in Rochdale, and to a much smaller extent in Oldham.

Over time many of these vestry functions were taken over by other bodies. Much of the surveyors' work went to the Trustees, and the work with the poor went to the Board of Guardians. Equally with the creation of a municipal corporation in 1849 there was a much reduced role for the vestry. This is reflected in the number of meetings:<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *PP 1853 (89) Census of Great Britain: Religious Worship*, p. 404. For a fuller explanation of the difficulties with these statistics, see Chapter One, p. 6.

<sup>16</sup> John A. Hargreaves, 'The Church of England in later Victorian Halifax 1852-1914', *THAS*, (1991), 27-30.

<sup>17</sup> *PP 1852 (38) Abstract Return from each Parliamentary Borough for the number of Church rates and the amount paid 1833-51*, p. 23.

<sup>18</sup> Houseman, p. 145 and p. 173.

<sup>19</sup> Hargreaves, 'The Church of England', *THAS*, p. 28.

<sup>20</sup> Abstracts from HPVM, 1816-1899.

1821-1830	92
1831-1840	94
1841-1850	56
1951-1860	21
1861-1870	14

In the thirty years before the establishment of the council there were 274 meetings averaging nine a year. In the twenty years after that there were thirty five meetings averaging two a year. The records do not state the total number of people who were present so no attempt can be made to assess the level of involvement. Nevertheless, they were major meetings of the town's leading citizens, with 386 different office holders attending between 1821 and 1849. Given the onerous nature of the posts, people did not hold office for long so there were a large number of wardens, but the pattern seems to be that having been chosen by the vicar to be church warden for a year, you were then chosen as the vestry warden for a further year, and the two post holders worked in tandem. After the establishment of the Town Council, this rapid turnover did decline. For example, Thomas Turley retired in 1869 after eleven years continuous service as the vicar's warden.<sup>21</sup> During this whole period Dr. Charles Musgrave was the vicar of Halifax. He was in post from 1827 till his death in 1875.<sup>22</sup> During that time he opened 33 new churches, and started work on restoring the parish church. It seems from the records that he was fairly popular with references to his health and well being, and he seems to have been a popular chair of the meetings.<sup>23</sup> He was present at over 50 meetings during that time.

It is important at this stage to look carefully at the nature of the membership of the vestry. The one major feature that separated Halifax from the other two towns was the overall make-up of its civic committees. By and large, there is little or no evidence of any radical

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<sup>21</sup> HPVM, 1859-69.

<sup>22</sup> Hargreaves, *THAS*, p. 27.

<sup>23</sup> Hargreaves, *THAS*, p. 43.

element being present in these groups. It is impossible to find any Chartists or any radical employers in the lists.<sup>24</sup> One factor in this may be the very early establishment of an improvement commission. Halifax got its first Act in 1762, whereas both Rochdale and Oldham did not get theirs till the eighteen twenties.<sup>25</sup> This was over sixty years later, after the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars and the upheaval caused by Peterloo. The issue of reform was very much in the air in the eighteen twenties and the spread of ideas was much more extensive.

When the Halifax Town Trustees were established the Act named the first 240 members and a further 80 were added in 1768.<sup>26</sup> They were chosen, not elected (though this did come in 1823). These people were the bedrock of the middle class in Halifax, the mill owners and the professions such as lawyers and doctors. Equally the bankers such as the Rawson family and the leaders of the wool trade, the Akroyds and the Crossleys, tended to dominate the Trustees and the vestry.<sup>27</sup> Later on in the eighteen forties these same families were to dominate the opposition to factory reform and the support for the Anti-Corn Law League.<sup>28</sup> Another factor may be the size of industrial enterprises in Halifax which will be examined later. They tended to be larger and employ more workers than the industries of the other two towns, thus giving their owners much greater political leverage in the area. As has already been stated, the parliamentary politics of Halifax tend to reflect this in the long service of Charles Wood as MP and, apart from a couple of occasions in the early eighteen forties, in the very staid nature of the election campaigns.<sup>29</sup> Even at the end of the eighteen forties when

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<sup>24</sup> G. R. Dalby, 'The Chartist Movement in Halifax and District', *THAS* (1956), p. 93.

<sup>25</sup> Halifax, HRL, Local Government Act, 1762, Reference Box 1.

<sup>26</sup> Halifax, WYAS, Halifax Trustees Minute Books (HTM) 1780-1793, HXM 36.

<sup>27</sup> HPVM 1830-1842.

<sup>28</sup> HACLL HAS/B 11/1.

<sup>29</sup> J. A. Jowett, 'Parliamentary Politics in Halifax 1832-1847', *Northern History* Vol. XII (1976), 172-190.

more radical candidates stood for the parliamentary seat, there were very few of their supporters on the major bodies running the town.<sup>30</sup>

The records do not always show who was in the chair, and Musgrave himself, though present on thirty three occasions is only shown as chair for fourteen of them.<sup>31</sup> The office of chair was significant as was shown in Chapter One. Seventeen meetings were not quorate, in fact no one attended, and some of the meetings were for the committee appointed to examine the accounts. The other leading figures to attend were key figures in the town. One of the most interesting was John Akroyd, head of the large woollen firm. He was chosen as the vicar's churchwarden in 1820, but he belonged to the Wesleyan Methodists. Nevertheless he accepted the appointment and for his time of office attended the Anglican Church for the major events.<sup>32</sup> His son Edward, later the MP, moved completely from Methodism to the Church of England and later helped to create and restore their churches.<sup>33</sup> This does underline that it was not necessary to be a worshipping member of the Church of England to hold parish office, and these offices were seen as for the whole parish, regardless of religious affiliation.

Of the top twenty members ranked by attendance six were gentlemen, independent of trade and a further four were engaged as manufacturers in the woollen trade. Four more were food suppliers and there was an accountant, a legal officer and a doctor.<sup>34</sup> Of these, four are worthy of note. The first was Charles Whiteley, treasurer to the magistrates, the courts and a solicitor. He attended over sixty meetings and was very active on the committees. He was also a major figure in the work of the Trustees. Another man very involved in both organisations was Peter Holden, always referred to in the minutes as P.K. Holden. He was a bookseller, and attended over fifty meetings and very many more for the Trustees. William Hoyland was a

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<sup>30</sup> See Toshihiko Iwama, 'The Middle Class in Halifax 1780-1850', PhD Thesis, University of Leeds (2003) for fuller details.

<sup>31</sup> HPVM 23 March 1854.

<sup>32</sup> Hargreaves, *THAS*, p.29.

<sup>33</sup> Hargreaves, *THAS*, p.29.

<sup>34</sup> HPVM 1816-1899.

wool manufacturer who also attended over fifty meetings, and the final person was John Haigh, a gentleman, who had very little to do with the Trustees. With the outstanding exception of John Jackson, the pattern that emerges was that the gentlemen were very involved in the work of the vestry but not as concerned with the Trustees.<sup>35</sup>

Overall, the minutes show that the work of the vestry formed a basis underlying the work of municipal government in Halifax. Once other organisations were set up, such as the vestry and the board of guardians, the frequency of meetings reduced but the same social mix continued to support the work. It was a constant presence, setting the poor law rate and appointing the overseers and their assistants throughout the period of this study. This gave them a key role later on in the struggles with the Poor Law Commissioners, as will be seen. The long service of the Reverend Musgrave also helped to give solidity to the work that was not always present in the other two towns. Overtly political comment was rare, so the statement approved on February 25<sup>th</sup> 1841 is worthy of note. The vestry expressed its abhorrence at the work house test and stated: 'Poverty is punished as a crime, and the Divine Law is violated by the separation of husband and wife and of parent and children'. It went on to seek a rejection of the Act of 1834, the high rates that were needed and the lack of relief for the able bodied.<sup>36</sup>

Two other areas are of interest. The vestry was involved in the debate over the police, as were the Trustees. They debated the issue in 1835 and were not minded to take it further. In 1836, they decided to keep the control within the town, and in September 1840 they were adamant that there was no need for a county constabulary and that they would run their own affairs with their own money.<sup>37</sup> The West Riding County Constabulary was not established till 1856.<sup>38</sup> An analysis of police forces run under local control between 1836 and 1839 shows that

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<sup>35</sup> See Chapter Five, p. 117.

<sup>36</sup> HPVM 25 February 1841.

<sup>37</sup> HPVM 3 September 1840.

<sup>38</sup> David Philips and Robert D. Storch, *Policing Provincial England, 1829-1856: The Politics of Reform* (London: Leicester University Press, 1999), p. 206.

Halifax had two officers under the control of the vestry and paid for by voluntary subscription.<sup>39</sup> The other area of spending that they were concerned about was health. Again this was a matter for the trustees but the vestry, as early as 1832, passed a resolution stating that there should be no more money given to health matters.<sup>40</sup>

Oldham presented a very different picture. First of all, it was not the main town of the parish. That was Prestwich, seven miles further west and by the nineteenth century much smaller.<sup>41</sup> The whole area was part of the Diocese of Chester till the reforms of 1847 placed them in the newly created Diocese of Manchester, under the leadership of Bishop James Lee.<sup>42</sup> Oldham was always seeking to gain its independence from the wider parish, and the names given to the parish indicate this. From its foundation in the fourteenth century it was known as Prestwich, but in the eighteenth century, it was known as Prestwich cum Oldham.<sup>43</sup> The 1821 Census record listed the parish as Oldham cum Prestwich but it was not till the reforms of 1847 that it gained some separation.<sup>44</sup> In area the whole parish was only 22,022 acres and Oldham was 12,039 acres, much smaller than Rochdale and only one-seventh of the size of Halifax.<sup>45</sup> Successive Oldham vicars sought to establish their independence, not least by having independence in the appointment of churchwardens. Strangely, this was not an independence they were to allow to the chapelries around them as they too sought freedom. The records given by Butterworth show that the vicars were quite prepared to ignore vestry appointments, either by simply imposing their own choice or, if challenged, using the courts of the Bishop of Chester to get their way.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Philips and Storch, p. 243.

<sup>40</sup> HPVM 27 September 1832.

<sup>41</sup> PP 1812 (316) House of Commons Order Papers, Census Abstracts and Returns for Oldham, p.157.

<sup>42</sup> William Farrer and J. Brownbill, eds, *The Victoria History of the County of Lancashire* Vol. 5 (London: Constable and Co., 1911), p. 70.

<sup>43</sup> Perry-Gore, p. 5.

<sup>44</sup> PP 1822 (8) House of Commons Order Paper, Census Returns p. 157.

<sup>45</sup> Edward Baines, *The History of the County Palatine of the Duchy of Lancashire*, (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1868), P. 453.

<sup>46</sup> OBP D: But/ F 18, 55, 3 May 1838.

The records for Oldham are mixed. There are two sets of vestry minutes, one for St Mary's, the parish church, and the other for St Peter's, the second Anglican church of the town. It is very clear from the nature of the St Peter's records that it was a form of chapel of ease.<sup>47</sup> The vestry met once a year, minutes were brief and the officers held posts for long periods. In fact between 1845 and 1862, a period of fifteen years, the same two men, James Lees and James Nolan, held the office of wardens.<sup>48</sup> Very few records exist for any other chapels outside of Oldham itself. The records for the Oldham vestry run from March 1841 till 1895 in the minute book but there is a marked deterioration in the accuracy and quality of the minutes after 1854.<sup>49</sup> The development of the borough council after 1847 and the work of the board of guardians meant a reduced function for the vestry and after 1860 councillors attended the vestry meetings but the records are fragmented and incomplete. Equally, the correspondence of the board of guardians with the Poor Law Commissioners in London has not survived and records such as these do throw light on the work of the vestry in a town, especially in respect of its work with the poor.<sup>50</sup>

Oldham itself was a much more radical place than Halifax. Many of the leading people were not Anglican. One radical leader, James Holladay, was a minister and preacher to a Methodist chapel in Slaithwaite, near Huddersfield.<sup>51</sup> The 1851 census shows that there was a smaller religious attendance than either Halifax or Rochdale. The figures for the wider area of the parliamentary borough included Crompton, Royton and Chadderton.<sup>52</sup> Only 34% of the population of 80,788 were listed as attending church, and of these 16% were listed as Anglican, a similar percentage to Halifax. Obviously given the great difference in the size of the population there were only sixty six churches identified in Oldham as opposed to 126 in

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<sup>47</sup> Oldham, OLSL, St. Peters Vestry Minutes 1836-1867.

<sup>48</sup> St Peter's Vestry Minutes 1847-62.

<sup>49</sup> Oldham, OLSL, St. Mary's Vestry Minutes (OSMVM) 1841-1895.

<sup>50</sup> Jeremy Gibson, and Colin Rogers, *Poor Law Union Records, Vol. 2 The Midlands and Northern England* (Bury: Family History Partnership, 2008), p. 29.

<sup>51</sup> Obituary of James Holladay *Huddersfield Chronicle and West Yorkshire Advertiser*, 2 October 1852.

<sup>52</sup> PP 1853 (89) Census of Great Britain: Religious Worship, p. 398.

Halifax. The same picture emerges for the other denominations with the Methodist group accounting for 10% of the population. The other factor to emerge is that the spread of churches is greater with fifteen other groups identified as opposed to only ten in Halifax.<sup>53</sup>

The issue of church rates was as contentious as in Halifax. The 1852 survey showed that three areas gave returns for church rates. In Royton, only the seat holders contributed. In Crompton, eight rates were set between 1831 and 1851. No figures are given for the rates themselves but two were refused in 1836 and in 1842. The report then concludes that 'since 1842, no church rate has been forced on account of the great opposition experienced'. For Oldham itself, the record shows that no rates were set.<sup>54</sup> The rates for the poor law were set and, as with Halifax, there were the revaluations and the personal requests for a fresh figure as a result of changes. The accounts for the constables and the overseers were checked annually. An improvement commission was set up in 1827, known as the Police Commission. It took the surveyor's work from the vestry. The role of this commission then passed into the work of the council.

The records for the period 1841 to 1850 show a total of twenty six meetings and most years have a regular pattern of an April meeting and an October meeting to approve the accounts.<sup>55</sup> In that period eighty three members are listed in the records as involved, but there were no full lists of those present. The list does include some of the leading radicals such as Alexander Taylor who was an Anglican and William Knott who was a Unitarian, as well as Holladay. As with Halifax, the vestry was seen as being much wider than the Anglican Church. One choice of warden was Richard Stump who was, for a long time, the vicar's choice. He was a gentleman yet he appears in Foster's list of radicals in Oldham.<sup>56</sup> There is evidence within the

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<sup>53</sup> *PP 1853 (89) Census of Great Britain: Religious Worship.*

<sup>54</sup> *PP 1852 (38) Abstract Return from each Parliamentary Borough for the number of Church rates and the amount paid 1833-51, p. 43.*

<sup>55</sup> *OSMVM 1841-1850.*

<sup>56</sup> John Foster, *Class Struggle*, pp. 154-159. See Chapter Seven, pp. 208-215.

minutes of a select vestry to run affairs, especially relating to the poor, though no records of the meetings of this group remain.<sup>57</sup> Like Halifax, there were sometimes two lists of members put forward and a vote taken on the group as a whole, as on 30 September 1843.<sup>58</sup> One list contained E. A. Wright a leading conservative and stationer whilst the other list contained James Holladay, a cotton spinner, and Joseph L. Quarmby, a schoolmaster, both leading radicals. The radical group won the vote. Contained within these records are the minutes of the meetings of the Chapelry, where opposition to the rule of the vicar is shown. On 19 March 1842 Abraham Clough and John Heap object to the choice of wardens on behalf of Crompton and Royton. The curate, the Reverend Mills, ignored their objections.<sup>59</sup> On 3 April 1844, at a meeting chaired by the Reverend Lowe, John Lees was named as warden. Joshua Milne objected and named James Cheetham and Abraham Crompton as the wardens for Crompton. The vicar refused to agree and his original choice stood.<sup>60</sup> The striking oddity was the chairmanship in November 1846 of Samuel Barker. He could not write and had to make his mark, the only occasion this was found during the research for this study.<sup>61</sup> A further interesting case was that of the meeting of 1 April 1841. It had to be held outside the church as the vicar locked the church to prevent them entering. The previous meeting on 8 March had a lot of Chartists present and there were disputes over the select vestry membership.<sup>62</sup>

An analysis of the membership of the vestry does show a marked difference from that of Halifax. There were very few gentlemen identified and, whilst cotton trade does account for the largest group on the list, out of eighty two, they only make up twenty one or about a quarter. Eighteen are not easy to identify, but the rest are shopkeepers, victuallers, bookkeepers, clog makers and hatters. Only ten appear on Foster's list of employers, compiled

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<sup>57</sup> OSMVM 30 March 1842.

<sup>58</sup> OSMVM 30 September 1843.

<sup>59</sup> OSMVM 19 March 1842.

<sup>60</sup> OSMVM 3 April 1844.

<sup>61</sup> OSMVM 12 November 1845.

<sup>62</sup> OBP 8 March and 1 April 1841.

to show the leading figures within Oldham.<sup>63</sup> Many of these people were independent men, their own masters and answerable to no other master. This gave them a form of freedom, but they were still running small enterprises, which fitted in with the manufacturing picture of Oldham seen in the earlier chapter. Like Halifax, there were issues over the rates, but in Oldham it was over the costs of the military. Butterworth recorded a very long debate over the cost of the soldiers and the constables used to quell the riots of 1834, the result of a cotton workers' dispute over pay.<sup>64</sup> In April 1844, the vestry refused to meet the cost of new barracks.<sup>65</sup> Unlike Halifax, the police were clearly the responsibility of the Police Commissioners. Philips and Storch show that there were ten fully paid constables set up by the Commission.<sup>66</sup>

The decline of the functions of the vestry arose because of the events of 1847. Apart from the major upheaval in the town over the parliamentary election, there was the final imposition of a Poor Law board of guardians, and the first elections for the new town council. Both these bodies took functions from the vestry and as such, it seems it was no longer considered as important. We have no way of knowing what role it played after these dates as there are no records and attention moved to the work of the council and of the board. The vestry seemed to be far more at odds within itself than the Halifax one did and there were real tensions with the outlying areas of Crompton and Royton which often included Chadderton for church purposes. The vicars were not popular as Butterworth showed and, apart from selecting the wardens, they did not seem to have a great interest in the town.<sup>67</sup> The other factor was that in the period under study there were four vicars. They were John Fallowfield (1818-42), most of whose work was covered by Edwin Butterworth; Thomas Lowe (1842-61) who was absent or non-resident for a considerable part of his tenure; David Alexander (1861-

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<sup>63</sup> Foster, *Class Struggle*, pp. 196-198.

<sup>64</sup> OBP 21 and 27 June 1834.

<sup>65</sup> OSMVM 3 April 1844.

<sup>66</sup> Philips and Storch, *Policing Provincial England*, p. 240.

<sup>67</sup> OBP 3 March 1838.

64) and William Walters (1864-73).<sup>68</sup> It is possible that the fragmentary nature of this provision and the constant battles to be independent of Prestwich may have contributed to the clergy's lack of involvement in the town.

The same cannot be said of the vicars of Rochdale, though their interest was often for very selective circumstances and to enhance their own power base. There were two vicars in this period and neither was popular. The first was the Reverend Hey, already described in Chapter Three.<sup>69</sup> None of this made him any more popular in Rochdale which had a growing group of radical townsmen, led by James Taylor, a Unitarian, and the Bright family who were Quakers. The central row during his tenure was over church rates. Hey was succeeded by the Reverend John Edward Nassau Molesworth, personal chaplain to the Archbishop of Canterbury.<sup>70</sup> He was vicar till 1877, a high Anglican and a high Tory. He fought constant battles against the growing number of civil organisations, not least the improvement commission, the council, the Poor Law board of guardians and the vestries themselves. The rows were over church rates (as it was with Hey), cemeteries, charities and land. The land question was centred on glebe land and new roads within the town. It was to be expected that there would be opposition from the non-conformists, especially in the person of John Bright, but the main opposition to Molesworth came from a member of his own congregation. Thomas Livsey was a blacksmith turned cotton dealer a Chartist and a major opponent of the new Poor Law.<sup>71</sup> He was baptised and married in the parish church and was not only a churchwarden but also a sidesman. Their rows were frequent, personal and on one occasion, physical.<sup>72</sup> They did reach an understanding in the end however when Molesworth was one of

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<sup>68</sup> Perry-Gore, pp. 83-84.

<sup>69</sup> See Chapter Three, p. 68.

<sup>70</sup> Keith Bamford, Rev. Dr. Molesworth, p.270.

<sup>71</sup> John Cole, *Conflict and Cooperation*, pp. 27-28.

<sup>72</sup> *Daily News* (London) 4 July 1846.

the last people to visit Livsey before his death and played a major role in his funeral arrangements.<sup>73</sup>

Rochdale was a very large parish, with the additional peculiar feature of incorporating Saddleworth. The latter was included as part of the parish, yet it lay to the east, between the parishes of both Prestwich- cum-Oldham and Halifax.<sup>74</sup> Under the Poor Law, Butterworth recorded that there were discussions to include it as part of the Oldham union, but the Assistant Commissioner, Alfred Power, felt this would make Oldham too big so it was put in its own Union.<sup>75</sup> For census purposes it was always included as part of Rochdale. The total area of the parish was 58,620 acres but if Saddleworth was removed this was cut to 41,828 acres.<sup>76</sup> Whilst this was only half the size of Halifax, it was three times the size of Oldham. It retained its identity, as its Parliamentary boundaries were the same as its municipal ones, unlike the other two towns which had larger Parliamentary boundaries than the town ones.<sup>77</sup>

The church rate survey of 1852 shows an interesting picture.<sup>78</sup> The areas are listed by the Anglican Church. St Clements represented Spotland and it shows that in 1835 the churchwardens agreed to be responsible for the upkeep of the church for a period of twenty years and as that was till 1855, the time had not elapsed. Smallbridge represented Wardleworth and it was recorded that no rates were set. Rochdale was St Chad's the Parish Church, which was in the Castleton district. Here the picture was slightly more complicated. The records show that five rates were set, three at 1/2d and two at 1d. It then records that eight rates were refused, one at 14d or 1/2d was not collected and then five at 1/2d, one at 1d and one at 2d were all refused. The entry then concludes by recording that five rates were refused after a poll had been taken. Sadly, there are no dates to identify when this happened.

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<sup>73</sup> RO 30 January 1864.

<sup>74</sup> PP 1812 (316) House of Commons Order Papers, Census Abstracts and Returns for Rochdale, p. 157.

<sup>75</sup> OBP 10 December 1836.

<sup>76</sup> OBP November 1836, Note 40.

<sup>77</sup> PP 1843 (496) House of Commons Order Papers, Census Abstracts and Returns for Rochdale, p. 147.

<sup>78</sup> PP 1852 (38) Abstract Return from each Parliamentary Borough for the number of Church rates and the amount paid 1833-51, p. 43.

What is clear, and was outlined by William Robertson a local chronicler in the eighteenthies, was the opposition within the town to these rates.<sup>79</sup> The first attempt by Hey in 1835 led to churchwardens summoning men and attempting to send bailiffs to seize property of people who had not paid the rates. It is interesting to note that the vestry records show two attempts by Hey to get his poor law rates reduced. He is not recorded as attending the meetings but he wrote to the committee on 12 January 1830 and on 19 May of the same year. On both occasions the vestry totally rejected his case. The case against the non-payers went all the way to the senior civil court in Yorkshire where the men were cleared. Then in 1839 came the first of two attempts to set a new rate, led by Hey. Under pressure from the church supporters he reluctantly agreed to hold a poll or ballot. This was open for five days which was increased to six when it was clear that the church party were losing. This secured the vote but the outcry was even louder within the town to abolish the rates altogether. Then Hey died and Molesworth, the new vicar, tried a new ballot. The anti-rate party won the ballot, but Molesworth ignored the result and called for another ballot. He attempted to pack the church with his supporters, but Livsey found out and packed it with anti-rate men. The result was chaos. The meeting spilled over into the church graveyard and the vicar, Livsey and John Bright addressed the crowd standing on tombstones. The Tory magistrates, led by Clement Royds, called out the militia and the Liberal magistrates, led by Henry Kelsall and William Chadwick, sent them away. The vicar declared that he had won and, in one of his earliest pieces of writing, John Bright set out to show that not only did he not win, but also that he cheated to get any sort of result.<sup>80</sup> Eventually Molesworth recognised the strength of feeling and no rate was collected. He however remained a strong supporter of the principle, and joined later campaigns to keep the rate up to their abolition in 1867.

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<sup>79</sup> William Robertson, *The Social and Political History of Rochdale* (Rochdale, 1877), p. 30.

<sup>80</sup> Rochdale, RLSL, John Bright, Address to the Inhabitants of the Parish of Rochdale on the late Church Rate Contest (Manchester Courier, 1840) RCHA/9/12/4.

The vestries meanwhile went about their job of supporting the poor. Originally, the parish had five townships Castleton, Spotland, Butterworth, Wuerdle and Wardle and finally Blatchinworth and Calderbrook. All five had poorhouses, but gradually during the eighteenth and early thirties, the number of townships shrank to three major ones Castleton, Spotland and Wardleworth. Each of these areas had a vestry but only the records for Castleton and Spotland survive.<sup>81</sup> The parish churchwardens and sidesmen were chosen every year by the old townships as follows: Castleton, Butterworth and Spotland chose two members each, Wardleworth, Littleborough, Todmorden and Wuerdle and Wardle each chose one. There are no records of any vestry meetings for the whole parish. The only matter that was organised across the whole parish was the police. There are no records of the vestry having any dealings with this matter. Philips and Storch show a captain and a night watch in their analysis, but also state that the police came under the Improvement Act of 1827.<sup>82</sup> Everything was conducted at the township level. This is a major difference to the other two towns that had central vestry meetings. Rochdale was split and this gave the opportunity for two sets of members to be involved in the direction of the parish. This was to cause problems later as there were two organisations dealing with the Poor Law board, and two sets of poor houses. The Poor Law Commissioners reports also show returns coming in from both Wardleworth and Whitworth, but there are no records at a local level.<sup>83</sup> Whitworth was part of Spotland vestry, but Wardleworth was separate.

The Spotland minutes are much briefer than Castleton's. They cover only twenty three years and, of these, there are no records for eight. The vestry ceased to function after 1846. The main people attending were Edward Grindrod who was present for 128 meetings and was chair nineteen times. Samuel Hoyle and John Shepherd attended ninety eight and ninety three

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<sup>81</sup> Spotland Township Select Vestry Minutes (RSSVM) 1819-45 LA/Z/1/5/3-7 and CBR 3/4-5. Castleton Select Vestry Minutes (RCVSM) 1837-67 CBR/3/1-2 RLSL.

<sup>82</sup> Philips and Storch, *Policing Provincial England*, p. 241.

<sup>83</sup> TNA, Poor Law Commissioners, Correspondence for Rochdale MH: 12 6184-6.

times respectively.<sup>84</sup> They expressed strong opposition to the new Poor Law in January 1837.

This was a joint meeting with the vestries of Castleton and Wardleworth where it was resolved that:

It is the unanimous opinion of this meeting that interference of the Poor Law Commission in the foundation of a Union in the Parish of Rochdale is unnecessary in as much as the poor of the respective townships are well and economically provided for, the rates moderate and the Leypayers satisfied with the present arrangements.<sup>85</sup>

The major issue that the vestry dealt with was membership of the Rochdale Poor Law Union. Spotland wanted to be set up as a separate union. The township was the largest in area in the Rochdale Union, but much of the land was moorland and, in terms of population, it was much smaller than Castleton. The vestry tried three times, in February 1846, March 1848 and finally in February 1858, to be separated from Rochdale.<sup>86</sup> It is clear from the commissioners' records that a lot of time and effort went into these requests. The third time the appeal was accompanied by three large maps, one equivalent to twenty five sheets of A4 paper, trying to show that other areas the size of Spotland were accepted as Poor Law Unions.<sup>87</sup> On the second and third occasions the Board of Guardians supported the request and even the MP of that time, Sir Alexander Ramsay, went to support the case.<sup>88</sup> Each time the case was rejected. On the first occasion it was on the grounds of cost, and that the needs of the poor were being adequately met. On the second occasion Alfred Austin gave a lengthy report as to why it should be rejected, again on cost grounds.<sup>89</sup> It was the same response the third time. Given the nature of the Poor Law Commissioners and the way the Unions were set up, it was extremely optimistic of Spotland and extremely unlikely they would succeed: but this episode underlines

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<sup>84</sup> RSSVM 1842-45.

<sup>85</sup> RSSVM 6 January 1837.

<sup>86</sup> *TNA*, Poor Law Commissioners Correspondence MH 12/6176, February 1846, 12/6177, March 1848 and 12/6180, February 1858.

<sup>87</sup> *TNA*, Poor Law Commissioners MH 12/6180 February 1858.

<sup>88</sup> *TNA*, Poor Law Commissioners MH 12/6180 May 1858.

<sup>89</sup> *TNA*, Poor Law Commissioners MH 12/6177 22 June 1848.

the enduring tenacity of sub-parochial localities against the centralising tendencies of the new Poor Law.

Castleton has much more extensive records running continuously from 1826 till 1845, then from 1846 till 1867 with nine years where no names of those attending are given, but reports of the meeting exist.<sup>90</sup> The attendance was dominated by the Dania family. James attended 131 times, thirty four as chair. His son John attended 115 times, thirteen as chair. Other prominent figures were John Meadowcroft with 123, twenty five as chair, James Butterworth with ninety three, thirteen as chair and Thomas Livsey with eighty, nineteen as chair.<sup>91</sup> The issue of the church rate has already been explored and the other major area of concern was the poor and from 1833 onwards, the implementation of the new Poor Law. The Dania family and Livsey were opposed to the new law, but wanted to resist it within the law and not get drawn into any illegal activity. They would not approve a new workhouse in 1843 as this would do the work of the Commissioners.<sup>92</sup>

In this they were helped by the character of the magistrates in Rochdale. In particular there were two brothers, Thomas and William Chadwick.<sup>93</sup> They were local mill owners but were Liberals, not Tories. Both had been present at Peterloo and were appalled by what happened. Thomas described it as 'an inhuman outrage, committed on an unarmed peaceful assembly'.<sup>94</sup> With other liberal magistrates such as George Ashworth, Henry Kelsall and John Fenton, they dominated the bench and were very opposed to the use of troops, be they local militia or regular troops sent by the government. They carried this approach into other areas such as the implementation of the Poor Law reforms, as will be shown later. It meant however that the upper class approach to the vestry was much more liberal in outlook.

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<sup>90</sup> RCSVM 1857-1867.

<sup>91</sup> These Abstracts were taken from RCSVM.

<sup>92</sup> RCSVM 17 September 1843.

<sup>93</sup> Cole, p. 32.

<sup>94</sup> Rochdale, RLSL, unpublished letter from Thomas Chadwick to Charles Chadwick, 1819.

They came under a lot of pressure for taking this stance, especially during a series of events after the so-called 'Plug Riots' of 1842.<sup>95</sup> The Home Secretary, Sir James Graham, was seeking to track down those he held responsible for the riots and at Peel's suggestion he was looking at the connections between the Anti-Corn Law League and the riots.<sup>96</sup> He reported to the Queen that it would be his duty to 'investigate the conduct of those magistrates to have acted with a degree of feebleness and indecision quite unworthy of their station'. He attempted court action but this was rejected as there was not enough evidence, and settled on using the Lord Lieutenant of Lancashire, the Earl of Derby. Six people were involved, three of them Rochdale magistrates, William Chadwick, George Ashworth and John Fenton.

The case for Derby did not start well as the first to be called, the Earl of Balcarres, proved quite simply that he was not a magistrate and took great exception to the tone of Graham's allegations. As he was a personal friend of the Earl, the matter was soon closed. The second called, Charles Hindley of Ashton-under-Lyne, strongly denied the accusations and Derby dropped the matter.<sup>97</sup> Henry Ashworth of Bolton had refused to attend the magistrates meeting about the riots because he was a Quaker and as the discussion was clearly bound to consider military action, he could not attend. His case was dropped. The three Rochdale men were also clear that they had acted in the best interests of good order. When the rioters approached Rochdale from Oldham, the senior magistrate, Clement Royd, a leading Tory banker, wanted to bring troops to stop them. The mainly liberal bench refused and the troops were sent back. The unrest passed quietly apart from some stone throwing, during which

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<sup>95</sup> Arthur G. Rose, 'Truckling Magistrates in Lancashire in 1842', *Transactions of the Historical Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, LXXXIII (1985), 40-70. See also Mick Jenkins, *The General Strike of 1842* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1980). The report entitled 'Anti Corn-Law Agitation' *Quarterly Review* Vol.71, pt. 4 (1842) is attributed to Thomas Croker and shows how the attempts to link the Anti Corn-Law League to the unrest appeared in Parliamentary reports.

<sup>96</sup> NS 16 July 1842.

<sup>97</sup> MG 17 August 1842.

Chadwick was badly cut on the head, and Livsey rescued him. Royd and John Bright clashed verbally over the matter.<sup>98</sup>

Things would have passed off quietly but for the actions of Molesworth. He had requested protection by troops and Chadwick had refused and (Molesworth alleged), told him that they had given money or provisions to the rioters to get rid of them. When Chadwick asked him to withdraw these remarks, Molesworth then repeated his allegations to Lord Somerset. Both Fenton and Chadwick denied saying any such thing. Equally, Chadwick's appearance before the Earl of Derby, swathed in head bandages, gave a very physical rebuttal to the charge that he had not done enough. Derby quietly swept the matter under the carpet and it was considered closed. What it does illustrate was the deep animosity between the Tory vicar and the Liberal magistrates, not to mention the leading figures such as John Bright and radicals such as Thomas Livsey.

An analysis of the members of the two Rochdale vestries shows this liberal tendency in more detail. In Spotland, out of 183 members, there were only four gentlemen altogether as opposed to four in just the top ten in Halifax. This picture is repeated in Castleton where, from a total of 251 members, only twelve were listed as gentlemen. The spread of roles mirrors the picture in Oldham, where the textile trade predominated, but there was a major difference in Rochdale in that the textiles trades were divided almost equally between wool and cotton, whereas Oldham was almost exclusively cotton. The food trade, both food and drink, were well represented. Book keepers, pawnbrokers and stationers are all there as are surgeons, chemists and lawyers.<sup>99</sup>

In conclusion, the role of the vestry in the development of civic governance in the first part of the nineteenth century was foundational. For two centuries, (longer in Oldham and

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<sup>98</sup> *MG* 13 August 1842 and *HG* 20 August 1842.

<sup>99</sup> *RSSVM* 1819-1850 and *RCSV* 1826-1894.

Rochdale), they were the only form of government and remained the one that was accessible to a wide range of people. It was with the vestry that everyone actively interested in local government started. If only at the level of an annual vestry or township meeting, everyone was informed and could be involved, to a greater or lesser extent. The problem with foundations is that, no matter how strong or weak, they are out of sight, and just as often out of mind. The lack of any detailed examination of this organisation for nearly a century by historians is illustrative of this.

Vestries were critical as they paved the way, through the development of a culture of public meeting-patterns, the role of the chairmanship and the voting systems, to the improvement commission in all their various forms. The public expression of these meetings, the posters giving notice of the event, its purpose and those requesting it, had a great importance. Many examples of such posters are to be found in the Poor Law Commissioners papers in London, sent as proof that the vestry meeting was properly conducted. If the outcome was advertised by poster, that was sent too.<sup>100</sup> The Commissions brought a much wider range of people for what was, in practice, a much more focussed range of work. Vestries went on working and were still active, playing a major role in the work of the board of guardians from 1837 onwards. They appointed the overseer, the workhorse of early nineteenth century administration. Oversight of elections and electoral rolls and registration courts, the work with the poor, the oversight of the registration of births, deaths and marriages, and their work within the parish, all came within their orbit, yet they were vestry appointments and vestry officers until the second half of the century, as in the case of Halifax.<sup>101</sup> Having thus examined the foundations in detail, the shape of the improvement commissions needs to be examined.

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<sup>100</sup> TNA, Poor Law Commissioners, MH 12/6183 17 September 186 and MH 12/6186 2 February 1866.

<sup>101</sup> HPVM The vestry was still appointing churchwardens in the eighteen sixties. 16 April 1868.

## Chapter Five

## Improvement Commissions

Improvement Commissions were the bedrock of the development of municipal government. The vestries had been a key element in setting the framework within which development took place but they were founded as part of the established church within the parish and this in turn became part of government. Improvement Commissions came about as the result of private acts of parliament based on the wishes of the inhabitants. They wanted to improve the conditions in which they lived and worked and they wanted also control of that process and the funds required to achieve it. Commissions were the precursors of the municipal corporations and they provided the members, expertise and leadership for the new councils. From them and their control came the demands for incorporation, and the format of the new councils in terms of wards and franchises. They demand close study.

As with the vestries, very little research has been done into this area of local government. Once again it is necessary to go back to the work of the Webbs to find any detailed examination of these bodies.<sup>1</sup> G. R. Dalby, writing in 1953 in the introduction to his unpublished thesis on the Halifax Trustees, said:

The student who wishes to inform himself of the activities of the many bodies of the Improvement Commissions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries will not find that he is weighed down by a mass of published material. Like the Webbs, he will discover that these Improvement Commissions are still seldom described in town histories, and that many historians and writers on the development of local government give them little more than passing reference.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *English Local Government*.

<sup>2</sup> G. R. Dalby, 'The Work of the Halifax Town Trustees from the Improvement Act of 1823 to the Incorporation of the Borough in 1848' Unpublished MA Thesis, University of Leeds, (1953), p. 1.

All Improvement Commissions had their origin in an Act of Parliament, but the Acts were permissive, that is they were not instigated by parliament itself but had to be applied for and each one was individual to the place that requested it. There appear to be no central records kept of how many there were, or when they were requested. The Webbs identified that the process ran from 1748 till 1850, with the first example being Liverpool in 1748.<sup>3</sup> They identified three types of commission, those where the members were named for life and so became self perpetuating, those that had some element of election and ex-officio members, and finally those which had an election based on property. Halifax was one of the first type, Oldham and Rochdale were of the third. Even this type could become self selecting, as members passed on seats to family members through the ownership of property. Detailed knowledge will only be found in the individual archives of each town. The bodies the acts created were also not consistently named as our three towns illustrate. In Halifax, the body was known as Halifax Town Trustees, in Oldham, it was the Police Commission and in Rochdale, it was the Improvement Commission.

In each town a body of land owners or ratepayers would decide to seek powers to control several areas of local concern. This was what Chandler describes as 'the evolving relationship between local and central government. It was the interaction of a network of agencies with the elite of central policy-makers, and they conflicted over the policy preferences and values'.<sup>4</sup> Equally there was the constant and strongly ingrained hostility to increased centralization of power, seen not only in this issue, but even more so in the Poor Law. The concerns typically included the streets, their building, planning, lighting and paving, water supply, control of nuisances, usually waste material left in the town, and sewage. By the eighteen forties, most commissions moved on to the areas of utilities such as gas. The final key area was that of policing the town and providing the necessary staff to control law and order

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<sup>3</sup> Webb, p. 242.

<sup>4</sup> James A. Chandler, *Explaining Local Government: Local Government in Britain since 1800* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 4.

within the town limits. The Commission would be funded by a rate based on the value of the land, and membership of the commission usually depended on being a rate payer, either as an owner or a tenant of property.

It is important at this point to look briefly at the role played in the areas of public health and the police by Edwin Chadwick, the Secretary of the Poor Law Board of Commissioners, and the principal author of the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834.<sup>5</sup> A more detailed examination of his role in the Poor Law will be undertaken in the next chapter, but whilst that is probably the area for which he is most noted, policing and health were two other key areas. He had had an interest in the creation of a national police force since 1829, and had sought to influence Peel when he introduced the Metropolitan Police.<sup>6</sup> After the introduction of the Poor Law Act in 1834, Parliament set up the rural police inquiry, and Chadwick was appointed by Lord Russell as one member of the three-man Commission, with the clear intention that Chadwick and the clerks would do the work.<sup>7</sup> It took three years to report and led to the Rural Constabulary Act of 1839.

The final form of the Act was not what Chadwick had wanted. He sought a centralised constabulary, overseen by the Metropolitan Force with the officers appointed centrally. It was all part of the greater central control that he felt was essential to ensure reform took place, and it was all to be linked to the Poor Law Commission and their agents, the Boards of Guardians.<sup>8</sup> The final Act was permissive, not compulsory, and control was placed in the power

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<sup>5</sup> For the details of Chadwick's work and life see S. E. Finer, *The Life and Times of Sir Edwin Chadwick*, (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1952) and Anthony Brundage, *England's Prussian Minister: Edwin Chadwick and the Politics of Government Growth, 1832-1854*, (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988).

<sup>6</sup> See Finer pp. 29-31.

<sup>7</sup> London, University College, Chadwick Papers, Russell to Chadwick, 1 September 1836, cited in Brundage, *England's Prussian Minister*, p. 58.

<sup>8</sup> Brundage, p. 59 and p. 68. For a fuller discussion see Finer, pp. 164-80, Jennifer Hart, 'Reform of the Borough Police, 1835-56' *English Historical Review* 70 (1955) 411-27, F.C. Mather, *Public Order in the Age of the Chartists* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959), p. 128 and Eric Midwinter, *Poor Law, Public Health and Police* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1969), 138-42.

of the magistrates of the counties, with the boroughs exempt.<sup>9</sup> Part of the reason for this set back was the problems being encountered with the imposition of the Poor Law reforms, especially in the north. Chadwick saw the Board of Guardians in every Union as part of the mechanism for applying central control, but he faced powerful opposition from landowners and magistrates, as well as a weak Whig government desperate to hang on to power.<sup>10</sup>

From the police Chadwick moved into the area of health and sanitation. In 1842, he published 'The Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Classes'<sup>11</sup> and from 1844 he was involved in the Health of Towns' Commission. This led to his involvement in looking into the health of London, and the issue of interments in the capital, and finally was influential in shaping Lord Morpeth's Public Health Act of 1848. Once again, however, his centralising tendencies were ignored as other powerful interest groups opposed him. In particular the magistrates and members of the London vestries were opposed to any interference in their powers, and provincial magistrates, landowners and municipal leaders were against any further central control.<sup>12</sup> Once again the Act was only permissive and where clauses were to be enforced, most towns overcame them by seeking incorporation and control of their own affairs. Chadwick's attempts to centralise control and reduce the local power of magistrates and town leaders were the background to the work of Improvement Commissions after 1832.

The local group who wanted to form an improvement commission would seek to gain permission for a local act, which usually involved having the support of the MP if there was one, and hiring an agent in London to oversee the drafting and passage of the act through the parliamentary process. These agents were usually solicitors, and their services were not cheap. An example of this was the attempt by the Rochdale improvement commission to seek a new

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<sup>9</sup> Brundage, p. 74.

<sup>10</sup> Finer, p. 173.

<sup>11</sup> *PP*, 1842 (006), Report of Her Majesty's Secretary of State for the Home Office Department from the Poor Law Commissioners on an inquiry into the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain.

<sup>12</sup> Finer, pp. 319-331.

act in 1846. The bill was just over £500, and more than £400 went to the agent. The act did not succeed because it ran out of time, so the final cost could have been much higher.<sup>13</sup> The growth of private and permissive Acts developed rapidly in the first half of the nineteenth century. Between 1800 and 1854, there were twice as many private acts as public ones,<sup>14</sup> leading to the creation of nearly 300 improvement commissions by 1835.<sup>15</sup>

Despite these differences, the bodies all shared two common factors. The first was that all were the forerunners of municipal corporations and when a town was granted its charter and set up its corporation, all power and money was eventually handed over from the commission to the council. This did not happen smoothly as the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835, which passed the role of improvement commissions to councils, only made the amalgamation permissive. There was no mechanism to incorporate the powers of the commission into that of the council. In all three towns this caused problems. Commissions were a vital part of the development of municipal governance. The second common factor was that all of the commissions, however they started, eventually moved to a system of elective membership. This was often done on a different franchise basis from the parliamentary franchise. All were established before 1832 and they did not operate in isolation but alongside the vestry and the board of guardians. Members of the commission were also involved in the many movements active during the first part of the nineteenth century such as the Anti-Corn Law League, the factory reform movement and the Chartists. Much work has been done at a local level about the commissions but, given this central role, it is unusual that no wider examination on a national level has taken place. In order to give structure to the examination of the three towns the evidence will be looked at under five headings: the structure of the Commissions, the meetings and membership, the utilities, improvement and policing.

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<sup>13</sup> RPICM Parliamentary Committee Minute Book 1846-1848, CBR/2/6.

<sup>14</sup> Chandler, p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *English Local Government, Vol. 4: Statutory Authorities for Special Purposes* (London: Longmans, 1922), p. 4.

## The Acts

Halifax had one of the earliest Improvement Acts in 1762.<sup>16</sup> Subsequent acts showed how a town could build up its responsibility for services as need and circumstances changed. The 1762 Act was designed to give a better water supply to the town as the population grew. A second Act in 1768 was designed to give the town trustees better control of the water supply and to add other areas of control.<sup>17</sup> Matters remained in this state until the act of 1823. This was necessary as there was some uncertainty about whether the two previous acts were limited to the town as it existed in 1768 or whether its powers spread to the new parts of the town built after that date. It repealed the two previous acts.

The major acts were implemented close together, Halifax in 1823,<sup>18</sup> Rochdale in 1825<sup>19</sup> and Oldham in 1826.<sup>20</sup> The terms are remarkably similar with very few special features. They all mention lighting, cleansing and paving, watching and improvements in the title. Oldham and Rochdale had regulation of the Police and only Halifax had water supply added. Only males over twenty one could vote and anyone gaining benefit from the process or selling any form of alcohol was prohibited from voting. The voting qualifications however were different. In Halifax it was owners or occupiers of property over £50. In Oldham it was owners over £50 and occupiers over £30. In Rochdale it was owners or occupiers over £35, reduced to £10 in 1844.<sup>21</sup> A quorum of members was seven, the treasurer and the clerk could not be the same person and new markets were exempt from commission control in all three towns. Meetings were to

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<sup>16</sup> Halifax, HRL. The Halifax Local Government Act, 1762, Box 1.

<sup>17</sup> Halifax, HRL. The Halifax Local Government Act, 1768, Box 1.

<sup>18</sup> Halifax: 'Act for paving, lighting, cleansing, watching and improving the Township of Halifax and for the supply the same with water,' 4. George IV 17 June 1823. HRL, Acts, Box1.

<sup>19</sup> Rochdale: 'Act for lighting, cleansing, watching and regulating the Town of Rochdale in the County Palatine of Lancaster and the regulation of the Police thereof.' 6. George IV 10 June 1825, RLSL.

<sup>20</sup> Oldham: *PP* 1826 (004) 'An Act for paving, water, lighting, cleansing and improving the Township of Oldham in the County of Lancaster, and of regulating the Police thereof.' 25 March 1826. A copy is in OLSL.

<sup>21</sup> RPICM 28 August 1844.

be monthly, except for Halifax where they were quarterly, possibly as they had a long-standing commission.

### Commissions

In Halifax, the new Act of 1823 gave the Trustees power over the whole township, not just the old town. Crucially, this Act also introduced the power over watching, the first sign of any involvement in policing the town, apart from the annual appointment of constables by the vestry.<sup>22</sup> In Oldham, things were very different. Oldham got its first Improvement Act seventy five years after the first Halifax Act, yet they both ended in the same year 1848. Oldham had only twenty years of improvement commissioners before they were incorporated. Halifax built up its responsibilities in three Acts over a period of sixty-one years whereas Oldham gained all its functions in one Act. This Act saw the first use of the division of Oldham into two parts, above Town and below Town. It covered only the township of Oldham, not the Parliamentary Borough. The first meeting of the Commission was held in January 1827, with sixty four members present. No-one could use their work premises to qualify for the vote. This was unique to Oldham. By 1850, when the powers were finally passed to the new corporation, there had been 360 members.<sup>23</sup>

Another interesting aspect of the minutes is that there are records kept of the number of people taken off the rate payer register, giving some indication of the effect of trade slumps. Rate setting and dealing with appeals against rates took up a lot of time and tended to dominate sections of the minutes, for example in 1830.<sup>24</sup> The first records of remittance were in 1842 with eighty people removed from the list or having their rates reduced. In 1843 a further 127 were removed but in 1844 only forty two came off. There were none in 1845, sixty eight in 1846, none in 1847 and a massive 623 in 1848. A further eighty nine came off in 1849.

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<sup>22</sup> G. R. Dalby, 'The Halifax Town Trustees', *THAS* (1957), p. 98.

<sup>23</sup> Oldham, OLSL, Oaths of Commissioners 1827-1849. B: PCO/4/1.

<sup>24</sup> OPICM January to July 1829.

This shows that 1029 people were excused rates in an eight year period.<sup>25</sup> Sadly the minutes do not record if and when any of these were reinstated, but it is an indicator of the levels of hardship found in the town at that time. Equally, the matter passed into the hands of the new council in 1850 and their records do not list or collate ratepayers.

Rochdale was similar to Oldham. The Improvement Act came a year earlier but the commission lasted nearly ten years longer than either Oldham or Halifax because the commission was not minded to move towards incorporation till 1856. It was not that the town was not prepared, but that it saw no need to move to incorporation at that point. As with Oldham, the cost and control of the police was the crucial factor. The only difference from the other two Acts was the instruction to widen the Walk, a street close to the centre and to build a footbridge at the end to ease the crossing of the river Roch. The seats were split into three areas with a maximum of sixty seats. Wardleworth had twenty seven, Castleton had twenty one and Spotland had twelve. A later Act in 1853 cut the numbers to forty two, with eighteen for Wardleworth, fifteen for Castleton and nine for Spotland. The voting expanded too, with one vote for every £50 of rateable property. The maximum per person was six, and the voter had to have lived in the town for at least twelve months.<sup>26</sup>

### Meetings and Membership

In Halifax, the Act of 1762 set out who were to be the new trustees. 224 men were named in the Act and they had the power to fill any vacancies that arose. There was a property qualification of a clear rent of £40 yearly value, or an estate valued at £1,500. A further eighty names were added in 1768. All the leading families of the town were included such as the Rawsons, the Listers, the Waterhouses and the Crossleys. Fifteen lords and baronets were included as well as four Anglican clergy and four doctors. Seven members could act for the whole body, but for special matters thirteen were needed. It seems that meetings were not

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<sup>25</sup> All these figures are extracted from OPICM.

<sup>26</sup> RCIPM 7 September 1853.

well organised and a very lax check was kept on finance, leading to later problems.<sup>27</sup> Meetings were held twice a month, but the majority of the records no longer exist for this period thus accurate conclusions are not possible.<sup>28</sup>

The Improvement Act of 1823 did not name members but simply laid down the qualifications and disqualifications. Trustees had to be adult males, and had to own or occupy property in the town of annual rent or value of £40. Males whose wife owned or rented such property would qualify. Having an office of profit, being a contractor to the Trustees or being an ale, wine or beer seller were all disqualifying conditions. All that was required to become a member was attendance at a meeting and taking the oath. Members were listed either as owners or as tenants.<sup>29</sup> Dalby offered the following analysis of the new Trustees in 1823.<sup>30</sup> There were 258 known members, and Dalby admitted that the classification was rough but he divided them as follows:

Manufacturers and merchants	80
Gentlemen	10
Professional men	33
Tradesmen and shopkeepers	105
Not known	30

Despite the roughness it does provide an indication of the changing nature of the Trustees since its inception. As in 1762 the leading names of the town were included. Most of the manufacturers were in textiles such as the Crossleys, Abbott, Akroyd, Baldwin and Whitworth. There were bankers, Rawson and Briggs, doctors, lawyers and a civil engineer, Browne. There was little evidence of any early radicals being members, but as the records

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<sup>27</sup> Dalby, p. 94.

<sup>28</sup> HTM, 1820-1838, CMT 1/1/1/1.

<sup>29</sup> HTM, 1839-1840, CMT 1/1/1/1.

<sup>30</sup> Dalby, p. 100.

were much more detailed after 1823, it is possible to gain a better picture of the work of the trustees.

It is interesting to study the membership in terms of attendance. The records are contained in four volumes, from 1823 till 1849, showing a total of 477 meetings split at 1840. Before that date there were 421 meetings, of which sixty four were inquorate. After 1840, there were only fifty six and none was inquorate. From 1832 to 1849, 399 members were identified as taking the required oath, yet forty two, over 10%, never attended a meeting. Interestingly this number included Francis, John and Robert Crossley, the members of the leading textile manufacturers. 52% were freeholders, 34% tenants and 14% were not identified. The average attendance in the years before 1840 was fifteen and after that it was thirty four. In his article on the Trustees, written in 1957, Dalby listed twenty four names of what he describes as 'some of the more active ones'.<sup>31</sup> Seven of the list had over 100 attendances, yet two of them, Thomas Cockcroft and Samuel Pollitt have only four attendances each. There were others with over 118 attendances each that were not mentioned, such as Charles Whiteley, a very active man in the town, George Horsfall, Samuel Asquith, John Hainsworth and William Shaw, but the two most glaring omissions are P. K. Holden<sup>32</sup> and John Jackson. Holden attended 209 meetings and Jackson attended 300, well over half the meetings recorded in that time.

The work of Dalby is interesting but needs to be treated carefully. First of all it is the only piece of work on the Halifax Town Trustees that has been printed. As such it is of considerable value, but this was a paper written in 1957 and presented as a talk to the Halifax Antiquarian Society without references. There has been no other work with which to compare and contrast its findings. It is based on an unpublished dissertation written in 1953, of which

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<sup>31</sup> HTM 1 April 1840.

<sup>32</sup> Holden's first name was Peter but he was always listed in any records in Halifax as P.K. Holden and that was how he signed his name.

there is a single copy in Halifax Reference Library.<sup>33</sup> He quotes many sources but does not always identify where they came from, and his conclusions are often not borne out by a re-examination of the minutes. This is especially so in his identification of the leading members of the Trustees. The phrase 'some of the more active ones' lacks definition and omits several leading figures, especially P. K. Holden.<sup>34</sup> The financial figures are aggregates, again without sources. He refers to Ranger's reports but does not identify the reason why Ranger came and or the massive debate that went on within the confines of that reporting procedure. The work is a useful starting point but one that has several limitations.

The other matter of concern was the chairmanship of this body. The main problem was that the chair was not always named and as the chair of the next meeting signed off the minutes of the previous meeting, it is not possible to identify all the people who held the office. Of the 477 meetings, 382 had an identifiable chair. Of these, 243 were chaired by a total of forty different people, the most notable of whom were John Craven, a wool stapler who chaired twenty one meetings, and Charles Whiteley, a hat maker who chaired twenty three meetings. By far the most important person, however, was P. K. Holden, a bookseller and insurance agent. He chaired 129 meetings, 27% of all the meetings held. Houseman does mention him as one of the leading figures of the town.<sup>35</sup> He was also a member of the vestry. There he attended thirty six meetings, and was in the chair for twenty of them. He held the offices of Constable and Overseer of the Poor, and as such was a major figure in the development of Halifax.<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, despite his 300 attendances, John Jackson was only invited to be chair ten times.<sup>37</sup> Like Holden he was a member of the vestry and he was also one of the first councillors in 1847.

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<sup>33</sup> G. R. Dalby, 'The Work of the Halifax Town Trustees'. HRL 352.DAL.

<sup>34</sup> Dalby, p. 100.

<sup>35</sup> J.W. Houseman, 'The Development of Local Government in the Parish of Halifax 1760-1848' *THAS*, (1929), p. 129.

<sup>36</sup> Wakefield, WYAS, The Halifax Parish Vestry Minute Book, (HPVM) 1816-1899, D53/6/1.

<sup>37</sup> Jackson seems to have only taken the chair when there was hardly anyone else available.

As will be examined later as part of the study of town improvement, the leading members of the town had to re-establish the Trustees in 1840 in order to bring stability to the finances. The Trustees faced a fresh challenge in 1847 with the introduction of a Health Bill into Parliament by Lord Morpeth. The Bill proposed that some of the powers of the trustees would be transferred to separate bodies, such as a Town Commission, where only two thirds of members would be elected and the other third would be appointed by the Crown. The Trustees debated the issue on March 15<sup>th</sup> 1848. The members, whilst anxious to improve the health of the town and seeking to approve the Bill in principle, were unhappy with the proposals on membership and the Bill was not popular. They commented that:

It would entail a great expense without any adequate benefit, but especially because of the centralizing principle which pervades the whole measure, a principle as pernicious and hateful in its operation as it is contrary to the spirit of local and municipal government.<sup>38</sup>

They equally made their views known to William Ranger when he came to conduct his Public Inquiry.<sup>39</sup> They held ward meetings and raised the issue of their powers under existing acts.<sup>40</sup> There were also several leading figures in the town, such as Thorpe, Beaumont and Edward Akroyd as well as the Mayor, John Crossley, who were in favour.<sup>41</sup> The way out of this dilemma was to apply for incorporation as both health administration and the work of the Trustees would then come under the control of a new council. The process of seeking incorporation was begun in April 1847 and there were then meetings of the Trustees and a public meeting.<sup>42</sup> Finally the Crown was petitioned and the process was completed by the Act granting the Charter of Incorporation in March 1848.

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<sup>38</sup> HTM 15 March 1848.

<sup>39</sup> *PP* 1851 (63) William Ranger, Report to the General Board of Health on a Preliminary Inquiry as to the Sewage, Drainage and Supply of Water, and the Sanitary Condition of the inhabitants of the Town of Halifax in the County of York, 16 April 1851.

<sup>40</sup> Ranger, p. 13.

<sup>41</sup> Ranger, p. 35.

<sup>42</sup> *HG* 7 May 1847.

In Oldham, analysis of the attendance figures throws up some interesting aspects.<sup>43</sup> The meetings were held monthly with a total of 276 regular meetings and thirty two special meetings. The average monthly attendance over that time was twenty members per meeting, but that figure covers a number of wide variations. Ten meetings had no attendance and a further eleven were inquorate, nearly 8% of the regular meetings. The best years for attendance were 1827, the first year, and 1847, the next to the last year and a very significant year in Oldham's development. The highest attendance for a regular meeting was in October 1841 with 120 members present. This was for the use of the newly built Town Hall and the appointment of extra Beadles. The November meeting of 1833 was also large with 101 members, and dealt with the Beadle and a new appointment. It was the special meetings however that produced the greatest turn out with 205 in October 1847 for the discussions on the new incorporation plan. 174 attended in May 1834 followed by 146 in June of that year, both dealing with the office of Beadle. January 1832 saw 144 members present to appoint a new Law Clerk, and December 1848 saw 154 attend for the final decisions of the Commission. None of these high figures seems to relate to national events such as the Reform Act or the issue of the Poor Law. These issues were usually covered by special public meetings called by the Constable or the magistrates. The only major matter was that of incorporation in 1847 and 1848. The other major meetings were over staff appointed by the commission. The only other trend of note is the drop in average attendance during election years in the eighteen thirties. Average attendance figures of fourteen in 1832, twelve in 1835 and nine in 1837 show that priorities lay elsewhere. Strangely the figures for the eighteen forties were much higher with twenty four in 1841 and thirty in 1847.

The major leaders are also of interest. Again using the office of chair as a guide, the leading chair was James Rowland, a founder member, a churchwarden, an ex-officio member

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<sup>43</sup> The analysis of attendance and membership is taken from OPICM 1827-1842, B: PCO/1/1 and 1843-1849 B: PCO/1/2.

of the Poor law Guardians and a Tory. He was chair twenty eight times. The second member was Richard Stump, a gentleman, the Vicar's choice as churchwarden and a Tory. He was chair twenty three times. He was also included on Foster's list of Oldham Radicals, as was John Collinge. The whole question of Foster and the lists will be examined later. Other major members were George Barlow an elected member of the Poor Law Board and a churchwarden, and John Bentley a member of the select vestry, an elected member of the Poor Law Board and a candidate in the first municipal elections. Both were chair seventeen times. Where this list differed from the Halifax list was in the large number of radical members who were part of the Commission. James Holladay, William Knott and Alexander Taylor were the leading members of the new radicals who were active in Oldham from 1830 onwards, and all were on the commission. The old radical leaders, John Knight and William Fitton were veterans of Peterloo and after imprisonment would not have reached the property qualification required for membership.<sup>44</sup>

Sadly the first minute book for Rochdale has been lost and there are no records before 1830. The remaining records show 506 meetings with 446 members over the thirty one years.<sup>45</sup> The pattern was somewhat similar to Oldham in that the weakest period was in the early years if inquorate meetings are considered. In 1831, there were fifteen meetings of which five were inquorate, and the following year three meetings from twelve were inquorate. Intense involvement in the other public meetings for Parliamentary reform was probably the cause. 1842 and 1843 were also weak years with two and three meetings inquorate respectively. 1842 in particular was a major year for unrest in the town. After 1844 the meetings were fortnightly, which makes the attendance record even better, the frequency of the meetings also increased after 1844. Prior to that date there had been only one meeting per month with perhaps an extra one if there was a major issue. After 1845, there were no further

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<sup>44</sup> *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, ed. by Joyce M. Bellamy and John Saville, assisted by David Martin (London: Macmillan, 1993), Vol. IX, John Knight, pp. 166-168.

<sup>45</sup> This analysis is taken from the Rochdale Improvement Commission Minute books, 1830-1858.

inquorate meetings and the stimulus of elections for the commission, introduced after the 1844 Act, seemed to have improved participation and involvement.

Certain people stand out in the record of meetings. The major figure was Thomas Livsey, a leading radical in the town. He attended 260 meetings, being chair for fifty four of them. Thomas Ashworth was chair fifty five times but only attended 190. William Pillings attended 232 meetings but was never asked to chair a single meeting. Family names appear quite often. Jacob Bright senior, the textile manufacturer, attended nine meetings before 1841 and was chair once. His son Jacob Bright Junior attended fourteen times after that and was also chair once. His brother John went to three meetings before leaving to be an M.P. Magistrates were present as well, with both William and Thomas Chadwick in attendance. Thomas was present forty four times, three times as chair; William went twelve times, three times as chair. The Royds family of bankers were not so prominent with only Albert attending once. Clement never went and neither did the Fentons or the Entwistles, the other leading families of the town. The Dania family, father James and son John, who were grocers attended a joint total of 217 times without being chair. In all, thirty three men reached a total of over one hundred meetings each. The average attendance of the 446 members over the thirty years was twenty nine meetings each, and the average monthly attendance was twenty five.

### Water and Gas

The Trustees of Halifax were established initially to provide adequate water for the town. This produced two related problems. If there was a shortage of water, action had to be taken to provide it, against a backdrop of constant expansion of houses and greater density of families within the existing areas of housing. Once that shortage had been addressed a new problem arose in that they had to provide storage for the water in terms of new reservoirs. By the time the land had been purchased and the reservoirs constructed, demand had out grown supply and new sources of water were needed. Action came in three phases. After the 1762

Act, the Trustees bought a second well at Birks Hall Wood to add to the existing supply at Well Head. They then built a small reservoir at the new spring and a larger one at Gibbett Hill to add to the existing one at Old Cock Yard. After the 1768 Act the new Trustees added a new source at Dodgson Clough as well as extending the water works and the pipe system. This was to prove adequate for a number of years.<sup>46</sup>

Things changed in 1823. Two other bodies were established shortly before that date. A separate market body was set up in 1810 and in 1822 a Gas, Light and Coke Company was given parliamentary approval. There were moves at a later date to purchase the Gas Company, and the Company seemed willing to sell, but the matter was not taken forward by the Commission because of impending incorporation. The new council purchased the Company in 1855.<sup>47</sup>

After the 1823 Act, the Trustees inherited all these facilities and an accumulated debt of £5,628 10s.0d for water workings which required an annual interest payment of £300. Once again supply exceeded demand and so two new reservoirs were built, both in Hanson Lane. They were built some way from the town to allow for housing expansion and between them they could hold nearly six million gallons. This met the needs for a number of years but then demand began to exceed supply and there were severe shortages by 1839. Existing supplies could not be expanded so a new source was found on land belonging to the vicar. This water was piped to Hanson Lane, but now a new reservoir was needed. Work was begun on a new one named after Queen Victoria in Gibbett Lane, but whilst it was under construction, the powers of the Trustees were passed to the new council. Water was just one area of responsibility but it has been examined in detail to show the complexity of dealing with a growing town and the many demands of the inhabitants.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> *PP* 1851 (63) William Ranger, p. 17.

<sup>47</sup> HBCM, December 1849-November 1857, HXM 5, 7 February 1855.

<sup>48</sup> Dalby, Halifax Town Trustees, p. 108.

It is very clear from the minutes of the Oldham commissioners that they felt their main function was to maintain the town and to incur as little cost as possible.<sup>49</sup> On the key issues of water and gas they used a local company, the Oldham Gas and Water Company, to provide all their supplies.<sup>50</sup> Therefore they never incurred any costs in extending water pipes or sewers. In fact a Government report in 1844 stated that: 'there is no plan of the sewers of Oldham and only one man, 80 years of age, could be found who knew the situation of the principal sewer'. A further comment was that: 'plans of Oldham and Bury are not sufficiently advanced for the installation of the sewers therefore the expense of getting them on the plan is not known'.<sup>51</sup> It was only in May 1847, that the surveyor recommended that they ought to have a plan of the sewers in the town.<sup>52</sup> In October 1845 they established a committee to look into the possibility of purchasing the Gas and Water Company.<sup>53</sup> The committee met with the Company who were ready to sell, but the committee had two guiding questions, what benefit it would bring to the town and what it would cost. The committee recommended that Parliament be approached with a view to buying the company. It saw great benefits, not least a healthy profit. Reference was made to the fact that Rochdale had done it and was enjoying cheaper gas. The report was accepted but in December James Holladay, a leading radical on the Commission, recommended no further action be taken and, at a later meeting that month, the plan was dropped.<sup>54</sup> Prior to that, the contract had a messy start. In December 1827 no contract was agreed because of problems with pipe-laying. It was not resolved by July 1828 yet in August a three year contract was signed.<sup>55</sup> That system continued for the duration of the commission. The main job of the company was to provide gas pipes to supply the existing and

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<sup>49</sup> OPICM, B PCO/1/1 1827-42 and B PCO/1/2 1843-50.

<sup>50</sup> OPICM 1827-1842, 5 December 1827.

<sup>51</sup> *PP* 1844 (572) 'First report of the commissioners for inquiring into the state of large towns and populous districts'. Appendix, p. 212.

<sup>52</sup> OPICM 5 May 1847.

<sup>53</sup> OPICM 8 October 1845.

<sup>54</sup> OPICM 8 October -15 December 1845.

<sup>55</sup> OPICM 2 July and 6 August 1828.

any new street lighting. Even this was halted in November 1830, as there was not enough money available.<sup>56</sup>

Like Oldham, water was not a major problem for Rochdale and indeed it was 1866 before the borough took control of suppliers of water.<sup>57</sup> In 1835, there was a dispute with Oldham in 1855 when the proposed Oldham Gas and Water Bill claimed land to the north east of the town as part of its water catchment area.<sup>58</sup> Rochdale also used that area for water catchment and was able to show that it had the prior claim. Disposal of sewage was a bigger problem, with what Garrard described as ‘the notorious clause 96’ which was inserted into the Improvement Act of 1853 at the pleading of two of the towns leading industrialists. This meant that no sewage could be deposited into the River Roch above a certain point, close to their mills. This crippled the town’s attempts to dispose of sewage for thirty years.<sup>59</sup>

It is worth studying the passage of this Bill through Parliament to see how a town gained an Improvement Act not only how it started within the town, but also the processes of Parliament. The minutes of the Commission provide a lot of detail. Discussions began in 1848 as part of the issue of adopting Lord Morpeth’s Health Bill which was being introduced at that time. On 8<sup>th</sup> March the commission voted not to adopt the clauses of the Bill, by only twelve votes to ten.<sup>60</sup> The matter was brought to a public meeting of ratepayers in late 1849 and a committee was established to look at the matter again. This too failed mainly because of popular opposition led by Thomas Livsey.<sup>61</sup> At the final meeting in December, the proposal was defeated by 200 votes to five.<sup>62</sup> The next time the issue was raised was a requisition to the Chief Constable, the same Thomas Livsey, to hold a public meeting to consider applying for a

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<sup>56</sup> OPICM 3 November 1830.

<sup>57</sup> Sadly there are no minutes for the Rochdale Council until 1883, after a fire in that year destroyed the Town Hall tower where all the records were stored.

<sup>58</sup> RPICM 23 May 1855.

<sup>59</sup> John Garrard, *Leadership and Power*, p.143

<sup>60</sup> RPICM 8 March 1848.

<sup>61</sup> MG 3 November 1849.

<sup>62</sup> MG 22 December 1849.

new Act, called in October 1851.<sup>63</sup> The new Bill was to include a proposal for a new cemetery, which was desperately needed, as well as public baths and a park. There were also clauses to give the Commission greater powers over street, sewers and paving. In the debates in the Commission, the radicals sought to add extra clauses to reduce the property qualification and widen the franchise. Two further public meetings were held and the medical men of the town called for restrictions on smoke and river pollution, which were added to the Bill.

There was a lot of opposition, led mainly by the Vicar, the Reverend Molesworth and two major Tory manufacturers, James Dearden and James Entwistle, as well as a number of firms opposed to greater rate payment. These included the Water Company, the Trustees of the town Market, the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway Company, the Heywood Gas Company and various mill owners. In a report to the Commission in September 1853, after the passage of the Act, the committee appointed to oversee the passage told of the strength of this opposition.<sup>64</sup> When the Bill reached Parliament it passed its first and second readings without any problems, which was normal. When the Preamble was considered there was a long debate about whether the Bill was simply repealing clauses in the old Act, while substantively keeping the old Act or whether this was in fact a new Act. It was decided it was a new Act and so the whole Bill had to be rewritten and resubmitted, a time consuming process in a tight parliamentary schedule. The committee and their agents argued that this request came from a public meeting backed by 1,500 ratepayers and took issue with the strength of opposition from 'respectable' people and the lengths to which they were prepared to go in order to stop the Bill. Ideas brought forward by the opponents were the creation of five wards for the Commission not three, a reduction in the number of commissioners to thirty and keeping the property qualification at £35. The committee reported on the meetings with the companies involved and the discussions on the problems, most of which were solved. The request of the

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<sup>63</sup> RPICM 15 October 1851.

<sup>64</sup> RPICM 7 September 1853.

Water Company that the Commissioners buy the water for the new baths at an increased rate was rejected as was the market's request to be exempted from paying rates.

This was not the case with Molesworth, but it seems that at this point Clause 96, which met the demands of Dearden and Entwistle, was inserted. This clause prevented the Commission from using the river Roch above the mills of the two manufacturers for the disposal of sewage, but this in practice made the disposal very difficult and very expensive as a much longer route had to be used.<sup>65</sup> The committee hardly commented, but turned its attention to the Vicar. When he was questioned before the Committee of the House of Lords, the Commission committee reported that he was rude, objected to everything and issued a 'tirade of abuse' against the Commission and its members. When the counsel for the town in turn rebuked him, Molesworth left the meeting and did not return. This did not prevent him from trying to influence the decisions of Lord Redesdale, the Chair of Committees, who had the final say over whether the Bill went forward. The problem was that because of the re-writing, time to fit the Bill into the current session was running out. Molesworth brought a new set of demands, wanting the Commission to repair an iron bridge over the Roch which he owned. He wanted the cattle market removed, a new chaplain appointed for the cemetery to be paid by the Commission, regular audits of the Commission's finances to be carried out by the auditors of the Poor Law Commissioners, and finally the removal of the current surveyor. All these were issues that he had fought the Commission over and lost.

Lord Resedale was very critical of the Commission and the committee responded by reporting that 'the strictures of the Lord in charge of Committees were not constitutional or right in a country which boasts of its freedoms.' It concluded that: 'some of the opponents of the Bill have pursued a course which is inconsistent with that candour and fair dealing which distinguishes men of character and probity from the unscrupulous and the disreputable'. Despite all these delays however Lord Resedale finally allowed the Bill to go through, it was

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<sup>65</sup> *MG* 7 September 1853.

passed by the Lords and put into effect in September 1853. It had been an expensive process as Garrard points out, costing on average over £2,000 and in some cases, much more.<sup>66</sup> An Act for Bolton in 1854 was claimed without contradiction to have cost £9,000.<sup>67</sup>

The final area of improvement was the control of the gas supply. At first sight this seemed quite straightforward with the Commission taking over the company in 1844, but deeper study reveals a more complicated development.<sup>68</sup> The Gas Company was owned and run by Tory businessmen and there were frequent battles before the take-over. As the Commission adopted streets they wished to include lighting for those streets, as can be seen in November 1833 and November 1835.<sup>69</sup> This worked for some time until the price of the gas for the lighting went too high for some of the Commission. In October 1841, Thomas Livsey proposed street lighting be stopped for the winter on account of the cost.<sup>70</sup> This was initially accepted but the supply was restored in December when the price was lowered.<sup>71</sup> The Commission had also started joint action with the Oldham Commission to limit the price of gas and this continued for some time till Rochdale took control.<sup>72</sup> Oldham never took control but instead relied on three year contracts.

The proposal to buy the Gas Works was first made in July 1843, and approved the following month.<sup>73</sup> A Gas Works committee was set up in September and the purchase was finally agreed in October.<sup>74</sup> The first chair of the Gas Committee was Thomas Livsey, and he was to continue with this work well into the new corporation after 1856. The purchase required a new Improvement Act which was approved and the new system was set up in

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<sup>66</sup> Finer, p. 433.

<sup>67</sup> Garrard, *Leadership and Power*, p. 101.

<sup>68</sup> RPICM 2 October 1844.

<sup>69</sup> RPICM 1 November 1833 and 4 November 1835.

<sup>70</sup> RPICM 4 August 1841.

<sup>71</sup> RPICM 15 December 1841.

<sup>72</sup> RPICM 6 October 1841.

<sup>73</sup> RPICM 5 July and 2 August 1843.

<sup>74</sup> RPICM 4 Oct 1843.

August 1844.<sup>75</sup> From then on the main item of interest was to keep the price of gas low and extend its use to as many houses as possible. Livsey's aim was that: 'every poor man could now have his humble domestic hearth lit at small expense'.<sup>76</sup> The numbers increased rapidly, from 904 consumers in 1844 to 1476 by 1850. By 1854 they had reached 2650 and by 1860 the figure was 8557. This represented six out of every seven houses in the borough.<sup>77</sup> Prices were constantly checked and, because of constant public interest, an informal limit was set for profits at about 10%. Livsey, speaking in 1861 and still chair of the Gas Committee said that: 'people would not long be satisfied to give 4s per 1000 cubic feet for their gas if the Corporation continued to receive such large profits'.<sup>78</sup> Price rises were undertaken very carefully. Issues over the use of the profits were to precipitate a major crisis within the council in 1863, during the Cotton Famine, which ultimately cost Livsey his chance of being Mayor.

#### Town Improvement

There are two distinct periods of meetings in Halifax, before and after 1840. That was a seminal year for the trustees as there was a major financial crisis. The trustees had four sources of income: water rents, street rates, borrowing or subscriptions. These subscriptions did not play a large part in the financing of the street repairs but they did in the development of water works. On two occasions sums of over £3,000 were raised, firstly to provide two reservoirs at Hanson Lane in 1826<sup>79</sup> and secondly for the Gibbett Lane reservoir in 1848.<sup>80</sup> It is worth noting that the sums were raised at times of economic hardship in order to provide work for the unemployed. Rates were another area of difficulty. Setting the rate was not a problem but notifying ratepayers and then collecting the money both showed the laxity of the trustees. For example, in December 1842 not all the demand notices for the first half of the

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<sup>75</sup> RPICM 28 August 1844.

<sup>76</sup> RO 5 May 1860.

<sup>77</sup> RO 15 September 1866.

<sup>78</sup> RO 1 May 1861.

<sup>79</sup> HTM HXM 38, 18 August.

<sup>80</sup> Dalby, Halifax Town Trustees, p. 108.

year had gone out, and only £400 out of a possible £3,700 had been collected. At that time the arrears of rate amounted to £5,600.<sup>81</sup>

Borrowing was the much greater problem. Rules had been laid out in 1823 and it appears that the borrowing limit was £3,000. A more generous view was that it could be increased to £9,000. By 1839 it was clear that the debt from borrowing was nearly £12,000.<sup>82</sup> Coupled with the arrears the total debt was close to £17,600, a huge amount of money given an annual income of only £3,700.<sup>83</sup> The main person in revealing this state of affairs and forcing changes was Joseph Thorpe, a leading wool merchant. He summed up the situation by saying that the affairs of the town had 'been conducted in a very irregular and slovenly manner'.<sup>84</sup> He expanded on this as follows:

Allocations were proposed without previous notice to the rest of the Trustees and decided on by those who were personally or otherwise interested in their completion. There was no responsibility or definite authority vested in any section, no check to be relied upon in the payment of many accounts and no effectual credit.<sup>85</sup>

Thorpe was greatly helped in the exposure of the state of the Trustees by the local press. As Daniel Ramsden, another leading Trustee commented: 'No weapon less powerful than the public press was able to maintain anything like decency and good order'.<sup>86</sup> The issue of admitting the local press into public meetings was a thorny one; often there were attempts to remove them<sup>87</sup> and there were even court cases as when Thomas Livsey of Rochdale sued a reporter for defamation. Livsey won but took only minimal damages and costs.<sup>88</sup> In Halifax at

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<sup>81</sup> HTM, December 1842.

<sup>82</sup> Ranger, p. 16

<sup>83</sup> Ranger, p. 17.

<sup>84</sup> Dalby, *Halifax Town Trustees*, p. 97.

<sup>85</sup> J. W. Houseman, 'The Development of Local Government in the Parish of Halifax 1760-1848' *THAS*, (1929), p. 174.

<sup>86</sup> *HG* 10 December 1836.

<sup>87</sup> For example, *Oldham Liberal Elector*, November 1856, January 1857, October 1857 and April 1858.

<sup>88</sup> *RO* 25 March 1860.

that time there were two local papers, the *Halifax Express* and the *Halifax Guardian*. The *Express* lasted only ten years from February 1831 till February 1841. Generally, it was in favour of the Poor Law Act of 1834, but supported the Anti-Corn Law League. It supported Wood as an MP but was opposed to Fielden.<sup>89</sup> The *Halifax Guardian* on the other hand lasted from 1831 till 1921. It was opposed to the Poor Law Act but mainly because of what it saw as central interference. It was opposed to the *Express* and was more liberal in its politics. It was also very much against the Roman Catholics<sup>90</sup> and had a mixed position on the Anti-Corn Law League, mainly it seems, because the editor was not invited to the opening meeting.<sup>91</sup>

The press were admitted to the Commissioners meetings for 20 August 1835, and were ejected because of their unfavourable report on 31 August 1835.<sup>92</sup> These initial reports led to much greater public interest and the reporters returned on 19 October. Their continued presence revealed many inappropriate meetings which were frequently disorderly with threats of violence, accusations of members seeking personal gain and very bad language.<sup>93</sup> These reports and many letters to the papers helped Thorpe in his campaign and the Trustees were reformed. It is interesting to note that the editor of the *Express* was not slow to claim the credit for this new approach.<sup>94</sup> The *Guardian* reported on the last Trustees meeting on 21 October 1848.<sup>95</sup>

The state of the meetings was clear. Prior to 1840 there had been a fortnightly meeting. There were no standing committees and very few rules of procedure. They could discuss any matter brought before them. There were few checks on any work done and little or no financial control. The low level of concern shown is illustrated by the numbers attending Trustee meetings. For the first ten months of 1839 there were twenty two meetings with an

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<sup>89</sup> *HE* 20 October 1838.

<sup>90</sup> *HG* 1 October 1836.

<sup>91</sup> *HG* 2 February 1839.

<sup>92</sup> *HE* 31 August 1835.

<sup>93</sup> Dalby, *Halifax Town Trustees*, p. 97.

<sup>94</sup> *HE* 14 December 1839.

<sup>95</sup> *HG* 21 October 1848.

average attendance of nineteen members.<sup>96</sup> There were even two meetings on 3 April and 2 October where no-one attended.<sup>97</sup> The clerk recorded that the meeting had been called but no-one had attended. For November and December there were five meetings with an average attendance of forty seven. In 1840 under new rules there were only five meetings a year but this same high level of attendance continued up to July.<sup>98</sup> The Trustees then completely overhauled their systems. New chairs took a much firmer approach as the *Halifax Guardian* reported when Christopher Rawson the leading banker took the chair.<sup>99</sup> On New Year's Day in 1840, a new constitution was approved. Full meetings became quarterly and a General Committee took executive charge of day to day affairs. From this came other sub-committees, including a Watch committee for the first time.<sup>100</sup> A fresh set of bye-laws were introduced and the town was run in a much more controlled way and on a much sounder financial footing. Equally, as the new committees became more experienced, the membership began to develop expertise in specific areas that was to be of great value when the new council was formed.

There were similar problems in the other major area of responsibility, that of the streets. These had to be repaired and maintained, lighting had to be provided and they had to be kept free of obstructions and 'nuisances', a general term that could cover a host of items from rubble to sewage. This area had two problems. The first was the nature of the streets themselves. Most of the major streets had been in existence before the rapid growth of the town began, but they were narrow, irregular and frequently unpaved. Examination of the revaluation of the streets shows that there were nearly seventy major public streets with another forty un-adopted.<sup>101</sup> From them ran a large number of lanes, passages, alleys and

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<sup>96</sup> Figures taken from HTM, 1834-1842, HXM 4

<sup>97</sup> HTM 1834-1842, HXM 4, 3 April and 2 October 1839.

<sup>98</sup> This analysis was taken from HTM 1834-42, HXM 39.

<sup>99</sup> *HG* 21 December 1839.

<sup>100</sup> HTM, 1 January 1840.

<sup>101</sup> Ranger, p. 22.

courts. Coping with just the major streets cost between a quarter and a third of the Trustees' street income.<sup>102</sup> These streets were also the places where the lighting was installed.

Secondly, there was the problem of drainage. Most drainage systems in place were designed to deal with surface water from the streets and the roofs. They were not designed to deal with sewage. Throughout the records of the Commission there were complaints about 'nuisances', both human waste and animal waste, especially where animals were slaughtered. It was a constant battle to get landowners or renters to agree to remove the mess. The cleansing of refuse bins, privies and cesspits remained the responsibility of the owner, and within the Act of 1832, out of 140 clauses, only two relate to drainage. The main drain was the Hebble Brook, running round from the north to the east of the town, and the land of Halifax sloped down to the brook. The Commissioners built their sewers and drains to run into the brook but, as the population grew, the problem multiplied and the smell grew. It was to be a problem that was passed to the Council, and only later did national public health reforms give towns the powers to tackle the problem. These included the Public Health Acts of 1848, 1872 and 1875, as well as the Local Government Act of 1871.

In Oldham, in terms of land development and street creation, there is little evidence of major work being undertaken. Land was purchased as early as March 1827 to provide a pen for stray cattle.<sup>103</sup> In the minutes, there were only two new roads adopted, Eagle Street in June 1831 and Duke Street in September 1833. When a decision to build a Town Hall was made in September 1839, it carried the proviso that the work should not cost more than £3,300.<sup>104</sup> Plans were discussed to set up a market under the Commissioners, and Parliament was to be approached to permit this in April 1836, yet by September that plan had been scrapped.<sup>105</sup> Apart from the desire to keep costs down, another factor that becomes clear was the impact

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<sup>102</sup> Dalby, Halifax Town Trustees, p. 104.

<sup>103</sup> OPICM 7 March 1827.

<sup>104</sup> OPICM 18 September 1839.

<sup>105</sup> OPICM 21 April and 7 September 1836.

of the large number of potential members, up to 360. Committees were appointed, reports were drawn up, a debate took place in the meeting and a decision was agreed on. At the next or a subsequent meeting a large number of different members would attend and reverse the decision. This happened over the purchase of the Gas and Water Company, over the market and even over incorporation. The most frequent sign of these reversals however was over the police. The knowledge of such changes would have been greatly increased by the decision in March 1836 to allow Edwin Butterworth to be present and to take records of the meetings. He was a local man who wrote the reports on a whole range of issues in the area and then sold his reports to large newspapers especially in Manchester.<sup>106</sup>

The role of the provincial press has been examined by Donald Read.<sup>107</sup> He identified that the first papers in an area tended to be of the Whig/Liberal persuasion and this in turn produced a Tory response.<sup>108</sup> This was true in Rochdale with the *Observer* (Liberal /Whig) followed by the *Pilot* (Tory) from 1847 onwards. In Halifax from 1831 there was the *Guardian* (Liberal/Whig) at the same time as the *Express* (Tory). Oldham was a little later. There was the *Chronicle* (Liberal/Whig) and the *Standard* (Tory). Other papers would have been available, such as the Leeds papers in Halifax, and for Oldham and Rochdale, the Manchester papers. Clarke gives more detail for these papers.<sup>109</sup> Baines got £1,000 to set up the *Leeds Mercury*, which at its peak in 1833 was selling 5,500 copies per week.<sup>110</sup> Thirty one middle class reformers gave £1,100 to set up the *Manchester Guardian* which reached a peak of 4,000 sales a week in 1834. Both papers were very middle class in their views. Both supported the abolition of the slave trade yet both were opposed to factory reform in this country. Both were

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<sup>106</sup> Michael Winstanley, 'News from Oldham: Edwin Butterworth and the Manchester press, 1829-1848', *Manchester Region History Review*, IV 1 (Spring, 1990) pp 3-10.

<sup>107</sup> Donald Read, *Press and the People 1790-1850: Opinion in Three English Cities* (London: Arnold, 1961).

<sup>108</sup> Read, pp. 102-107.

<sup>109</sup> Bob Clarke, *From Grub Street to Fleet Street: an illustrated History of English Newspapers to 1899* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004) pp. 105-39.

<sup>110</sup> Clarke, p. 125.

in support of the Anti-Corn Law League, yet the Guardian supported the new Poor Law Act.<sup>111</sup> Both would have been overshadowed amongst the working class by *The Northern Star*, which started in 1837.<sup>112</sup> Most people in the three towns would have had access to the *Northern Star*, but Read sees this as outside the normal flow of provincial press.<sup>113</sup> He concludes that these papers do not initially set opinion, but inform it and only over a period of years do they become the leaders of opinion and not just the sources of information.<sup>114</sup>

The conflict with Molesworth in Rochdale was evident in another area of the Commission's work, that of street improvement and lighting. As Vicar, Molesworth owned or controlled as glebe land one third of the town. He was constantly seeking to lay new streets on this land but not as part of an approved plan with the Commission. The main argument was over the levels of the roads and the surveyor was frequently to be found asking the Commission for power to force the Vicar to lay the roads at the same level as the rest of the township.<sup>115</sup> This no doubt explains why Molesworth wanted his removal from office before the new Act was put into operation. The iron bridge over the Roch was another area of battle. The Vicar wanted it repaired at the Commission's expense and they argued that it was not within their powers to do so.<sup>116</sup> He also wanted the Commission to remove gas pipes that had been laid under his land and re route them elsewhere.<sup>117</sup> Earlier, when he introduced a Private Bill into Parliament to help him achieve some of his objectives, the Commission set up a special committee to watch the progress and protect the Commissions' interests. Thomas Livsey was appointed as chair, and even went to London in June 1845 to ensure a speedy conclusion.<sup>118</sup> The Commission also requested a Parliamentary inquiry into the actions of the Vicar in tearing

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<sup>111</sup> Clarke, p. 127.

<sup>112</sup> Joan Allen and Owen Ashton, *Papers for the People: a study of the Chartist Press* (London: Merlin, 2005) pp. 25-53.

<sup>113</sup> Read, pp. 98-102.

<sup>114</sup> Read, p. 207.

<sup>115</sup> RPICM 7 April 1847.

<sup>116</sup> RPICM 28 December 1848.

<sup>117</sup> RPICM 1 October 1845.

<sup>118</sup> RPICM 16 April and 4 June 1845.

down notices of public meetings posted on the church door.<sup>119</sup> This was the traditional method of informing the town's people of a forthcoming meeting, and these notices had a long standing official status.<sup>120</sup> The inquiry was not held.

Molesworth also fought a long and ultimately futile battle over a new cemetery. The Commission not only included this in the 1853 Act, but used a new tactic from 1848 onwards. Rochdale had been included in the Diocese of Manchester, newly created in 1847, and the Commission went over Molesworth's head directly to the Bishop, James Lee. The Bishop not only approved plans for the cemetery but accepted an invitation to open and bless it. The Vicar was invited but refused to attend and ordered his curates not to attend. This stance was very unpopular within the town, and won Molesworth few friends.<sup>121</sup> Despite this opposition, the progress of improving streets went on throughout the history of the Commission. The river divided the town but work took place on either side with the adoption of Anne Street South in June 1832,<sup>122</sup> south of the river and the Walk in August 1834, just north of the river.<sup>123</sup> After the Act of 1853, the pace of adoption speeded up and the minutes after that date are nearly all taken up with detailed lists of new and improved streets.

In terms of public health acts, Rochdale was the same as Halifax and Oldham in that they were reluctant to lose power to central control. Unlike the other two towns, they did not move towards incorporation as a way of making health reforms but keeping control within the town. One step that Rochdale did take was to decide to build their sewers in the egg shaped style. This method was put forward by the Sanitary Report of 1842. These had been discovered by a young engineer called John Roe in London and were recommended as a method for the

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<sup>119</sup> RPICM 3 March 1847.

<sup>120</sup> For the role of placards in calling public meetings, see Janette L. Martin, *Popular Political Oratory and Itinerant Lecturing in Yorkshire and the North East in the Age of Chartism 1837-60* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of York, 2010) pp. 85-86.

<sup>121</sup> *Rochdale Sentinel* 5 May 1855.

<sup>122</sup> RPICM 6 June 1832

<sup>123</sup> RPICM 6 August 1834.

quick and effective removal of sewage, thus lessening the risk of disease.<sup>124</sup> Rochdale adopted this method in October 1844.<sup>125</sup> The question of the Health Act was more complex. The Commission discussed the matter in March 1848 and decided by twelve votes to ten not to take the matter further.<sup>126</sup> In October 1849 they examined the issue again and decided to have a public meeting. This meeting, held in November, set up a committee to look at which clauses Rochdale needed and to report back.<sup>127</sup> Livsey led the opposition to the Act and when the committee reported back in December it made no recommendation and a vote to take the matter further was defeated by 200 votes to five.<sup>128</sup> The next occasion the matter was raised was in October 1852 when a large group of ratepayers petitioned for a public meeting. The Chief Constable responsible for calling the meeting was the same Thomas Livsey.<sup>129</sup> This meeting was to seek a fresh improvement act, which could include health clauses without the need for greater centralisation. This became the 1853 Improvement Act mentioned above.

### Policing

The other major area of responsibility usually exercised by the Improvement Commissioners was that of the police. This was a major part of the work of the commissions in both Rochdale and Oldham, and the latter was even known as the Police Commission, yet in Halifax it was very rarely mentioned, nor was it seen as part of their role. This may be due partly to the original acts of 1762 and 1768, when local policing was not seen as a municipal problem, but was the work of the magistrates, the county authorities and the vestry. Municipal policing seems to have come to the fore only after 1820, when solutions were sought to problems in London and Peel began his work to create a new force for that city.<sup>130</sup> In Halifax the commissioners were only responsible for the night time control of the town. The daytime

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<sup>124</sup> For a much more detailed report on these sewers see Finer, p. 216-225.

<sup>125</sup> RPICM 10 Oct 1844.

<sup>126</sup> RPICM 17 Oct 1849.

<sup>127</sup> *MG* 3 November 1849.

<sup>128</sup> *MG* 22 December 1849.

<sup>129</sup> Garrard, *Leadership and Power*, p. 142.

<sup>130</sup> Philips and Storch, *Policing Provincial England*, pp. 58-83.

police were provided by the Constables of the township and their deputies, and were the responsibility of the vestry. The records show that the constable was appointed annually and that every year his accounts were examined, usually in November.<sup>131</sup> Philips and Storch's analysis shows that there were two officers and that they were paid for by voluntary subscription.<sup>132</sup>

The watchmen were paid from the Trustees rates. Dalby provides an analysis that shows that the cost of the watch between 1840 and 1849 was £766 0s 2d, over 28% of the trustees outlay on the principal items for the streets.<sup>133</sup> Financial records before then were very scarce and in 1848, under the council, a borough police force was formed. The establishment was as follows: one superintendent, one inspector, one detective constable, four sergeants and eighteen constables, a total of twenty five officers.<sup>134</sup> In a constabulary report in 1861 the Inspectors reported that the town had thirty seven constables, one per thousand of the population. Recommendations had been followed and 'the force having been maintained at all points in a satisfactory state of discipline and efficiency, the Inspector is gratified to recommend it'.<sup>135</sup> It does need to be remembered that there were major disturbances in Halifax in 1842, but these were dealt with through the magistrates and the army, and were beyond the ability of any new police force to deal with. This will be examined later.

On the issue of a county force, there was much more activity and wrangling. The central point at issue was the major problem of providing a satisfactory force; everybody wanted a force but no-one was prepared to pay to provide one. What complicated matters in the West Riding of Yorkshire was the size of the area and the division between rural and urban

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<sup>131</sup> HPVM D: 53/6/1 16 October and 7 November 1832.

<sup>132</sup> Philips and Storch, Appendix B, p. 243.

<sup>133</sup> Dalby, *Halifax Town Trustees*, p. 104.

<sup>134</sup> HBCM Vol.2 16 August, 1848.

<sup>135</sup> *PP* 1863 (20): Police (Counties and Boroughs), 'Report of the Inspectors of Constabulary for the year ending 29 September 1863', p. 75.

areas. The size and population of the urban areas was growing at a rapid rate, yet as a result of rapid industrial growth, many rural areas had urban townships within their orbit. The debate was amongst the mainly Tory magistrates who wanted a compromise to have the county police in towns but not in the rural areas. The Liberal group wanted a full force. One of the chief supporters of this liberal stance was Sir Charles Wood MP for Halifax. They were all agreed on the need for a police force, but differed on the range of that force. Equally, a large number of other political issues entered the debate and made matters very confusing.<sup>136</sup>

At a packed meeting in April 1840 Matthew Thompson, a Liberal Bradford justice, proposed a whole county force.<sup>137</sup> The debate that followed highlighted the basic split. The chairman, Lord Wharnccliffe shared Thompson's view but was worried about the rural-urban split.<sup>138</sup> A new Bill was under discussion in Parliament to allow different rating systems for different parts of the county and Wharnccliffe proposed to defer the issue until an Act was passed. By the next meeting in September, the amending Act had been passed, but those opposed to any rate had organised a lot of petitions. Many of these were dismissed but the problem arose that if there were to be different districts, where exactly would the lines be drawn to ensure completely rural and urban districts.<sup>139</sup> A Liberal proposal to adopt the original and the amending Act was defeated. Wharnccliffe proposed that the main Act be adopted only for industrial areas and this was accepted.<sup>140</sup> A committee was set up to examine and identify the relevant areas.<sup>141</sup>

Then the Liberals tried to ambush the Tories. At the February meeting in 1841, in a very harsh winter they pushed through a measure to adopt the whole force for the whole county. The vote was twenty seven to twenty one, only forty eight magistrates being

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<sup>136</sup> Philips and Storch, p. 203.

<sup>137</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 11 April 1840.

<sup>138</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 12 December 1840.

<sup>139</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 26 September 1840.

<sup>140</sup> *Leeds Intelligencer*, 26 September 1840.

<sup>141</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 12 December 1840.

present.<sup>142</sup> At the April session a total of 108 magistrates attended, the Liberal plan was defeated and the matter was not seriously raised again.<sup>143</sup> Wharnccliffe moved on to become a member of Peel's new Government and advised against trying again, but to wait to see what happened in Lancashire.<sup>144</sup> The magistrates took this view and no county force was established till it became compulsory in 1856. Halifax itself remained strongly opposed to any form of county force and more specifically to paying for any form of force. On 3 September 1840, the Vestry passed a motion stating that there was no call for a county force and that the town would use its own money to look after its own affairs. The motion stated that: 'It is the opinion of this meeting that the Police as at present appointed for the government of this town is fully adequate for the complete preservation of the peace within the township'.<sup>145</sup> Not everyone took this view. The editor of the *Halifax Express* wrote a long editorial on March 31<sup>st</sup> 1838, in favour of the police force, and in October 1840, he was in favour of the new Constabulary Act.<sup>146</sup> This was followed by support for the rural police on 20 September 1841. The *Halifax Guardian* took a different stance, and opposed rural police on cost grounds in August 1840.<sup>147</sup>

Unlike Halifax, the Police Commission in Oldham took control of the police from the start, first of all with the watch committee. There were two areas of concern and control. The first was the force within Oldham, its size and cost. The other was the whole issue of the imposition of the rural or county police and the cost implications as well as the loss of control. Within the town force itself, a limit was set on the watch, a maximum of ten watchmen for the whole town. A Watch Committee was set up to oversee the work of the watchmen, the night

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<sup>142</sup> *Leeds Intelligencer*, 16 January 1841.

<sup>143</sup> *Leeds Intelligencer*, 10 April 1841.

<sup>144</sup> *Leeds Intelligencer*, 16 October 1841.

<sup>145</sup> HPVM 3 February 1840.

<sup>146</sup> *HE* 31 March 1838, and 12 September 1840.

<sup>147</sup> *HG* 29 August 1840.

patrols and the beadle.<sup>148</sup> Very quickly there were demands for more watchmen, but this was rejected.<sup>149</sup> The watchmen were paid but an overriding concern was to keep the cost down, and as Midwinter pointed out this was a pioneering approach.<sup>150</sup> The Commission was determined to keep costs low.

Costs however were paramount. As Midwinter shows, the comparison was often made for towns such as Oldham with cities such as Manchester and Liverpool and the result is clearly 'administrative nonsense' and it shows the smaller forces 'in an absurd light'.<sup>151</sup> By 1852, Oldham was the least expensive in terms of the cost of a constable at £52 compared to Manchester and Liverpool at £56. Rates were much higher in the cities at 2s 6d whereas Oldham only charged 5d. This thirst to keep costs down may go some way to explain why Oldham had a very rare and public wage dispute with its constables in 1853. The officers paraded with placards demanding fair dealings. The watch committee threatened to sack those who refused to accept terms of 18s to 20s a week. One constable was suspended.<sup>152</sup> The force did grow as Midwinter demonstrated. In 1849, when the borough force was established, it had twelve officers, by 1856 there were twenty two. This is in comparison to Manchester with 554 and Liverpool with 886.<sup>153</sup>

This desire for financial stringency did have one noticeable result. The quality of the men chosen to be constables was not good. David Taylor points this problem out in his detailed study of the police in Middlesbrough.<sup>154</sup> Whilst not as large or as old as the towns under study, it did witness the rapid growth common to all industrial towns in the first half of the nineteenth century. Taylor points out that despite clear opportunities offered by an

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<sup>148</sup> OPICM 7 February 1827.

<sup>149</sup> OPICM 7 March 1827.

<sup>150</sup> Eric C. Midwinter, *Law and Order in early Victorian Lancashire*, Borthwick Papers 34 (York: Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, 1968) p.10.

<sup>151</sup> Midwinter, p. 31.

<sup>152</sup> OPICM 5 January 1831.

<sup>153</sup> Midwinter, p. 42.

<sup>154</sup> David Taylor, *Policing the Victorian Town: The Development of the Police in Middlesbrough c. 1840-1914*, (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

Improvement Act in 1841, in practice 'policing under the act was characterised by confusion, parsimony and incompetence'.<sup>155</sup> This meant that the job of attracting good officers was difficult and keeping them was even more difficult. He cites the case of Richard Ord who twice left for better paid jobs. Twice his job was advertised at a lower salary than was paid to Ord, and when he did return, it was to a not much greater salary, out of which he had to pay for his uniform and £10 rent for a police house.<sup>156</sup> This constant turnover of personnel meant that there was little continuity and the role became one of simply reacting to events and trying to keep the peace. Such a picture can be found in Oldham. They were particularly unable to deal with large scale protest or rioting. The response was usually to call in the military. As Midwinter points out, 'there is little or no evidence that the police were able to handle mass action with any comfort; rather it would appear that they sometimes exacerbated the conflict'.

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The relationship between the Commission and the Constable or Beadle as he was known in Oldham was often a fraught one, and at times a very confusing one. A committee was established in 1827 to oversee the watch and the Beadle, to which was added the post of Inspector of nuisances. A meeting of 7 March 1827 asked for more men. This was rejected. In April 1828, the whole force was re-established,<sup>158</sup> and in December of that year Joseph Chadwick was appointed as Beadle on a salary of 150 guineas and a house. In the same meeting George Taylor was dismissed as a watchman and then promptly re-appointed, the first of several quick reversals.<sup>159</sup> In May 1829, a further dismissal was similarly overturned.<sup>160</sup> In December 1830 John Wrigley was suspended for being drunk on duty and allowing a

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<sup>155</sup> Taylor, p. 28.

<sup>156</sup> Taylor, p. 30.

<sup>157</sup> Midwinter p. 37.

<sup>158</sup> OPICM 2 April 1828.

<sup>159</sup> OPICM 3 December 1829.

<sup>160</sup> OPICM 27 May 1829.

prisoner, Joseph Clegg, to escape.<sup>161</sup> In January 1831 a new committee was set up to improve matters and in December, Joseph Chadwick was reappointed as Beadle but only on a yearly contract.<sup>162</sup> He was kept on in October 1832. He was removed from office on 2 October 1833 by a meeting with only twenty seven members present. A special meeting about the sacking was called on 14 October with seventy five members. That was followed by a meeting on 6 November with 101 members, where the sacking was confirmed and William Heywood was appointed as Chief Beadle.<sup>163</sup> The row carried over into 1834. The meeting of 14 May had 174 members present and was the first time that there had been a vote on the position of chair. John Halliwell was chosen. The matter of the Beadle was debated at length, and it was alleged that Heywood had failed to act in a proper manner at the start of the riot at Bankside Mill where one man was killed and serious damage was done. Heywood was sacked.<sup>164</sup> At a further special meeting on 18 June, with 146 members attending, Chadwick was reinstated.<sup>165</sup> The matter did not close there as, in April 1836, he was dismissed again and this time there was no reprieve.<sup>166</sup> A later meeting to appoint a new Beadle, Joseph Wild, in 1836 drew seventy members.<sup>167</sup>

Wild was reappointed every year from then till October 1847, when he was sacked, and the two following resolutions were written one after the other in the minute book.

Resolved: that this meeting is of the opinion that Mr. Joseph Wild, the Chief Beadle is culpable of a neglect of Duty in not quelling a disturbance in the public streets of this Town on 1<sup>st</sup> September last by suffering persons to carry about in the streets an effigy and discharge firearms and the same without making an effort to suppress the disturbances thereby occasioned.

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<sup>161</sup> OPICM 1 December 1830.

<sup>162</sup> OPICM 7 December 1831.

<sup>163</sup> OPICM 2 October, 14 October and 6 November 1833.

<sup>164</sup> OPICM 14 May 1834.

<sup>165</sup> OPICM 18 June 1834.

<sup>166</sup> OPICM 6 April 1836.

<sup>167</sup> OPICM 4 May 1836.

Resolved: that Joseph Wild is re-appointed as Chief Beadle or Superintendent Constable to the Commission until the month of October next, at a salary of £120 per annum.<sup>168</sup>

The second motion was then defeated at a vote by fifty five votes to forty one, and William Carpenter was appointed. He was succeeded by John Bromley who was in post when the council took over. Another incident to show that Oldham retained control of its police was the dismissal of Constable Howard in May 1845, who had taken three female prisoners to gaol in Manchester. They had all gone to the pub, got drunk and were many hours late in reporting to the prison, all of which was shown in the minutes and in the press,<sup>169</sup> as was the meeting to replace him.

The issue of the rural police was much greater in Lancashire than in Yorkshire. The Constabulary Act of 1839 came from the Report which took three years to produce and was mainly the work of Edwin Chadwick, which has been discussed above. Lancashire provided a lot of the evidence through questionnaires which Midwinter describes as 'having many leading questions and stereotypical answers'.<sup>170</sup> Opposition came from all sides. Leading politicians did not want any more state encroachment, magistrates and corporations saw a further loss of power after the Poor Law and the working class saw it as another example of oppression. The Act, when it came, was only permissive and a lot of power and, more importantly, control of the finances remained at local level.<sup>171</sup>

The Lancashire force was one of the largest in the country. The Police and Constabulary list of 1844 stated that the Lancashire force founded in 1839 had sixty two sergeants and 295 constables. In an unknown hand written note at the bottom of the page it states: 'Exclusion of all the incorporated boroughs and the Parliamentary boroughs of Ashton-

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<sup>168</sup> OPICM 6 October 1847.

<sup>169</sup> OPICM 7 May 1845 and *Manchester Times and Gazette*, 10 May 1845 and 7 June 1845.

<sup>170</sup> Midwinter, p. 5.

<sup>171</sup> Midwinter, p. 3.

under-Lyne, Oldham and Warrington and the town of Stalybridge'.<sup>172</sup> Unlike Yorkshire, there was little opposition to the formation of a rural police force in Lancashire amongst the magistrates. There was no dissent and no political struggle. The Lancashire Justices had responded quickly to requests to consider the case put by Shropshire, the 'Salop Resolution' proposing a county force paid for out of county rates and subject to the county magistrates. Once the Act was passed the magistrates held a meeting in November 1839 and passed the proposals unanimously. Sixty two magistrates were present, and there was little discussion.<sup>173</sup> The force was to operate across the county and the number was to be one chief constable and 500 men. As the return showed, they were some way short of that in 1844.<sup>174</sup> That is not to say that there was no other opposition. The radical *Preston Chronicle* described the imposition as: 'this most expensive, rigorous and obnoxious espionage arrangement'<sup>175</sup> and it was criticized by the Chartists as being an agency of oppression of the working class and its legitimate claims.<sup>176</sup>

In January 1839, there was a large public meeting in Oldham against the imposition of the rural police attended by all the leading radical figures.<sup>177</sup> The following year another similar meeting was held, again designed to keep the rural or county police out. The matter was close to home as the rural police had been imposed on Royton in July which, whilst part of the Parliamentary borough, was not part of the township.<sup>178</sup> On 1 April 1840, the commission itself had expressed its opposition to the new Act. A special committee was set up to fight the Act and the minute read as follows:

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<sup>172</sup> *Police and Constabulary List, 1844*, The Police Historical Society, (1990).

<sup>173</sup> *Preston Chronicle* 9 November 1839.

<sup>174</sup> Philips and Storch, p. 109.

<sup>175</sup> *Preston Chronicle* 9 November 1839.

<sup>176</sup> Philips and Storch, p. 139.

<sup>177</sup> *Manchester Times and Gazette*, 4 January 1839.

<sup>178</sup> OBP 2 January 1840.

Being in the opinion of this Meeting opposed to the interest of all good local Government, it is hereby determined that every constitutional means shall be taken by the Police Commission to prevent the introduction of this Act to the Township.<sup>179</sup>

Further protest meetings followed in Chadderton and Royton aimed at preventing the imposition of the rural police and there was a further request to the magistrates to keep them out on cost grounds.<sup>180</sup> There had been attempts at incorporation in 1833 which had failed but the Rural Police Act would have made Oldham responsible for twenty one constables. The commission was successful at keeping the number at ten, as Philips and Storch's analysis of 1836-1839 shows. The force was under a local Act and had ten fully paid men.<sup>181</sup> What is not revealed by that analysis but becomes clear from the minutes was the use by Oldham of supernumerary Beadles. These were officers of the commission, who already had posts such as the Superintendent of the Town Hall, or the Inspector of Nuisances or the Town Surveyor and his assistant. They were appointed from 1837 as 'assistant' Beadles or constables only to be used when needed and not paid except for expenses on the occasions they were called on.<sup>182</sup> There were at least twelve of these posts renewed every year. In this way the number of Beadles was increased but the cost was not.

Further pressure led to incorporation in 1847 when a force of twelve constables was set up. The County force was allowed access as the minutes of 2 August show. Captain John Woodford, Chief Constable of Lancashire, was allowed to use an office and four cells for three months at a time. This would cost them £45 a year.<sup>183</sup> Finally in 1863 in the Inspector of Constabulary's report on Oldham, the continuing attempts to keep the numbers down were shown again. There were fifty eight constables shown as the strength, but the inspector notes that the real figure is only forty five as thirteen are 'third class reserves'. These reserves were

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<sup>179</sup> OPICM 1 April 1840.

<sup>180</sup> Oldham, OLSL, Butterworth Papers Microfilm, reel 69.

<sup>181</sup> Philips and Storch, p. 240.

<sup>182</sup> OPICM 4 October 1837.

<sup>183</sup> OPICM 4 August 1848.

only employed occasionally and their real job was the lighting and cleansing of the public lamps. As has been shown above, the actual number of paid constables would have been much smaller. Once again, 'the inspector is of the opinion that the number of men is not sufficient to the extent and population of the borough'.<sup>184</sup> The other area to be examined was the relationship of the commission and the police with the military and the magistrates.

The question of control of the police in Rochdale was much more complicated. As part of the original Improvement Act of 1823, the commissioners were responsible for the watch, and Philips and Storch's analysis for 1839 shows that the town had a captain and night watch under the Improvement Act.<sup>185</sup> The commission had a Chief Constable, a post created as early as March 1830, and at first the post holder was appointed by the commission. There were issues of competence when Constable Knight was sacked for misconduct in May 1830,<sup>186</sup> and the position of Johnson the paid Chief Constable was discussed in April 1831.<sup>187</sup> This led to a Watch Committee being appointed in May 1831, and the appointment of an honorary Chief Constable being made in July of that year.<sup>188</sup> Henry Kelsall was the first holder of the honorary office. He was a magistrate, as was the next holder, William Chadwick, and the office grew in importance until incorporation in 1856. The post holder was elected annually but it became the practice to serve for two years. He chaired the commissioners' meetings on a regular basis after 1849. He was the caller of public meetings either on his own initiative or in response to a petition from a group of townspeople. In the hands of a radical like Thomas Livsey, this was a powerful position to advance radical ideas. Livsey was Chief Constable from 1852 till 1854.

The watch remained under the control of the commissioners as well and here the issue of cost can be seen as in Halifax and Oldham. In December 1830 the hours for the night watch

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<sup>184</sup> *PP*, 1863 (20), 'Report of Inspectors of Constabulary for the year ending 29<sup>th</sup> September 1862', p. 68.

<sup>185</sup> Philips and Storch, p. 241.

<sup>186</sup> RPICM 13 May 1830.

<sup>187</sup> RPICM 6 April 1831.

<sup>188</sup> RPICM 4 May 1831.

were defined and when they requested a pay rise in January 1831, it was refused.<sup>189</sup> Five extra men were added in October 1831 and the process of dismissing watchmen carried on throughout the period.<sup>190</sup> Johnson survived as Deputy Constable aided by two new Beadles till May 1837, when he was sacked.<sup>191</sup> Samuel Milnes was appointed as his replacement but he only lasted till September of the same year when he too was sacked and replaced by James Butterworth.<sup>192</sup> From then on the post only had an annual contract with the commissioners renewing it every May. After 1839, the reports on the watch decline, as the Rural Police became involved.

An interesting snapshot of the levels and types of crime in Rochdale is contained in the minutes of the commission for 1839.<sup>193</sup> The Watch Committee report was included in full with not only the type and number of offences but the outcome in court as well.

#### Offences

13 beer housekeepers exceeding hours	1 rape
1 licensed victualler exceeding hours	2 embezzlers
12 committing nuisance	2 keeping disorderly houses
40 felonies	47 assaulting officers
9 burglaries	2 deserters
1 issuing base coins	4 runaway apprentices
1 issuing forged bills	53 vagrants
1 highway robbery	155 misdemeanours
1 cutting and maiming	286 disturbing the peace
1 malicious shooting	8 leaving carts in the street
<u>Total</u> 640 offences	

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<sup>189</sup> RPICM 5 January 1831.

<sup>190</sup> RPICM 5 October 1831.

<sup>191</sup> RPICM 3 May 1837.

<sup>192</sup> RPICM 6 September 1837.

<sup>193</sup> RPICM 30 April 1839.

190 brought by the Watchmen

450 brought by the Beadle and the Constables

### Outcome

50 committed for trial

206 fined as vagrants, misdemeanours or breaches of the peace

164 fined

220 discharged

If these cases are broken down, there were 461 public order offences, or 72%;

16 irregular houses, or 2.5%;

59 runaways or 9%

104 serious crimes or 16.25%

40% were discharged, and the daily rate of crime was less than two cases per day in a population of just under 44,000.

That makes an interesting comparison with the picture painted in 1839 in the Constabulary Report. It quotes Thomas Bart, a straw-hat salesman as saying:

Where travellers feel the least comfortable in travelling are the neighbourhoods of the northern manufacturing towns, as in the vicinity of Manchester, where some ferocious highway robberies have been committed. In particular the neighbourhoods of Bury, Preston and Rochdale are worst whilst the Blackstone Edge and Todmorden Vale Roads are never used for the people there are barbarous to an unusual degree.<sup>194</sup>

Both these roads lead to Halifax. The Commissioners fought long and hard to keep the rural police out of the town, but they failed. They started by opposing the introduction of the Act with a motion against it in March 1840.<sup>195</sup> In April they held a public meeting to get names for a petition against it, and in the same month, they held a special meeting to oppose the Act and

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<sup>194</sup> Midwinter, p. 4.

<sup>195</sup> RPICM 4 March 1840.

sent a delegation to London to fight it.<sup>196</sup> In August 1841, they sent a delegation to the magistrates asking them to go to Preston to stop the introduction of the Rural Police into Rochdale.<sup>197</sup> They passed the following resolution in December:

That this meeting is of the opinion that the introduction of the County Constabulary Force into this Borough is totally uncalled for and cannot be too highly deprecated; that the conduct of those persons who have been instrumental in bringing them into operation is highly censurable; that they have thereby incurred an additional expense of several hundred pounds a year at a time when the poor ratepayers are not half fed and many of them absolutely starving from the want of the common necessities of life and that the Commissioners of Police for this Borough hereby enter this, their protest against their introduction.<sup>198</sup>

The magistrates however were determined to bring them in, and in April 1842, Livsey wanted to know the names of those who had requisitioned the Rural Police and wanted them published.<sup>199</sup> When the new Improvement Act was introduced in 1844, Livsey attempted to get the Rural Police removed from the town.<sup>200</sup>

The parliamentary records show how far Livsey and the commission were prepared to go.<sup>201</sup> In May 1846, four of them, on behalf of the committee, wrote to the Home Secretary, Sir James Graham, about an alleged assault by three County constables on a female servant at an inn. The report alleges they were drunk and when the landlady threatened to take action she was threatened. The parish constable took out summonses against the three men but they argued that he did not have the power to do so. Two meetings at the Petty Sessions brought

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<sup>196</sup> RPICM 1 and 21 April 1840.

<sup>197</sup> RPICM 4 August 1841.

<sup>198</sup> RPICM 1 December 1841.

<sup>199</sup> RPICM 6 April 1842.

<sup>200</sup> RPICM 28 August 1844.

<sup>201</sup> *PP* 1846 (313) Rochdale Borough: A Memorial to the Right Hon. Sir James Graham, and correspondence thereon, relative to certain violent and illegal acts perpetrated within the Borough of Rochdale, 14 May 1846.

only more allegations and no redress for the servant, the landlord or his wife. This they put down to 'the glaring act of oppression and tyranny'. The Home Office wrote to the magistrates who confirmed the main points of the complaint, but said that 'we understand and believe that Captain Woodford the chief constable has thoroughly investigated the matter in respect of the conduct of the officers with a view to punishment or otherwise, as he might judge right'. The Home Office then wrote back to the commission informing them that Sir James Graham had inquired into the matter 'and sees no reason for further proceedings in this case'. Livsey was to pursue the County Police further as chair of the Poor Law board of guardians.

At the heart of this as with Oldham were the twin issues of control and cost. On the issue of control, the letter to Graham ended with the statement that:

The introduction of the county constabulary force into the borough superseded the power of your Memorialists, who had previously the appointment and control of their own constables, and in all other respects the management of the public affairs of the town.<sup>202</sup>

The issue of cost had been raised and continued to be raised with the magistrates and the County force.<sup>203</sup> The possibility of further enforcement of the county police in the proposed Act of 1856 tipped the argument in the borough in favour of incorporation. It had been raised in the commission in 1852, but there was considerable opposition.<sup>204</sup> This had gone by 1856 when a motion against the new Act was passed in February, and the petition for a Charter of Incorporation had already been placed in January.<sup>205</sup> The Report of the Inspectors of Constabulary of 1863 showed an interesting picture. Given that Midwinter writes of Thomas Butterworth captaining a force of twelve night watchmen in 1825,<sup>206</sup> there had not been a big

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<sup>202</sup> *PP* 1846 (313) p. 3.

<sup>203</sup> RPICM 5 July 1854.

<sup>204</sup> RPICM 1 December 1852.

<sup>205</sup> RPICM 2 January and 21 February.

<sup>206</sup> Midwinter, p. 10.

increase in numbers by 1863 with only twenty three constables on the force, which the Inspector said was 'an increase of one since the last inspection in 1861'. He added that the establishment was complete but it was not sufficient in numbers.<sup>207</sup> Compare that with Halifax which had a similar population but had thirty seven constables in 1863. Oldham had fifty eight as has been shown, though many of them were of dubious status.

In all three towns, there was the complicated question of the role of the military in supporting the local law officers. As Midwinter has pointed out, there was 'little or no evidence to suggest that local forces were able to handle mass action with any comfort'.<sup>208</sup> The issue was not that of relationships between the police and the army, but between the army commander and the magistrates. General Sir Charles Napier was the commander of the forces in the North and based himself at Nottingham. He was a highly experienced soldier, a veteran of the Peninsular Wars.<sup>209</sup> His approach to controlling the population of the North was based on two simple concepts, that of the concentration of troops and of good billeting for them. In both of these areas he came into conflict with the magistrates. They all wanted men based in their town, but were loath to pay for proper billeting for those troops. In this respect Halifax was the prime example. There were frequent requests for troops from the magistrates, led by Joseph Raby.<sup>210</sup> Napier's response was that there were forty two dragoons split between twenty one billets. The correspondence between the Halifax magistrates and Colonel Weymss, Napier's second-in-command shows how this issue continued to be unresolved. His approach was summed up in a letter to the magistrates of the West Riding on 24 April 1839:

Sirs, I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 22<sup>nd</sup> instant. To

be frank with you, I dislike small detachments because from experience I have learnt

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<sup>207</sup> *PP*, 1863 (20) Police (Counties and Boroughs), Reports of the Inspectors of Constabulary p. 68.

<sup>208</sup> Midwinter, p. 37.

<sup>209</sup> Sir William Napier, *The Life and Opinions of General Sir Charles James Napier G. C. B.*, Vol. 2, (London: Murray, 1857), pp. 1-104. This contains extracts from his letters and his journal.

<sup>210</sup> G. R. Dalby, 'The Chartist Movement in Halifax and its District.' *THAS*, 1956, pp. 93-111. Copies of sections of the letters between the army and the Halifax magistrates are in an appendix at the end of this article.

the danger to which they are exposed in civil commotion: but this danger depends much upon the manner in which they are lodged. The cavalry at Halifax are quartered in the very worst and most dangerous manner. Forty two troopers in twenty one distant billets! Fifty resolute Chartists might disarm and destroy the whole in ten minutes; and believe me gentlemen that a mob which has gained such a momentary triumph is of all mobs the most ferocious and most dangerous to the inhabitants.<sup>211</sup>

He was similarly scathing about Rochdale, describing the quarters there as 'infamous'.<sup>212</sup>

Oldham was never mentioned in his accounts.

Napier had great sympathy with the Chartists and blamed the Government and the new Poor Law for their plight. 'It is said arms are being provided for insurrection: this is the result of bad government, which has produced want and the people are to be pitied rather than blamed'.<sup>213</sup> He also added 'What has made Englishmen turn assassins? The new Poor Law'.<sup>214</sup> Nevertheless, despite these views he was not prepared to allow any rioters to use force to achieve political objectives. He used a combination of pressure and bluff. He arranged artillery demonstrations for selected Chartist leaders<sup>215</sup> and proposed using buck shot, which would wound but not kill.<sup>216</sup> He sent a regiment of soldiers to Manchester on two separate trains so that the Chartists thought there were two new sets of soldiers. He also reported himself that 'the 1<sup>st</sup> Dragoons and the 10<sup>th</sup> Foot came from Ireland with the 79<sup>th</sup>, the last being in kilts terrified the Chartists more than a brigade of other troops'.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Napier, p. 16, Letter to West Riding Magistrates, 24 April 1839. He makes repeated references to the figures for Halifax throughout his journal for this period. For a more detailed examination of Halifax, see Neil Pye, *The Home Office and the suppression of Chartism in the West Riding of Yorkshire, 1838-1848*, PhD Thesis University of Huddersfield (2011).

<sup>212</sup> Napier, p. 47. Journal Entry 19 June 1839.

<sup>213</sup> Napier, p. 4. Journal Entry 22 March 1839.

<sup>214</sup> Napier, p. 9. Journal Entry 10 April 1839.

<sup>215</sup> Napier, p. 40. Journal Entry 28 May 1839.

<sup>216</sup> Napier, p. 4. Journal Entry 22 March 1839.

<sup>217</sup> Napier, p. 44. Journal Entry 8 June 1839.

He had little time for the Government. 'The Duke of Portland called on me. He seems totally ignorant of the state of the country and indeed told me so. A duke and ignorant of the state of the country in which he holds such large possessions!!'<sup>218</sup> His real anger however was reserved for the magistrates. 'Besides these you and I have our little master-generals called magistrates. God help the poor English army among so many cooks. Were it broth, it would have spoiled long ago'.<sup>219</sup> He also objected very strongly to his troops being used for other purposes such as arresting criminals.<sup>220</sup> The Home Secretary Lord Russell replied very strongly to those magistrates who used troops in this way.<sup>221</sup>

The most significant year for military action in the towns of the North was 1842, but there had been a previous use of troops in Oldham in 1834. This followed a dispute within the textile trade with lock outs, and the death of a mill worker, shot from within a factory by a blackleg worker. This was, according to Winstanley, 'not part of any popular radical action nor was there anything other than a tenuous and ambiguous link between radical leaders and organised labour'.<sup>222</sup> The legacy could best be seen in the reluctance of the Chartists in the town to give any support to physical force movements after 1838.<sup>223</sup> The unrest in Oldham in 1842 mainly concerned the passage of strikers from Ashton through Oldham on their way to Rochdale. Troops were billeted there and there was a complaint about their continued presence and cost in the Police Commission meeting in January 1843.<sup>224</sup>

The Rochdale experience was very different, given the presence of the two Chadwick brothers, Thomas and William. Despite the anxiety already seen with Clement Royds, the majority of magistrates were liberal and the brothers were determined not to use force if

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<sup>218</sup> Napier, p. 9. Journal Entry 14 April 1839.

<sup>219</sup> Napier, p. 45. Letter to Sir Hew Ross June 1839.

<sup>220</sup> Napier, p. 44. Letter to the Under Secretary at the Home Office June 1839.

<sup>221</sup> Philips and Storch, p. 59.

<sup>222</sup> Michael Winstanley, 'Oldham Radicals and the Origins of Popular Liberalism 1830-52', *The Historical Journal* 36, 3 (1993) 619-643. See p. 621.

<sup>223</sup> For a much fuller examination of these events see Robert Sykes, 'Some Aspects of working class consciousness in Oldham 1830-1842', *Historical Journal*, 23, 1 (1980), 167-179.

<sup>224</sup> OPICM 4 January 1843.

possible. On 11 August the Royton strikers arrived in Rochdale and despite the swearing in of special constables, their progress was hardly halted. The shopkeepers and even Jacob Bright senior gave bread to the strikers. The strike was complete by the end of the day.<sup>225</sup> An attempt by the mill owners to reopen the mills was thwarted by the return of the Royton strikers on 18 April. Troops were present but were not used, much to the confusion of their officers. They commented that 'they might as well have been left in their billet'.<sup>226</sup> William Chadwick was hurt by a stone thrown from the crowd, but Thomas Livsey got between him and the strikers and prevented further trouble. When William Chadwick informed the vicar, the Reverend Molesworth, that he would not be afforded any special protection, Molesworth referred the whole case to the Government.<sup>227</sup>

In Halifax the problem was far more serious. There was a large crowd of workers trying to shut the mills on 15 and 16 August 1842. Seventeen people arrested in those disturbances were being taken to Wakefield by the soldiers when they were ambushed by a large mob wanting to free the prisoners. They failed to stop the coaches but ambushed the soldiers on their way back. Three soldiers were unhorsed by the volley of stones and they were beaten and kicked. Only after shots were fired did the mob disperse.<sup>228</sup> More arrests and trials followed and as late as 1848, the events of 1842 were used by one magistrate to argue that troops should be left in the town.<sup>229</sup> Generally after 1848, as trade improved and police forces began to be more effective, there was less call for troops and local bodies took over.<sup>230</sup>

## Conclusion

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<sup>225</sup> MG 13 August 1842.

<sup>226</sup> Arthur G. Rose, 'Truckling Magistrates of Lancashire in 1842', *Transactions of the Historical Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, 83 (1985), 40-70 p. 59.

<sup>227</sup> For a fuller explanation see the whole article by Arthur G. Rose.

<sup>228</sup> HG 20 August 1842.

<sup>229</sup> F. C. Mather, *Public Order in the Age of the Chartists*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959) pp.174-5.

<sup>230</sup> For a fuller analysis of the period after 1848 see Malcolm Chase, *Chartism: A New History*, pp. 312-341.

When the new council was established in Halifax, the question of the transfer of powers and money was not an issue. Though there was no legal requirement to hand over power, the Trustees recommended unanimously that powers be transferred and at a meeting on 1 January 1848, a Deed Poll was passed.<sup>231</sup> One of the major reasons for this smooth transfer was undoubtedly that at the council elections, twenty eight of the forty councillors chosen were Trustees. This clearly showed the way in which improvement commissions were the training ground for the council. The other aspect that ensured continuity was that the clerk to the Trustees, Jonathan Crowther, became the first Town Clerk for the new council. Methods and practices used by the trustees were adopted initially by the council and most matters carried on seamlessly from one body to the new body.

For Oldham, when incorporation finally came, the commission had one last big meeting. On 8 December a resolution was tabled that the commission have nothing to do with the new council and actively oppose its introduction. An amendment was proposed that the commission do nothing at all in case any of the costs of the new council should fall upon the commission. The vote was 104 to fifty three in favour of the amendment.<sup>232</sup> Finance was still the overriding priority. The meeting had a small footnote in that for the first time in nearly twenty years on the commission, the leading radicals split. Alex Taylor voted for the resolution, James Holladay and William Knott voted for the amendment. Rochdale was similar to Oldham. It did not gain a Charter of Incorporation till much later but it used the same structures and systems as before and there was considerable overlap of members. The petition for incorporation was made in January 1856,<sup>233</sup> but it was necessary to petition Parliament to

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<sup>231</sup> HTM 1 January 1849.

<sup>232</sup> OPICM 5 December 1848.

<sup>233</sup> RPICM 2 January 1856.

enable the transfer to take place.<sup>234</sup> Nevertheless it still took over eighteen months for the final transfer to take place.<sup>235</sup>

The role of the improvement commissioners in every town was very important, as it was the precursor to the town council created under incorporation. The commissions provided many of the members of the new councils, and the new members were already well versed in the procedures and practices of an official body, with its rules and by-laws, its committees and reports. Equally, many members had developed particular expertise in one area such as gas, water or the police and took this on into the council. Another vital by-product was the expertise of the paid officials, such as the surveyors, the clerks in the meetings, the various rate collectors and the rate assessors who were used by the commissions. The other major advantage was that they shared a membership with the other major bodies within the town, such as the vestry, and more importantly the Poor Law Board of Guardians. This carried on into municipal corporations and was of great benefit to these new bodies.

There were marked differences between the three towns. Halifax started some sixty years before the other two and had a very settled and much more conservative outlook. Most of its members were either upper or middle class. There is hardly any evidence of working class or, more importantly, radical involvement in the Halifax body. There were Chartists and factory reformers in the town, but none seem to have made any impact on the Trustees. Eric Webster, writing on the Chartists in 1994, examines the claim that three individuals who were on the Trustees were Chartists. They were Squire Balme, John Bottomley and John Harrison. All had attended Chartist meetings, but Webster dismisses as 'dubious in the extreme' that they were active members. Balme was listed as a gentleman who owned over thirty houses, Harrison was an innkeeper and Bottomley was a corn merchant.<sup>236</sup> In both Oldham and Rochdale not only were there radicals on the commissions but very often they were running

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<sup>234</sup> RPICM 6 February 1857.

<sup>235</sup> RPICM 13 January 1858.

<sup>236</sup> Eric Webster, 'Chartism in the Calder Valley 1838-50', *THAS*, 2 (1994), p. 57.

the body. Men such as Holladay, Knott and Taylor in Oldham and Livsey, Heape and Ashworth in Rochdale, all made significant contributions to the development of the commissions and to the town.

They all had common problems of water and gas supply, laying, lighting and paving streets, drainage and sewers, nuisances and dirt. All three dealt with them to differing degrees of success. They all had watch responsibilities, and police as well. Halifax did not have many problems in this area as there was a great reluctance in the West Riding of Yorkshire to take any action and the town had its corporation before action was necessary. Oldham and Rochdale both dealt with the police and brought order to the towns. All three towns were determined to follow two guiding principles in all their work, firstly that the cost to the ratepayers of the town should be kept to a minimum, and secondly that the threat of centralisation, of outside control should be resisted at all costs within legal means. That approach was also to be seen in the way they dealt with the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834.

## Chapter Six

## The Board of Guardians

In the development of municipal control, the board of guardians was a unique institution in the three towns in that, of all the bodies and movements involved in their emergence, this was the only one imposed from outside. All other bodies came from the wishes or actions of the inhabitants; this one was forced on towns by law. This leads to another unique aspect in that the records contain two sets of information, the actions, views and debates within the town body, and the response and requests and instructions from the central body, the Poor Law Board of Commissioners. This gives an insight into how these towns reacted to the central group and where the boundaries of power lay in this complex set up. As has already been seen, there are gaps in the records. In Halifax, there is only one set of Board minutes from 1837 till 1841. All of Oldham's minute books are extant, but Rochdale has gaps.<sup>1</sup> It is somewhat inexplicable that some records are missing as they were all kept in Somerset House and frequent references are made in the notes to previous correspondence, so the records must have been accessible to the clerks. Nevertheless, what does remain presents a picture of the relationship between two of the towns and the agents of central Government.

The origins of the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 have been very well analysed elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> Equally, the opposition to the Poor Law especially in the North has also been examined in detail.<sup>3</sup> Much of the work sees the opposition as very limited and mainly over by

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<sup>1</sup> There are no remaining records for 1845-48, 1851-54, 1862-63 and 1865-72. They were held at the Lancashire Record Office but were missing before 1974. At the National Archives, there are no records of the Poor Law Commissioners correspondence with Oldham. For Halifax, there are records dating from the very start of the process in October 1834. With Rochdale, the records do not start till January 1846.

<sup>2</sup> See Nicholas Edsall, *The Anti-Poor Law Movement 1834-44* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1971), Derek Fraser, ed., *The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Macmillan, 1976), John Knott, *Popular Opposition to the 1834 Poor Law* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), Michael Rose, *The English Poor Law, 1780-1930* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1971) and Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *English Poor Law History: Part II, The Last Hundred Years*, 2 vols. (London: Longmans, 1929).

<sup>3</sup> Michael Rose, 'The Anti-Poor Law Movement in the North of England,' *Northern History*, 1 (1966), 70-92.

1844.<sup>4</sup> What has yet to be undertaken is an examination of how a board of guardians, which had already been established, had a board made up of ex-officio and elected members and was apparently in full cooperation with the commissioners, yet managed to thwart and delay the drive and work of the commission. Outright opposition was rare, yet in the cases of both Halifax and Rochdale, they sought to use the complexity of the commission's systems and to test the practical limits of its powers. Delays in sending information or in acting on instructions, pleas of poverty or lack of manpower, and requests for clarification were all used as a form of passive resistance, all with the object of keeping actual control in the hands of the board, not the commission.

The Poor Law Amendment Act and the commission set up by that Act have long been associated with the name of Edwin Chadwick. He was not alone on the body that drew up the report prior to 1834, and others were quick to claim credit for their role. Chief amongst these was Nassau Senior, an economist who helped found the *London Review*. Senior told De Tocqueville about the report in 1835, stating 'three fourths of it was written by me, and all that was not written by me was re-written by me'.<sup>5</sup> Chadwick and Senior were close to the leading philosopher Jeremy Bentham, who had led the movement known as 'Utilitarianism' or 'Philosophic Radicals', and who had died in 1832.<sup>6</sup> Other leading figures in the movement were John Stuart Mill, Francis Plaice and the M.P. Joseph Hume. From 1831 onwards, Chadwick was Bentham's secretary. He took these philosophical ideas into his work for central Government, first of all on factory acts and then on the Poor Law.

What helped to fix the link between Chadwick and the Act was the fact that Chadwick then became the secretary to the Poor Law Commissioners. This was not what he intended, he

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<sup>4</sup> See Chapter 2, pp. 30-32.

<sup>5</sup> Anthony Brundage, *England's 'Prussian Minister': Edwin Chadwick and the Politics of Government Growth, 1832-1854* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University, 1988) p. 38.

<sup>6</sup> See William Thomas, *The Philosophic Radicals: nine studies in theory and practice 1817-1841* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979) pp. 15-94 for more details.

wanted one of the three commissioners' posts and spent a considerable time, as Brundage pointed out, trying to get ministers of both the Whig and Tory persuasions to grant him a post.<sup>7</sup> For fifteen years he kept trying but without success. Basically he was not seen as being of the right 'class' for the post, as was said in Cabinet: 'his station in society was not as would have made it fair that he should be made one of the Commissioners'.<sup>8</sup> That he was an expert at the production of reports with detailed factual evidence and excellent proposals backed by the facts, was not in doubt. Ministers in the Cabinet came to rely on his expertise to help not just with legislation but also with dealing with matters in Parliament on a day-to-day basis. Brundage uses as the title of his study of Chadwick the label that was first used by Lord Russell writing to Chadwick in 1836:

We must be aware not to lose the cooperation of the country. They will not bear a Prussian Minister to regulate their domestic affairs, so that some faults must be indulged for the sake of carrying improvements in the mass.<sup>9</sup>

What becomes clear from a detailed reading of the correspondence of the commissioners based in their offices in Somerset House was the very high level of control and order they wanted to achieve.<sup>10</sup> There was a form for every appointment made to the boards, a form for every type of expenditure and endless lists of numbers: those relieved; those in the workhouse; the diet of the inmates; the plans, estimates and bills for even the slightest piece of work done, and endless letters. In the week beginning 17 February 1865, eight separate letters all dealing with different items were sent to the Rochdale Board of Guardians.<sup>11</sup> In addition there were inspections. The financial audit was carried out twice a year and there was an annual inspection of the care of lunatics. There could be a number of additional inspections

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<sup>7</sup> Brundage, p. 122.

<sup>8</sup> Spencer to Chadwick, 8 May 1841, quoted in S. E. Finer, *The Life and Times of Edwin Chadwick* (London: Methuen, 1952), p. 109.

<sup>9</sup> Russell to Edwin Chadwick, 9 October 1836.

<sup>10</sup> TNA, MH 12, Papers for Halifax and Rochdale.

<sup>11</sup> RBGM 17 Feb 1865.

by specially appointed Assistant Commissioners, as well as medical inspections, at least once a year and more if disease was rising. Finally there were inspections into the teachers employed, both for the girls and for the boys, and forms reporting the progress of both the teachers and the pupils. These were accompanied by forms to claim the salary of the teacher back from another Government department so that no expense would be incurred by the Board.

The most requested forms were for any type of outdoor relief. Each application for every person had to be recorded. Later the boards changed this to one form per family. In Rochdale, at the height of the Cotton Famine in the eighteen sixties, all that the Commissioners got was the numbers. A very visual clue to the amount of paperwork involved can be seen simply by looking at the files in the National Record Office.<sup>12</sup> Records for each town were usually divided into files covering two years and the smallest file is over fifteen centimetres thick. Given the number of Unions involved, this was micro-management on a massive scale.

An important feature of the board of guardians was that it was a hybrid committee. One group was made up of ex-officio members appointed by the Commission. These were usually magistrates, and one area to be explored is the extent to which they became involved in the work of the guardians and how well they worked with the other group. These were the elected Guardians, elected by the ratepayers of the Union, usually within each township. This elected contingent would be careful to ensure that the creation of new magistrates did not upset the balance between elected and ex-officio, as became a possibility in Rochdale in 1859.<sup>13</sup> Inevitably there could be tensions between members such as that between the Reverend Mills and Thomas Livsey in Rochdale.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> TNA, MH 12 for Halifax and Rochdale

<sup>13</sup> RBGM 29 July 1859.

<sup>14</sup> RBGM 22 March 1850.

Central to the working of the board of guardians and of the Poor Law within a Union were the overseer of the poor and his assistants. These men were the chief financial officers of the board and were responsible for overseeing the collection of the rates, and for the distribution of any relief. The key point was that they were not appointed by the commission but by the vestry and the commission had no power to remove them. This loophole was used by both Halifax and Rochdale to keep in post officials whom the commission wanted removed and to delay the resolution of problems over relief. The overseer was a central figure in local government in the first half of the nineteenth century. He was responsible for the parliamentary and borough electoral roll and closely linked to the Revising Barrister's courts, where voting rights were challenged.<sup>15</sup> He was involved in refreshing the electoral roll after any valuation exercise carried out by the improvement commissioners. He was often the local Registrar for Births Deaths and Marriages after the 1837 Act. He was responsible for the overall implementation of the rates once the vestry and the board of guardians had set the required rates. His assistants had considerable financial responsibilities and were closely involved in very small local townships. Every year these communities met as part of the vestry and would elect the overseer and his assistants. It is a reflection of how important public meetings, which had been properly called, were in the administration of the board. Poster notices of the calling of the vestry meeting and the posters advertising the results of the elections were sent by the boards of guardians to the commissioners as official notification of the choice of new officials, and the commissioners' files include many copies from Halifax and Rochdale.

The parish was also critical in the matter of finance. No new provision was made in the 1834 Act for the collection of rates. The parish overseer assessed all the occupiers, the vestry levied a rate and the overseer's men collected them. Each parish continued to pay for the

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<sup>15</sup> See John Prest, *Politics in the Age of Cobden* and Malcolm Chase 'Out of radicalism: the mid Victorian freehold land movement', *English Historical Review* 419 (1991) 319-345.

relief of its poor as well as a cost towards the central expenditure, such as the salaries of officials. The amount a parish paid was based on the claims made on that part of the Union taken over three years. Therefore making greater demands for relief incurred more of the central costs. Another critical factor was the assessments made on very small pieces of land. If the economy declined (as it did frequently during the late eighteen thirties and the eighteen forties), many ratepayers were unable to pay their rates and applied to the magistrates for exemption. This in turn also impacted on the payment of rates to the improvement commissions as was shown above in Oldham.<sup>16</sup>

The introduction of the new regulations was phased in from 1834, with the North to be left till last. There was a sense amongst the people of the North that little of the new Act was likely to apply to the area, as Rose points out.<sup>17</sup> The *Leeds Mercury* thought it could 'scarcely be doubted that the commission will direct interference chiefly on parishes where great abuses exist and not trouble with vexatious meddling the parishes where the affairs of the poor are well administered'.<sup>18</sup> Against the advice of Chadwick, who wanted a complete introduction across the country in one move, the Poor Law Commission started work in the South and it was not till late in 1836 that the assistant commissioners moved towards the North.<sup>19</sup> They were to face a double assault, from both the magistrates and local authorities and from the working people. Rose argues that the areas that showed the greatest and most organised opposition to the new laws were those areas that had been most forthright in their demands for factory reform.<sup>20</sup> Many of the leaders of the factory movement were also opposed to the new Poor Law, men such as Richard Oastler and John Fielden. The framework for opposition existed as local committees were already in place and therefore the map of the

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<sup>16</sup> OBG M Figures for rating relief.

<sup>17</sup> Rose, 'The Anti-Poor Law Movement in the North of England', p. 71.

<sup>18</sup> *Leeds Mercury* 31 May 1834.

<sup>19</sup> Finer, p. 115.

<sup>20</sup> Rose, p. 74.

opposition to the new law almost exactly matched the map of the factory reform movement, along the sides of the Pennine hills and including Halifax, Oldham and Rochdale.

### Halifax

As has already been seen, though all three towns shared a common opposition to many aspects of the new law, they approached that problem in very different ways and at different speeds. Halifax magistrates accepted the terms of the new system almost at once in 1837. It took the other two towns nearly ten years to reach the same state. The *Halifax Guardian* highlighted the main issues, for example the powers of the Commission in an editorial on 16 May 1834.<sup>21</sup> When Power came to establish the Unions in 1837, and a public meeting was held to nominate the guardians, the paper was very critical.<sup>22</sup> It gave a lot of coverage to an anti-poor law meeting on 1 April, addressed by Richard Oastler.<sup>23</sup> The same happened with the large meeting at Peep Green on Hartshead Moor. The paper was very critical of P. K. Holden who chaired most of the initial public meetings over the issue of overseers and the setting of the poor law rates.<sup>24</sup> Finally for this early period, the paper was banned from Board meetings in April 1839.<sup>25</sup>

The other Halifax paper, the *Express* approved of the new Poor Law.<sup>26</sup> In August 1836, there was a brief report about the Board meeting,<sup>27</sup> and this was followed by the reporter being banned at the next meeting.<sup>28</sup> The paper published a long editorial in favour of the 1834 Act in January 1837<sup>29</sup> and was very critical of the meeting (the same as the *Guardian* one)

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<sup>21</sup> *HG* 16 May 1834.

<sup>22</sup> *HG* 14 January and 4 February 1837.

<sup>23</sup> *HG* 1 April 1837.

<sup>24</sup> *HG* 30 May 1837.

<sup>25</sup> *HG* 25 April 1839.

<sup>26</sup> *HE* 22 May 1834.

<sup>27</sup> *HE* 24 August 1836.

<sup>28</sup> *HE* 31 August 1836.

<sup>29</sup> *HE* 25 January 1837.

chaired by P. K. Holden to nominate the guardians, seeing it as descending into an anti-Poor Law meeting.<sup>30</sup> Having been restored to the meetings there was a very lengthy report in February 1837.<sup>31</sup> In October 1838, it reported the anti-poor law riots in Todmorden, and attempted to implicate Fielden as the organiser of the violence. Fielden was described as ‘that solemn and self-sufficient fool who represents Oldham’.<sup>32</sup> The paper closed just before the minute book finished.<sup>33</sup>

Five townships in the north west of the parish were removed from the Halifax Union and joined to two townships in the Rochdale parish to create the new Todmorden Union. These were Errington, Heptonstall, Langfield, Stansfield and Wadsworth. The remaining eighteen townships of Halifax parish elected delegates who first met on 17 February 1837.<sup>34</sup> Only one township, Fixby in the very south of the parish did not send a member. There were six ex-officio magistrates, including Rawdon Briggs who had been the town’s MP from 1832 till 1835. The sole surviving minute book (February 1837 to April 1841) permits an illuminating analysis of the attendance pattern. The first set of meetings was short as a new board was elected on 27 March of that year. All five meetings were quorate with an average attendance of twenty. The following year (ending 2 April 1838) was not as successful with forty two meetings of which fifteen were inquorate, nearly 36%. Average attendance was only six. Matters improved during the next year (ending 5 April 1839). There were fifty three meetings, none inquorate with an average attendance of fourteen. The following year (ending 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1840), there were fifty one meetings with an average attendance of ten. The final full year for which there are records showed forty nine meetings with an average of thirteen attendees. A pattern of a regular weekly meeting with nearly one third of members present on average

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<sup>30</sup> HE 1 February 1837.

<sup>31</sup> HE 28 February 1837

<sup>32</sup> HE 20 October 1838, and Stewart A. Weaver, *John Fielden and the Politics of Popular Radicalism 1832-1847*, pp. 200-206.

<sup>33</sup> HE 27 February 1841.

<sup>34</sup> HBGM 17 February 1837.

began to emerge.<sup>35</sup> This analysis of attendance shows that members were diligent and conscientious.

The role of the magistrates was also interesting. Of the six ex-officio members, only one played little part in the proceedings at the start of the board's work. John Rawson only attended four times. The rest played a full part, not only as members, but also in the vital office of chair. Rawdon Briggs (a Unitarian banker and opposed to church rates) attended fifteen meetings and was chair once. William Briggs was his son and also a banker. He attended sixty three meetings but was only chair once. George Pollard, another banker and the first chair of the West Yorkshire Railway Company, attended forty two times and was chair twice. Landowner J. R. Ralph attended fifty seven times and was chair three times. Finally there was John Waterhouse a member of a very prominent local family and like all the others, a Justice of the Peace. He attended forty one times and was chair for thirty two of those. The other figure of note was the Reverend Ralph Younger, a local curate from the parish. He first attended in 1840, just before the record ends. Clergy were often present at vestry meetings, frequently as chair, but the only other meetings they are recorded as attending were the board of guardian meetings.

Of the elected members, the leading figure was Robert Wainhouse, present at 155 out of a total of 205 recorded meetings. More importantly, he was chair on 109 occasions, over half the meetings. John Holland had the next highest attendance rate. He was present 134 times. William Little was present 132 times, twice as chair. William Baxter and John Murgatroyd with ninety one attendances each and Samuel Peel with eighty five completed the top members. Ninety four different members were recorded as attending. The size of the Union caused membership problems. There were eighteen townships, of which eight had more than one member. Halifax was the largest with five members. The other eleven had only

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<sup>35</sup> HBGM 1837-1841.

one member each and there was great concern at election time as some townships, notably Fixby, make no return at all. Fixby was the only township to send no member to the initial meeting on 17 February 1837, but when fresh elections were held in April 1837, there were no members from Fixby, Sowerby, Shelf, Barkisland and Rishworth (Shelf did send a member the following week). The following year there were again no members from Fixby and Barkisland as well as Elland and Greetland, Midgeley and Rastrick. Nearly one quarter of the townships were unrepresented at any one time. Yet smaller townships were significant; for example Wainhouse was the member for Skircoat, and Baxter was the first member for Barkisland. Halifax township tended to dominate the meetings with Jonathon Akroyd as a member as well as G. B. Browne.

Browne was at the centre of a row within the board in February 1838.<sup>36</sup> Browne was the chair eleven times in sixteen attendances. The chair at this meeting was taken by John Waterhouse. Alfred Power the Assistant Commissioner was also present. There had already been some difficulty with the new commissioners under the old poor law administration. In 1835, the case of a distressed couple from Wyke was raised with the commissioners. Medical relief and burial costs had been granted by the poor law authorities but the commission refused to sanction this. The board, backed by the magistrates replied that: 'This Board desire to inform you that no expenses incurred previous to the giving of legal notice are accountable under the Act'.<sup>37</sup> During the same period, two of the smaller townships, Lindley and Soyland, wanted to be their own Unions or at least not be part of Halifax.<sup>38</sup> This was unlikely given that Chadwick's original plan had deliberately set up large Unions by grouping parishes together if they were not too large and generally saw large Unions as helping the influence of magistrates

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<sup>36</sup> HBGM 5 February 1838.

<sup>37</sup> TNA, MH 12 14974 29 April 1835.

<sup>38</sup> TNA, MH 12 14974 January 1837.

and large landowners, and reducing the impact of narrow and sectional interests. Equally, the Guardians would be forced to deal with classes of cases rather than individual cases.<sup>39</sup>

There was an electoral dispute in 1837 when Thomas Sladen accused George Binns of electoral fraud to win the seat for Norland.<sup>40</sup> Binns had just been chosen as the vice-chair to Browne. The board investigated and so did the commissioners. A report was produced in February that cleared Binns completely.<sup>41</sup> Binns did not remain on the board for very long, resigning in July 1838 because of ill health.<sup>42</sup> A major issue in the early days was the actions of the auditors and the question of disallowing expenses. This was a problem across many boards of guardians and the process was very complicated as each township maintained its own accounts.<sup>43</sup> Auditors appointed by the commission would inspect the books twice a year and in Halifax this meant eighteen different sets of records. All expenses were examined and if they did not meet the criteria laid down by the commission, they were disallowed. The relevant local officer could then appeal to the commission. They sent his appeal to the auditor who then usually repeated what he had already decided. Other people involved, such as the local Board or the magistrates would then write to support the appeal and to explain why the expense had been incurred. In most cases the commission would relent and then approve the expense. By that time however, the second audit of the year was underway and the relevant official would find that he was still in trouble because the last set of expenses had not been approved. Given the number of local officials, this became a major source of work for the board in Halifax. It is interesting that the magistrates of Halifax took up one of the first cases of this sort in December 1839. They wrote to the commission stating 'much unpleasantness had arisen in several townships in consequence of the auditors disallowing certain items in the

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<sup>39</sup> Finer, p. 184.

<sup>40</sup> HBGM 17 February 1837.

<sup>41</sup> TNA, MH 12 14974 22 February 1837.

<sup>42</sup> HBGM 27 July 1838.

<sup>43</sup> This process has been revealed by a detailed reading of the Poor Law Commission correspondence already quoted.

constables' accounts'.<sup>44</sup> The specific area that was most often the cause of friction was the granting of any form of outdoor relief by the board. The commission went to great lengths to recover the money. On 1 August 1840, they took out a writ of mandamus against the Halifax Guardians and the constable to recover expenses. The case was heard at York.<sup>45</sup> On 1 February 1841, the writ was refused by the judge on the grounds that the constable had had to pay out the funds and as such he was owed the money. The magistrates again supported the constable.<sup>46</sup>

After April 1841 the only sources of information are the Poor Law Commission records and the *Guardian* reports. The saga of Halifax's petty financial disputes continued. For example, in May 1842, the board wanted to make use of the poor house owned and run by the Waterhouse charity, a major benefactor in Halifax. The commission insisted the charity be affiliated to the board and the latter duly applied. The commission wrote back asking for extra information, to which request the board replied that they were prepared to allow the clerk to provide the extra documents if the commission were prepared to pay him.<sup>47</sup> The outcome was not recorded.

Work for the able bodied was a complicated matter for the board. The commission was against any payment direct to these people and wanted to see evidence of work before any payment would be sanctioned. Clements, an Assistant Commissioner, came to Halifax in January 1843 to impose the outdoor labour test.<sup>48</sup> The *Guardian* reported that it was done without consultation and that it was labelling 'poverty as a crime'.<sup>49</sup> The board threatened to resign, but were persuaded not to by Clements.<sup>50</sup> In March 1843, the board submitted to the commission a plan of a treadmill to be used to crush stone and dross. This involved many

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<sup>44</sup> *TNA*, MH 12 14974 23 December 1839.

<sup>45</sup> *TNA*, MH 12 14975 1 August 1840.

<sup>46</sup> *TNA*, MH 12 14975 1 February 1841.

<sup>47</sup> *TNA*, MH 12 14975 15 March 1842.

<sup>48</sup> *HG* 14 January 1843.

<sup>49</sup> *HG* 28 January 1843.

<sup>50</sup> *HG* 14 February 1843.

hours of back-breaking work on the treadmill, a wheel with steps that once going was very difficult to stop.<sup>51</sup> The board received approval for this machine but did not purchase it till February 1848, when it was referred to as a 'grinding' machine, again for dross and sand.<sup>52</sup>

Other options to provide work for the able bodied were explored. In April 1848, the Board reported that 300 were employed working on a reservoir as a result of high unemployment'.<sup>53</sup> By May however the problem was much worse. The board applied to the Commission to suspend the labour test order. This was refused and the board told to find a proper task of work for the men and to report back on the steps they had taken to solve the problem.<sup>54</sup> It was clear that the board could not as a list of eighty nine who had been given relief without doing any work was received by the Commission the next day. That led to a list of disallowances from the commission, fifteen pages in length.<sup>55</sup> Ninety one more cases were reported on 1 June.<sup>56</sup> Vagrants were another source of conflict. In August 1856, the board wrote to the commission to explain what it proposed to do to help vagrants, many of whom were ex-military. They made it clear that it was their responsibility: 'they will be supported by the consciousness of the discharging of their duty to those whose funds they have to administer, as well as to the deserving poor'.<sup>57</sup> Assistant Commissioner Farnell was involved in a major row with the board over this and was castigated by the *Guardian* for his approach.<sup>58</sup> The paper backed the Mayor, John Whitworth and John Crossley, who refused to condemn the board. The paper sent a copy to the commission to express its disgust.<sup>59</sup> The commission's response was eleven pages long making the point that help could only be given in cases of

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<sup>51</sup> *TNA*, MH 12 14976 16 March 1843.

<sup>52</sup> *TNA*, MH 12 14978 17 February 1848.

<sup>53</sup> *TNA*, MH 12 14978 26 April 1848.

<sup>54</sup> *TNA*, MH 12 14978 16 May 1848.

<sup>55</sup> *TNA*, MH 12 14978 17 May 1848.

<sup>56</sup> *TNA*, MH 12 14978 1 June 1848.

<sup>57</sup> *TNA*, MH 12 14981 4 August 1856.

<sup>58</sup> *HG* 13 September 1856.

<sup>59</sup> *TNA*, MH 12 14981 6 September 1856.

'sudden or urgent necessity'.<sup>60</sup> The response of the board to an attempt to impose the labour test in 1852 is unknown as the commission records for those years are missing.<sup>61</sup>

The final crisis in the period under study was that of the Cotton Famine of the early eighteen sixties. It did not have a major impact in Halifax. The *Guardian* reported that the famine was approaching in November 1861,<sup>62</sup> but in response to a letter from the commission in the same month, the board said that they did not expect it to cause them any problems.<sup>63</sup> The total number of cases reported, in which outdoor relief was given, was not high. For 1862 it was less than twenty five<sup>64</sup>, fifty four in 1863<sup>65</sup> and forty nine in 1864.<sup>66</sup> The last word should be left to the board. On 1 June 1867 Mr. Cain, a new youthful Assistant Commissioner, came to the board meeting and delivered a long lecture on their work and how they needed to build a new workhouse and how it should be run. He was listened to in silence and no report was sent to the commission. Instead they simply sent a copy of the newspaper report from the *Halifax Courier*, an eloquent statement as to what they thought.<sup>67</sup>

Yet overall Halifax seems to have been a compliant Union. The magistrates were very involved and led the move to set up a board to comply with the wishes of the commissioners. They were ready and willing to challenge the latter, to support board members and the Union officials where they felt their role was being challenged. The elected members too were very involved and prepared to work hard, as the attendance figures show to get the Union working, but they too were jealous of their role and sometimes strove to support the poor of the area through measures of which the commission did not approve. This was a dual responsibility to those who paid the poor law rates and elected them and to the poor of the Union who looked

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<sup>60</sup> *TNA*, MH 12 14981 13 September 1856.

<sup>61</sup> *MG* 11 September -22 December 1852.

<sup>62</sup> *HG* 9 November 1861.

<sup>63</sup> *TNA*, MH 12 14983 11 November 1861.

<sup>64</sup> *TNA*, MH 12 14983 11 November 1862.

<sup>65</sup> *TNA*, MH 12 14984 November 1863.

<sup>66</sup> *TNA*, MH 12 14984 November 1864

<sup>67</sup> *Halifax Courier* 1 June 1867.

to them for help and support. It does need to be stressed that this was a large area, containing both rural and urban populations and a wide range of problems. Also there were, within the officials of the board, a similar wide range of abilities and expertise. The board had to manage all this but was determined to do it without excessive interference from London.

### Oldham

The records for Oldham have a major deficiency in that there are no Commission records, as has already been stated. There are a full set of board minutes and considerable press and archive material available, not least for the first few years in the writings of Edwin Butterworth. A further problem presented by the records is that after 1860, the clerk of the board of guardians began to record members' attendance simply by surname, giving no forename at all. In a town with several families using the same name, for example Lees, it is impossible to identify an individual and this makes comparison meaningless.

Oldham was at the other extreme to compliant Halifax. From the very beginning it refused to comply with any instructions from London. As early as 1836, there were issues with the size of the proposed union. Commissioner Arthur Power came to Oldham to look at the problem and it was decided not to include Saddleworth and Failsworth as this would make the size of the Union unwieldy.<sup>68</sup> Saddleworth was a part of Rochdale parish and Failsworth a detached part of Prestwich. Meetings against the introduction of the new Poor Law began in earnest in 1837. There was a public meeting called on 26 January to nominate members for the board, and by 8.00 pm the next day, no nominations had been received. At the very last minute, Kay Clegg, a local solicitor, submitted a list of six names. This was followed shortly after by six nominations from Thomas Swire, a clogger and a Chartist. He said that his

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<sup>68</sup> Rose, 'The Anti-Poor Law Movement in the North of England', Rose pointed out how dangerous this trip was for Power personally, after Power was attacked in Bury, Keighley and Bradford, p. 80.

nominees would, if elected, take office but would refuse to act in any way. John Halliwell and Benjamin Dunkerley were on both lists. The men summoned by the collector of taxes to deliver voting forms arrived at the office the next day but refused to act, so no forms went out in Oldham and there was no election. In Chadderton and Crompton there were no nominations. Royton had nine nominations and voting took place. James Wild was the only candidate in Thornham, and there was only one candidate in both Alkrington and Tonge. Finally, there were seven nominations in Middleton, but then four withdrew leaving three men who had already said they would not act if elected.<sup>69</sup>

This situation persisted for some time. A further meeting was held on 27 March.<sup>70</sup> Alex Taylor was in the chair and most of the named attendees were radicals, and again no-one was prepared to stand. The next meeting was in January 1838, at which John Knight the veteran radical was present.<sup>71</sup> After this there were few meetings as the Commission in London took a more careful path, not wanting to cause further problems in the North. It was to be 1844 before they turned their attention to Oldham and similarly Rochdale and Ashton.<sup>72</sup> The response of the three towns was to hold a joint meeting to look at ways to resist the imposition of a Board in each town.<sup>73</sup> The Assistant Commissioners visited in November, when a public meeting was held against the imposition of the new law, but by December the overseers had not responded to the Commission.<sup>74</sup> Finally a writ was issued for a board to start work in the autumn of 1847.

What helped to consolidate the movement against the Poor Law Amendment Act in Oldham was first of all the position of the town's two MPs, John Fielden and General Johnson, who had been elected in 1835 after the death of William Cobbett. Both were leading

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<sup>69</sup> *MG* 1 February 1837.

<sup>70</sup> *Standard* 30 March 1837.

<sup>71</sup> *Standard* 2 January 1838.

<sup>72</sup> Edsall, *The Anti-Poor Law Movement*, p. 253, and Rose, Michael E., ed., *The Poor and the City: The English Poor Law in its urban context, 1834-1914* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1985) p.7.

<sup>73</sup> *HG* 4 Jan 1845.

<sup>74</sup> *NS* 29 November 1845.

opponents of the Act and Fielden led the campaign within the Todmorden Union and spoke at a considerable number of meetings across the area.<sup>75</sup> Secondly, there was the stance taken by the town's magistrates, who refused to engage with the new Board in any meaningful way. They carried this approach on into the life of the Board itself. Finally, the strength of the radical groups in the town kept the campaign against the imposition of the Board very much at the forefront of public life.

Thus at the start of 1847, there had been no elections, no ex-officio members appointed, no administration and care of the poor was still firmly in the hands of the vestries. The only step that had been taken was to put control of the registration of births, deaths and marriages under the oversight of the Ashton area, which was itself also holding out against the new law. Butterworth was very unhappy at this step as several registrars were appointed for the town. He was one of them, as was William Fitton from Royton, a noted radical and veteran of Peterloo.<sup>76</sup> It was February 1848 before control of this work was returned to Oldham. 1847 marked a watershed in the town. There was a very hotly contested parliamentary election, as well as elections for the new town council under the Incorporation Act. The very serious split within the radical movement, and a major campaign of exclusive dealing were played out in public and in the midst of all this turmoil, the Poor Law Commission served a writ for the establishment of a board of guardians.

There were twenty three elected members, with the largest group of seven coming from Oldham itself. Chadderton and Middleton had three each and the other smaller townships had single representatives. Amongst the ex-officio members were James Rowland and Nathaniel Worthington, two of the town's leading cotton manufacturers. There were two vicars and John Duncroft the Tory M.P. who was elected in that year. Ex-officio members were

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<sup>75</sup> Malcolm Chase, 'Labour's Candidates': Chartist Challenges at the Parliamentary Polls, 1939-1860', *Labour History Review*, Vol. 74 No. 1, (April, 2009), 64-89.

<sup>76</sup> OBP 1 March 1832.

early attendees and both Rowland and Worthington acted as chair, but not on a regular basis. Rowland did this twenty eight times and Worthington nineteen. There was another vicar, the Reverend Richard Dunford, but he was an elected member for Middleton from 1848, the first example of a clergyman being chosen for such a post to be found in the three towns.<sup>77</sup> In 1857 another vicar, the Reverend Hill, was elected.<sup>78</sup>

Given the lengths to which leading members of the town were prepared to go in order to avoid having a board of guardians, the attendance pattern after 1847 was quite surprising. There are no records of inquorate meetings and the overall average attendance shown is of fourteen members, the vast majority being elected members. These meetings were held every week and very rarely, only twice in the fourteen years up to 1860, was there a week without a meeting. The ex-officio members began very well but in the year from a new board starting in April 1848 till the following April over half the meetings had no ex-officio members attending. Very soon there are no records of attendance for them and from 1853 till 1865, there is only one meeting where the attendance of two ex-officio members is recorded.

The position of chair was agreed at the first meeting following the annual elections held in early April. Only nine men held the office in the twenty two years before 1868. The leading figure was John Bentley who held the post six times. Samuel Fielding and Abraham Crompton, a cotton mill owner, held it three times each, and George Barlow, a cotton merchant, held it twice. The rest had a single year of office. The leading attendees were the same John Bentley, who attended 420 meetings, Samuel Stubbs with 394, Samuel Fielding with 340, William Whitehead with 320, Nelson Mills with 313 and William Ainsworth with 311. At the other extreme Robert Gill attended one meeting in 1851. In total, there were 104 members before 1868. Included in their number were several leading radicals, for example James Holladay was a member in 1851, and James Greaves, a spinner and a leading Chartist in

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<sup>77</sup> OBG 5 April 1848.

<sup>78</sup> OBG 5 April 1857.

both 1850 and 1851. Another Chartist, Leonard Haslop, a hatter and proprietor of a temperance coffee house, was a member from 1859 onwards.

The vast majority of the minutes are taken up with cases of relief and the construction of a new workhouse, a major report on which was produced in 1858.<sup>79</sup> A new direction in provision was proposed by the board in 1853, namely the purchase of a set of houses for use as day care centres for children, thus allowing their parents to go and look for work. There was a lengthy correspondence with the Commissioners and a limited experiment was authorised. Sadly, there seems to be no further reference to this work after that date.<sup>80</sup>

Disputes with the Commissioners centred on the two major topics that also occurred in Halifax (and clearly elsewhere), the issue of disallowance of expenses and that of relief for able bodied poor. On disallowances, for example, the board objected very strongly to an expense of £20 for travelling being disallowed. The cost was for going to see the Commissioners in London.<sup>81</sup> An issue that united all boards of guardians across South Lancashire and West Yorkshire was the Commission's plan to impose the labour test across the region.<sup>82</sup> There was a strongly worded response from the Oldham Board to a Commission circular of 25 August 1852, which sought to deny all forms of outdoor relief and to keep all provision within the workhouse. The response of the board was to describe this as 'inapplicable and impractical in Oldham' saying that it would 'destroy all independence on the part of the board'.<sup>83</sup> Oldham took the lead in calling a meeting of the other Unions in Manchester in October. Seventeen of the twenty five Unions involved sent delegates and they voted without dissent to draw up a petition against the order, send a deputation to London

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<sup>79</sup> OBG 12 May 1858.

<sup>80</sup> OBG 18 February 1853.

<sup>81</sup> OBG 27 April 1853.

<sup>82</sup> For a fuller account of this plan see *MG* 11 September -22 December 1852.

<sup>83</sup> OBG 22 September 1862.

and, should this fail, petition Parliament. The Commission backed down and reduced or removed many restrictions.<sup>84</sup>

The other dispute that took place after 1850 was with the local press. From the very beginning the board had taken the decision to allow the reporters into the meetings.<sup>85</sup> In late 1856, there was a disagreement between the board and the *Oldham Chronicle* over reporting of the meetings.<sup>86</sup> In December the reporter was banned, but was reinstated in January 1857.<sup>87</sup> In May the dispute was opened up again, and further rows over the reporting led to another ban in November 1857.<sup>88</sup> The paper campaigned against this ban. As a result there was a very fractious meeting of the board on 27 February,<sup>89</sup> and a public meeting on 22 March to discuss the board, public accountability and the freedom of the press.<sup>90</sup> A new board took over in April and the press were allowed back in.<sup>91</sup> Like Halifax, whilst the board wanted its affairs to be public, it did not take kindly to being open to public ridicule.

The most challenging issue to face the Oldham Board was the Cotton Famine of the eighteen sixties.<sup>92</sup> Given that almost all of Oldham's textile industry was based on cotton, the effects of the Civil War in America were huge. The board's minutes give a picture of rapidly rising numbers requiring help, and the constant struggle to get the Commission in London to understand the size of the problem and the resources needed to cope with it. The first mention of the impending crisis was on 27 April 1861 with a newspaper report on the start of

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<sup>84</sup> Edsall, pp. 255-56.

<sup>85</sup> OBG 6 October 1847.

<sup>86</sup> OC November –December 1856.

<sup>87</sup> OC 31 January 1857.

<sup>88</sup> OC 15 November 1857.

<sup>89</sup> OC 27 February 1858.

<sup>90</sup> OC 22 March 1858.

<sup>91</sup> OC 24 April 1858.

<sup>92</sup> For a fuller examination of this event, see the following: Contemporary works, Sir Arthur R. Arnold, *A History of the Cotton Famine from the fall of Sumter, to the Passing of the Public Works Act*, (London, 1865) and John Watts, *The Facts of the Cotton Famine*, (London, 1866). Other more recent works are William Otto Henderson, *The Lancashire Cotton Famine, 1861-5*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1934) and Norman Longmate, *The Hungry Mills: The story of the Lancashire cotton famine 1861-5*, (London: Temple Smith, 1978).

the Civil War<sup>93</sup> and then on 7 September of the effects of the short supply of cotton.<sup>94</sup> The board minutes then began in February 1861 to record the numbers receiving relief. Two sets of figures were given, those receiving indoor relief and those receiving outdoor relief. The indoor figures were never high in comparison to the outdoor. They show a total of 388 in February 1861,<sup>95</sup> rising to a peak of 655 in December 1862.<sup>96</sup> What this did cause however, was a constant pressure on the board's resources and an inability to meet any further problems because all its indoor relief facilities were fully allocated. Fluctuations caused by more extreme weather in winter could not be dealt with forcing claimants onto the outdoor relief system which was under even greater pressure.<sup>97</sup> What did not help was the effect of the famine on ratepayers, who either lost their jobs or who were on reduced hours and so could not pay the rates. This reduced the income to the board at a time when maximum funds were needed.<sup>98</sup>

The major problem was the number of people seeking outdoor relief.<sup>99</sup> The board faced two issues. One was the repeated refusal of the Commission to relax or remove the ban on all forms of outdoor relief. It had accepted a de facto change when faced with concerted opposition in 1852, but continued to reject attempts to free up the system further to allow more help to be available. Opposition to this policy was allied to the broader public response to the plight of the cotton districts and the various committees set up to give aid. The more successful these were the more the Commission argued that no further relaxation of the rules was necessary as help was being given from other quarters. The figures were stark. From a total of 1319 people receiving weekly relief on February 13 1861, the figure rose to a peak of 15,563 in November 1862. For the month of November the total was 51,305 and for December it was 68,296 as December had five weeks of requests. The weekly totals did not return to the

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<sup>93</sup> OC 27 April 1861.

<sup>94</sup> OC 7 September 1861.

<sup>95</sup> OBG 13 February 1861.

<sup>96</sup> OBG 17 December 1862.

<sup>97</sup> OBG 13 February 1861.

<sup>98</sup> OBG 8 June 1864.

<sup>99</sup> The analysis that follows is based on material in OBG 1861-1866.

levels of 1861 till December 1865. In the five years from February 1861 to February 1866, there were 260 meetings and a grand total of 1,021,417 payments made. In all that time there were only twenty one recorded attendances by any ex-officio guardians. On 4 March 1863, the board minutes show that the figure estimated for relief was £320 per week. The actual cost was £695 so a new estimate was set at £800 a week. Given that the figures for that week showed 9243 claimants, then each claimant would have received, on average, 1s 9d.

Outside help came slowly. In January there was a discussion as to how they were to work with the new committee.<sup>100</sup> By then, in order to help it administer the relief exercise, the board set up an Assessment Committee in September 1862, followed by a revision of the relief districts in the same month.<sup>101</sup> They then appointed extra relieving officers and in November they appointed more officers and made more rooms available.<sup>102</sup> They also set up schools for the able bodied<sup>103</sup> and gave consideration to the idea of loans, not grants, first of all in July 1862,<sup>104</sup> then again in March 1863.<sup>105</sup> There is no evidence that the idea was followed up. The first mention in the board minutes of the Oldham Relief Committee came on 17 December 1862.<sup>106</sup> Official figures did not help either. In May 1862, the *Oldham Chronicle* argued in an editorial that the town did not need national help, using Parliamentary figures to show that in Preston one in ten needed help, in Rochdale it was one in twenty and in Oldham it was only one in thirty seven. Equally, the increase in relief showed a similar picture, the paper argued. In Blackburn the increase in relief was 268%, in Rochdale 119% and in Oldham only 86%.<sup>107</sup> In February 1863, Farnall, an Assistant Commissioner, submitted a report showing the percentage of the population receiving relief. Of the major cotton towns, Preston was the

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<sup>100</sup> OBG 21 January 1863.

<sup>101</sup> OBG 3 and 17 September 1862.

<sup>102</sup> OBG 19 November 1862.

<sup>103</sup> OBG 5 November 1862.

<sup>104</sup> OBG 13 July 1862.

<sup>105</sup> OBG 4 March 1863.

<sup>106</sup> OBG 17 December 1862.

<sup>107</sup> OC 10 May 1862.

highest at 38.3%, with Ashton on 37.3%, Rochdale on 26.8% and Oldham on 21.2%.<sup>108</sup> The actual cases of outdoor relief recorded by the board rose from 1237 per week to a peak of 15,563 in 1863 before falling to 1891 in 1865.<sup>109</sup>

In April 1863, the Mayor of Manchester set up a fund to help and on 19 July 1863, the Manchester Committee met and recommended local subscriptions.<sup>110</sup> On 2 August, the Mayor of Oldham called a public meeting and set up a relief committee.<sup>111</sup> On 23 August the first published subscription list appeared and from then on money began to flow in.<sup>112</sup> There were issues between the committee and the board, and in November 1863 there was a major meeting between the Mayor, the MPs and the board.<sup>113</sup> The questions of how the relief was to be distributed, what was the level of Board relief and how the town compared with others, were all discussed. These questions continued to be a matter of debate and of newspaper editorials. The committee was finally disbanded in January 1866.<sup>114</sup> The *Chronicle* mainly supported the board, but the *Standard* did not. It stood for the strict application of the labour test rules.<sup>115</sup> It complained about the Oldham relief committee being dominated by the Manchester committee,<sup>116</sup> and made a big attack on the stance of the *Chronicle*.<sup>117</sup> On one matter however both papers agreed. They were solidly behind the South in the Civil War.<sup>118</sup> The *Standard* was even against Lincoln.<sup>119</sup> The *Chronicle* had been supporting the South for longer, as an editorial in 1862 showed.<sup>120</sup> There was even an Oldham Southern Independence

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<sup>108</sup> Longmate, *The Hungry Mills*, p. 103.

<sup>109</sup> OBGGM 1 May 1861, 26 November 1863 and 22 November 1865.

<sup>110</sup> OC 19 July 1863.

<sup>111</sup> OC 2 August 1863.

<sup>112</sup> OC 30 August 1863.

<sup>113</sup> OC 8 November 1863.

<sup>114</sup> OC 20 January 1866.

<sup>115</sup> OS 18 January 1862.

<sup>116</sup> OS 23 January 1864.

<sup>117</sup> OS 30 January 1864.

<sup>118</sup> See Patrick Joyce, *Work, Society and Politics: The Culture of the Factory in Later Victorian England* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980), pp. 150-154, on Oldham's support for the South.

<sup>119</sup> OS 24 September 1864.

<sup>120</sup> OC 18 January 1862.

Association.<sup>121</sup> A list of their members, published in the *Standard* included all the principal citizens and most of the Council.<sup>122</sup>

The Commission tried to take a firm stand on the issue of outdoor relief, but the sheer size of the problem forced it to compromise. This was not done however without a lot of attempts to hinder the board. In January, February and March 1862, the board wrote to London trying to get the rules eased.<sup>123</sup> In March, Ashton Union asked the chairs to go to London to represent their unions in getting the board to ease the rules.<sup>124</sup> The Commission would not let this happen and in April the Oldham Board had to refuse to extend relief.<sup>125</sup> It was forced to extend the rate and in May it tried to set a new limit but was again unable to hold the line.<sup>126</sup> Then in June the Commission disallowed two sets of relief given by the board. The board went to the town's MP to get the decision overturned.<sup>127</sup> This was done by John Hibbert in July, after a visit from Farnall, when he too was asked to help.<sup>128</sup> The board gave limited support to the Villiers Bill, a measure to enable the Government to advance money to local authorities, to enable them to employ able bodied people who required relief on public works.<sup>129</sup> The board's costs were rising, as the estimate for April to September showed. Set at £320 the previous time it had cost £695 and the revised estimate was for £800.<sup>130</sup> In the midst of all this, the board decided to seek a separation for Oldham from the rest of the Union.<sup>131</sup> A Poor Law Inspector came to the town to examine the case. It was rejected by the Commission but changes were made to the allocation of seats on the board.<sup>132</sup> Chadderton, Crompton,

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<sup>121</sup> Longmate, *The Hungry Mills*, pp. 250-1.

<sup>122</sup> OS 14 June 1863.

<sup>123</sup> OBG 29 January, 26 February and 12 March 1862.

<sup>124</sup> OBG 19 March 1862.

<sup>125</sup> OBG 2 April 1862.

<sup>126</sup> OBG 7 May 1862.

<sup>127</sup> OBG 11 June 1862.

<sup>128</sup> OBG 2 July 1862.

<sup>129</sup> Longmate, *The Hungry Mills*, pp. 205-6.

<sup>130</sup> OBG 20 March 1863.

<sup>131</sup> OBG 24 February 1864.

<sup>132</sup> OBG 4 May 1864.

Middleton and Royton which all had three seats were reduced to two, thus strengthening Oldham's power on the board.<sup>133</sup>

Oldham and the board survived and continued to work under the rules in place after 1867. It was stretched to the limits by the Famine, but as was found in most of the distressed Northern towns, the community pulled together. Since 1847, the board had worked hard with a high level of attendance and involvement on the part of the elected members. Whilst there was little interest from the ex-officio members, they did not seek to disrupt the work of the board. A new workhouse was built and the board was in a good position to work with the Council, not least to meet the new requirements on health issues that would come their way.

### Rochdale

Rochdale ostensibly followed the same path as Halifax in moving immediately to elect guardians, but it then followed Oldham in refusing to let anything be done. Like Oldham, it resisted the commission till 1847, but then went much further than Oldham in resisting the attempts by the Commission to impose its will. One fact alone shows how successful they were in this type of passive resistance. It was not till 1871 that the guardians even started to plan for a workhouse built to Commission regulations, and it was not opened till 1877, forty years after the 1834 Act was theoretically applied to the North.<sup>134</sup> The Board used the title 'workhouse' after 1847 but this refers to the townships' poor houses which were all in existence before 1834. Given that there was considerable correspondence with the Commission, a very clear picture emerges of a body of men determined to protect what was already in place to best serve the needs of the town, as they saw them. Thomas Livsey, one of the central figures in this work, recalled at a dinner held in his honour shortly before he died, that he had gone to see the commissioners.

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<sup>133</sup> OBG 17 August 1864.

<sup>134</sup> Garrard, *Leadership and Power*, p. 150.

I recollect attending as a deputation with Sir Alexander Ramsay and Mr. John Bright before the President of the Poor Law Board, then Mr. Sotherton Escourt, in reference to the proposal to establish a bastille in this county; Mr Sotherton Escourt said to us; 'Oh but yours are not workhouses you know, they are alms houses!' 'Yes,' I replied 'that is exactly the word; they are almshouses and they are not intended to be workhouses in your sense of the word. They are intended as homes for the homeless poor'. That was one of the most pleasurable moments I ever remember, to hear Mr Escourt acknowledge that our workhouses, so called, were almshouses.<sup>135</sup>

The local and national records for Rochdale are extensive, but the minutes of the board have not all survived.<sup>136</sup> There are gaps between 1846 and 1848, and between 1852 and 1853. There is a small gap in 1862, but as this is the period of the Cotton Famine the loss is significant. There were no records from the period after 1866. There are other gaps in the early records but that was because no meetings were held, especially between 1840 and 1844. In the national records, held in the National Archive Offices, there is a wealth of detail, but there are gaps there, for 1850 till 1852 and for 1864, again the time of the Cotton Famine.<sup>137</sup> Effectively the only year for which there are no records is 1852. One point of interest is that even though no-one turned up, the clerk still kept a record of the meeting so that the rules of the Commission were met.<sup>138</sup> Rochdale did not break the rules; the situation was simply that no one attended, as a matter of personal choice. All this was part of the process of pushing at the limits of the Commission's power, so as to restrict the influence of the men from Somerset House and so retain local control.

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<sup>135</sup> RO 21 November 1863.

<sup>136</sup> RBGM 1851-1854 are missing.

<sup>137</sup> TNA, MH 12 6176-6187, 1846-1867.

<sup>138</sup> RBGM 3 January 1845.

As a result of this mixed pattern of records, any analysis of the meeting pattern has to be taken cautiously. This is particularly so for the first period from 1837 till 1849.<sup>139</sup> Between 1837 and 1840, only seventeen meetings were held, of which two were inquorate. Ten of these took place in the first year with an average attendance of nine. There were three meetings each in 1838 and 1839 with five and eight members present on average. No meetings were held in both 1841 and 1842, and only one is recorded for 1843. In 1844, ten meetings were recorded but nine of them were inquorate. The average attendance was two. It was nearly the same in 1845 when eighteen meetings were recorded but twelve were inquorate. The average attendance was one. There are no records surviving for the period 1846 till 1849. From then on the attendance and the number of meetings rapidly increased, but the picture was patchy at best.

In 1849, there were forty meetings, with only one inquorate, but in 1850 there were only twelve meetings, ten in 1851 and thirteen in 1852. The major problem after that year was the large number of inquorate meetings.<sup>140</sup> 1855 had thirty seven meetings with seven inquorate and 1856 had forty four meetings but sixteen inquorate. In 1857 there were forty five meetings but twelve were inquorate and 1858 saw fifty four meetings but fifteen were inquorate. The attendance averaged eight for those four years.<sup>141</sup> By 1859, there was a more serious level of attendance and as the problems of the Cotton Famine became obvious, the members started to play their proper role.<sup>142</sup> Between 1860 and 1865, there were only seven inquorate meetings and the average attendance was much higher at thirteen.<sup>143</sup> 1864 was the peak year with fifty eight meetings and 729 attendances. Sadly that was one of the years missing in the national records. There were a total of 571 meetings recorded at an average attendance of nine.

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<sup>139</sup> RBGM 1837-45.

<sup>140</sup> RBGM 1849-45, PUR 1/6.

<sup>141</sup> RBGM 1854-58, PUR 1/8.

<sup>142</sup> RBGM 1858-60, PUR 1/9.

<sup>143</sup> RBGM 1860-62, PUR 1/10, and 1863-65, PUR 1/12.

The membership was varied.<sup>144</sup> Looking at the ex-officio members first, the picture has two parts, again before and after 1849. Over the time being studied, there were thirty two different ex-officio members chosen. These included the two Royds brothers, Clement and Alfred. Clement attended twice and Alfred once. The vicar of Rochdale, the Reverend Hey was chosen but never attended. His successor was never chosen but two curates were, Reverend Mills, who attended nine times and Reverend J.R. Raines who never attended. Jacob Bright Junior was present at seven meetings, four of which he chaired. Three figures stand out. The first was James Butterworth who was at forty one meetings but only chair once, James Holt, who attended sixty meetings and George Leach Ashworth who went to thirty five meetings, once as chair. Apart from the clergy and the Royds family, all the rest were leading Liberal figures in the town.

The elected members were very different. Twenty members out of the total of seventy nine only came to ten meetings or less. On the other hand there were seven men who attended over 100 times, another six reached over 200 attendances and one man reached over 300 meetings, 56% of all the recorded meetings. These figures are made up of twenty five meetings as a member, and 296 as chair. Thomas Heape was a cotton manufacturer and a member of a leading Liberal family, but he was a close friend and supporter of Thomas Livsey. Both Garrard and Cole see Livsey as the leading figure in the development of radical thinking and action within Rochdale but he was not alone and not always at the front of the different movements.<sup>145</sup> This is one such case. Livsey was only recorded as being present 119 times, thirty seven as chair. It is true that the missing records do cover the period when Livsey was at his most active on the Board, as the press reports show, but this equally applies to Heape.<sup>146</sup> Thomas Heape's brother William was present 240 times but only once as chair. Andrew Stewart was another leading Liberal who was present 269 times, 104 as chair. Robert Taylor

<sup>144</sup> The following analysis has been taken from RBGM.

<sup>145</sup> Garrard, *Leadership and Power*, p. 152 and John Cole, *Down Poorhouse Lane*, p. 16.

<sup>146</sup> *MG* 15 November 1848, 18 November 1848 and 2 December 1848.

attended 230 times but was never chair. Finally, John Dania, the grocer attended 274 times, only twice as chair, but like Heape he was a close friend of Livsey's and a major figure on the board. These were the men who led the campaign within the board. They were either liberal or radical, and throughout the history of the meetings they sought constantly to keep the poor at the forefront of the deliberations and decisions.

The development of the board in Rochdale had two distinct phases, before and after 1846. The first difficulty that arose was the demand made by the Registration Act of 1836, dealing with births, deaths and marriages. A Superintendent Registrar was needed and this was to be the work of the new board of guardians in each Union. This put a lot of pressure on the assistant commissioners to force the creation of a board in every Union. From 1837, a lot of the work by the radicals went into making sure that any board elected would be unable to work, owing to the refusal of any appointed members to act. Elections were held for the year 1836 till 1837.<sup>147</sup> Power came to Rochdale on 8 January 1837.<sup>148</sup> The radicals had planned to boycott the whole proceedings but it became clear that the Tories would put up candidates. Rather than lose the argument, in February the radicals produced a set of candidates to fight the election. The results were published on 19 February and the radicals had a majority of thirteen to five, and the backing of the magistrates who were equally opposed to the new Act.<sup>149</sup> During a speech by Richard Oastler in the town in 1838, he was interrupted by 'a gentleman in the boxes' for not making it clear that 'there are people of the higher and middle classes who are opposed to the Bill and would wish to see it repealed'.<sup>150</sup>

The first meeting was held on 15 February and James Hoyle was elected as chair.

William Robert, a local solicitor, was appointed as Superintendent Registrar and Clerk to the

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<sup>147</sup> RBGM 15 February 1837.

<sup>148</sup> *MG* 11 January 1837.

<sup>149</sup> *MG* 19 February 1837.

<sup>150</sup> David Gadian, 'Class formation and class action in north-west industrial towns, 1830-1850' in *The Victorian City: a Reader in British Urban History, 1820-1914*, ed. by R. J. Morris (London: Longman, 1993) p. 46.

Board. At the second meeting on 24 February an assistant was appointed.<sup>151</sup> Power came again in March when the districts were set out. By this time the feeling was moving very much against compliance. A minute from the meeting of 30 March states: 'that the same be received and left for future consideration and that the clerk do not forward the Report unto the Poor Law Commissioners until such further consideration'.<sup>152</sup> Further elections were held in April, producing a similar board but there was no one present at the May meeting.<sup>153</sup> There were further meetings in July, November and December.<sup>154</sup> The following year was much worse when only three meetings were held. No-one went in February; there was a poor turn-out for the elections in April with no ex-officio involvement, and only three members present in October.<sup>155</sup> 1839 was no better with only three meetings and a set of elections that consolidated the hold of the radicals. The minutes for that year contain no mention of the relief of the poor.<sup>156</sup>

In 1840, only one meeting was held on 20 March with Livsey in the chair.<sup>157</sup> It was to be three years before another meeting took place, on 30 March 1843. That was the only meeting that year with only ten members present.<sup>158</sup> Livsey was chair and read out the minutes from the meeting of 1840 and the meeting closed. In 1844, the situation started to change, as the Commissioners began to try to force Unions such as Rochdale, Oldham and Ashton to conform and operate under the new rules. Assistant Commissioner Clements came to Rochdale in September 1844.<sup>159</sup> A public meeting was held at which it was decided to petition Parliament and the collection of signatures was started. At the same time Clements returned and tried to meet the guardians on 1 November. Livsey realised that if Clements got

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<sup>151</sup> RBGM 24 February 1837.

<sup>152</sup> RBGM 30 March 1837.

<sup>153</sup> RBGM 7 April and 26 May 1837.

<sup>154</sup> RBGM 7 July, 3 November and 5 December 1837.

<sup>155</sup> RBGM 2 February, 26 March and 4 October 1838.

<sup>156</sup> RBGM 31 January, 14 February and "2 March 1839.

<sup>157</sup> RBGM 20 March 1840.

<sup>158</sup> RBGM 30 March 1843.

<sup>159</sup> *MG* 18 September 1844.

three members together he would have a quorum and so they could act as a board. Livsey stood outside the door of the meeting and only allowed two members in at a time. Clements complained that this was no way to conduct business, to which Livsey replied that there was no business to conduct.<sup>160</sup> Clements tried again to have a meeting on 8 November but he was unsuccessful as the following entry in the minute book showed. This was written by William Roberts the clerk.

I hereby certify that I attended at the Wardleworth Workhouse, Rochdale this 8<sup>th</sup> day of November 1844 at the hour of 2pm. And remained there for one hour but in consequence of the non-attendance of all of the Guardians, no business could be proceeded with.<sup>161</sup>

This entry was repeated sixteen times between then and March 1845. The Commissioners now applied for a writ to force the magistrates to comply with the law. Up to then they had firmly backed the rest of the board, but legal pressure was forcing them to act. The writ was served on 3 December 1844. They had to obey the order of 25 October and have executed all the required measures by 11 January 1845 or face prosecution. The response of the board was to claim that there were no properly elected members and no ex-officio members either qualified or confident to act, so they could not comply with the order.<sup>162</sup>

This was not really a strong argument as there had been elections in March 1844, but the board was determined to resist and the due date passed with no action taken. The Commissioners took the case to court and it reached the Liverpool Assizes in March 1845. William Sharman Crawford, the town's radical MP, tried to get the Rochdale petition referred to a parliamentary select committee, but this too failed.<sup>163</sup> The case proceeded but far from

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<sup>160</sup> MG 6 November 1844.

<sup>161</sup> RBGM 8 November 1844.

<sup>162</sup> Margaret Lahee, *Life and Times of the late Alderman T. Livsey* (Manchester: Heywood and Sons, 1866, pp. 86-87.

<sup>163</sup> *The Times* 13 March 1845.

being a straightforward matter, it turned into a nightmare for the Commission. Livsey had discovered that when the commissioners had signed the original writ, they had broken the law. The order was required by Act of Parliament to be signed by at least two commissioners, in each other's presence within Somerset House. One of the signatories, George Lewis, had signed it whilst on honeymoon. How Livsey found this out is not totally clear. Cole suggests that it was 'a combination of friends in high places and financial inducement'.<sup>164</sup> Robertson, writing in 1889, is much more specific. He claimed that the original story reached William Busfield Ferrand, an Ultra Tory MP opposed to the new Poor Law, who told John Fielden, the Oldham MP and that confirmation could be obtained for £100. Fielden contacted Livsey, gave him the information and £100. Livsey went to London, got the written confirmation, and then produced it in court.<sup>165</sup> The court found in favour of the commissioners but gave power to the defendants as a result of the technicality.

It was clear that the Commissioners would take action and that the magistrates themselves were acting outside the law. The Justices of the Peace took over and assumed control on 1 August 1845.<sup>166</sup> They split the Union into three areas, Wardleworth, Castleton and Spotland and then on 6 August they prepared for elections. On 15 August they appointed officers and demanded that the overseers bring their records to the next meeting.<sup>167</sup> The elected members played a waiting game hoping that when the election lists were announced no-one would stand who was prepared to act and so they could nullify the actions of the Justices and carry on as before. At that point three members agreed to accept the nomination and to act with the Justices.<sup>168</sup> The anger in the town was immense and a public rally was held in the centre of the town on 6 September. By then one of the three elected members had resigned, but the other two, Samuel Brierley and James Holt were verbally attacked and great

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<sup>164</sup> Cole, p. 23.

<sup>165</sup> William Robertson, *The Social and Political History of Rochdale* pp. 27-28.

<sup>166</sup> RBGM 1 August 1845.

<sup>167</sup> RBGM 15 August 1845.

<sup>168</sup> *MG* 30 August 1845.

anger was directed at the magistrates. Livsey urged the crowd not to use any physical force but to treat them with lofty scorn and righteous indignation.<sup>169</sup>

The new board, only four in number, just a quorum, then began to implement the law. They brought the payment of relief under board control and used the newly appointed officers to take control.<sup>170</sup> Their opponents were, for a brief period, unable to influence the issue, but at the new elections in April 1846, they returned to take control and exercise their opposition from within the board.<sup>171</sup> In the two townships where there was an election, the results were as follows:

Wardleworth

Castleton

John Garside    Anti-Poor Law    968

Thomas Livsey    Anti-Poor Law    1072

John Leach    Anti-Poor law    953

Samuel Holland    Anti-Poor Law    1027

John Sharp    Anti-Poor law    950

John Dania    Anti-Poor Law    986

Samuel Brierley Pro-Poor Law    236

John Mellaliew    Anti-Poor Law    966

James Holt    Pro-Poor Law    232

John Irving    Pro-Poor law    185

In all the other townships Anti-Poor Law candidates were returned unopposed. Whilst the new board could not undo what had been put in place, after 1846 their battle with the Commissioners in London was fought within the organisation rather than from without.

The Rochdale Board had all the problems that the other two towns faced. They fell out with the press, in their case the *Manchester Guardian* about its reporting of their meetings.<sup>172</sup> They also had a row with Joseph Rowntree, the philanthropist from York. He visited the

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<sup>169</sup> *MG* 17 September 1845.

<sup>170</sup> RBGM 5 September 1845.

<sup>171</sup> *MG* 15 April 1846.

<sup>172</sup> RBGM 12 July 1850.

workhouses in early 1860 and sent a letter to the *Rochdale Observer* which was very critical of the Wardleworth workhouse. The board carried out a major check and the master and matron were sacked.<sup>173</sup> When Rowntree repeated this exercise in December 1861, without the board's knowledge, they were so angry they gave orders he was not to be allowed into the workhouse again.<sup>174</sup> The board was always in dispute with the commissioners about the number of forms that were needed. Robert Whitworth complained in September 1849 that the forms being sent were useless and inappropriate. He had devised some new ones, and he enclosed a copy.<sup>175</sup> In December of the same year, Roberts the clerk, complained about the forms and the constant requests for fresh information.

I cannot avoid mentioning that the Registrar General has requested the Board of Health not to trouble us as Superintendent Registrars with gratuitously getting up statistics for the Superintendent Inspectors of the Board of Health.<sup>176</sup>

He then added that he needed six extra copies of the form and would not be able to meet the deadline because of other duties. He also used a regular opening phrase 'May I remind you....' when he wanted to complain about fresh forms.<sup>177</sup> In April 1855 he wrote to complain, as did the board, about the requirement to submit one set of accounts for all the workhouses. It was pointed out very forcefully that there were six workhouses so six forms would be needed and only those forms would be returned.<sup>178</sup>

Information requests from other sources were always treated with care. They replied to the Deputy Clerk of the Justice of the Peace with the following resolution in November 1857: 'Resolved: that the Guardians decline furnishing any data whereby an irresponsible

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<sup>173</sup> TNA, MH 12 6182 4 February 1860.

<sup>174</sup> RBGM 29 November 1861.

<sup>175</sup> TNA, MH 12 6177 3 September 1849.

<sup>176</sup> TNA, MH 12 6177 19 December 1849.

<sup>177</sup> TNA, MH 12 6179 28 November 1857.

<sup>178</sup> TNA, MH 12 26 January 1855.

body can add to the taxation of the County'.<sup>179</sup> On 27 March 1861 a complaint written as a memorial was sent by all the officers of the Union about the amount of time and the cost of filling in all the forms and duplicates.<sup>180</sup> It was repeated in more detail in 1862.<sup>181</sup> When the Commission complained in March 1861 about the cost of renting rooms for the officials, Roberts in reply asked them if they could do all their work from home and if not why should they expect local officers to do the same.<sup>182</sup> The vestry meetings started to add the use of the rooms and equipment to the orders given to the overseers at the annual vestry meetings that appointed the officials. Individual workhouse masters complained. John Wilds, Master of Hollingworth workhouse refused to do all the paper work as he could not do all the books himself and his salary was so small that he could not afford to pay someone else to do them.<sup>183</sup> Added to all this was the never ending stream of letters and requests. In two weeks in January 1860 ten separate letters were received and, as already mentioned, in February 1865, eight letters were received in one week, all on different matters.<sup>184</sup>

The visits of the auditors and the consequent cases of disallowed expenses, as in Halifax and Oldham, took up a lot of time. Rochdale caused a major problem for the Commissioners and the auditor. The central figure in the distribution of relief was the assistant overseer in each township. Following complaints from the auditors about the standard of book keeping in the workhouses in 1849, two of these officers had complained to the commissioners. William Chadwick, on 16 May told the Commission that new books would be purchased and that when a new rate was set they would be used, but that was then and not now.<sup>185</sup> Abraham Leach pointed out that his books were the only ones in order and that the

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<sup>179</sup> RBGM 13 January 1857.

<sup>180</sup> TNA, MH 12 6183 27 March 1861.

<sup>181</sup> TNA, MH 12 6184 18 January 1862.

<sup>182</sup> TNA, MH 12 6183 20 March 1861.

<sup>183</sup> TNA, MH 12 6177 4 June 1849.

<sup>184</sup> RBGM 17 February 1865.

<sup>185</sup> TNA, MH 12 6177 16 May 1849.

members of the press present would verify this.<sup>186</sup> Neither was bothered again. The biggest problem however was pointed out to the Commission in March 1846. The auditors wanted what they considered inefficient and ineffective assistant overseers to be sacked by the board. The board pointed out that these officers were not appointed by the board but by the vestry and they could only resign to them. Neither the Commission nor the board had the power to accept their resignation.<sup>187</sup> The best example of this was the case of Arthur Travis, assistant overseer for Spotland for twenty four years. At every audit he was criticised for not having his books in order and then being disallowed several expenses because they were not covered by the Commission rules. Several times the auditors demanded his removal. Every time the vestry of Spotland returned him as assistant overseer. He was very popular and at the last attempt to remove him, the township sent a memorial to the Commission praising his work. He was kept in post.<sup>188</sup>

One other issue that did involve the board was the repeated attempts by the township of Spotland to remove itself from the Rochdale Union and set up its own board. The details are set out in chapter four. There were three attempts in February 1846,<sup>189</sup> March 1848 and finally in February 1858. The Rochdale Board wrote to support this request on the second and third occasions, but even the submission of a huge map of the area in 1858 could not convince the Commission of the justice of their case.<sup>190</sup> On the second occasion, Alfred Power, the Assistant Commissioner, gave a long and detailed response to Rochdale's letter of support, but the answer was still negative.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> *TNA*, MH 12 6177 25 May 1849.

<sup>187</sup> *TNA*, MH 12 6176 14 March 1846.

<sup>188</sup> *TNA*, MH 12 6186 4 January 1866.

<sup>189</sup> *TNA*, MH 12 6176 February 1846.

<sup>190</sup> *TNA*, MH 12 6180 11 February 1858.

<sup>191</sup> *TNA*, MH 12 6177 22 June 1848 and 6 July 1848.

Rochdale challenged the Commission in any way it could. Following a complaint about the children going to school outside the Union, Livsey gave notice at the meeting on 20 June 1862 that:

On Friday next he would move that a person be appointed to bring the children belonging to this Union out of the Swinton schools and that such person did take them to Greydays House in Whitehall, London and leave them with the Poor Law Board.<sup>192</sup>

He did not place the motion but it indicated the anger and frustration within the Board at the demands of the Commission. That was very mild compared to the resolutions that Livsey introduced in July 1855. In June, the board passed a resolution against what it considered the needless interference of the Commission in the audit of the board. The Commission sent a strong letter of response on 12 July. Livsey proposed this one resolution in three parts and it was seconded by John Dania.

That the Board cannot avoid noticing such a remarkable communication as the one just read, that on the one hand the argument in the letter based on the statement that the Workhouse Medical Relief Book is used according to the prescribed form in every other Union besides this throughout the country is not true in fact, and on the other hand the insinuation contained in the second part of the letter that the interests of the Ratepayers are not properly attended to by the Guardians of this Union and require the more active superintendence of a Board in London who have been asleep during the 20 years of the official existence of themselves and their predecessors is an uncalled for and perfectly unjustifiable insult to the Guardians of this Union.

That this Board cannot avoid taking this opportunity of expressing their annoyance at the Poor Law Board giving the Go-By in their letters to parts of communication sent to them by the Guardians of this Union, and on the present occasion the practice of the

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<sup>192</sup> RBGM 20 June 1862.

Poor Law Board is the more contemptible in as much as the Board in their last communication informed the Poor Law Board distinctly of the instructions they had given to the Medical officers and therefore it was for the Poor Law Board to have addressed themselves to the Guardians of this Union upon that subject and not to have concluded their letter with the intimation of compelling Officers to do things which accomplish no other purpose than that of the degradation of Guardians and promoting the exaltation and assumed importance of a London Board.

That the Board cannot conclude these Resolutions without expressing their deep regret that the Poor Law Board should permit their subalterns to be making official capital by writing such degrading and insulting letters as the one now under consideration; for the Guardians shrink not from any appeal to the Ratepayers as to whether their interests are properly attended to, and they equally challenge the Poor Law Board to an investigation whether the sick inmates of the Workhouse in this Union have not received due attention during the 10 years that the new Poor Law has been in force in this Union.<sup>193</sup>

The resolution was passed unanimously. No reply from the Commission is recorded.

The Union workhouse was a constant topic of discussion. The problem was that the board repeatedly refused to build one. Rochdale had six workhouses, or as they more often referred to them, poorhouses. The Commission made repeated attempts to close them down and get the board to build a new one. In Rochdale, a Union workhouse was always seen as a 'bastille'. In his book on the diary of one of these houses at Spotland, John Cole shows a cartoon of a workhouse, taken from the *Rochdale Spectator* of 1 November 1844. It uses the theme of the bastille, with the relieving officer whipping the aged and infirmed through the door. Cole describes it as 'unique as it is probably the only locally produced cartoon on the

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<sup>193</sup> RBGM 27 July 1855.

subject of the workhouse'.<sup>194</sup> This term became widely used across the north of England as Rose points out.<sup>195</sup> In July 1850, the Commission demanded plans for the new workhouse. The board rejected this request on the grounds of cost and that they had no need of one.<sup>196</sup> On 19 September 1857, the Commission attempted to reduce the number of inmates at Hollingworth workhouse to sixty three. The board rejected this and stuck to its figure of seventy four.<sup>197</sup> In September 1858, the Commission attempted to close down two workhouses, Calf Hey and Marland. Again the board resisted.<sup>198</sup>

On 16 March 1859, the Commission tried to make improvements at Spotland workhouse and gave the order for a new workhouse.<sup>199</sup> The following February it was the turn of Wardleworth after Rowntree's letter.<sup>200</sup> Between 1860 and 1865, the topic was not raised because of the need for all available places to relieve the Cotton Famine. No plans were discussed till 1870 and then work began. The new Union workhouse at Dearnley, on the road to Littleborough, was finally opened in 1877. Just over thirty years later it became a hospital; its life span as a workhouse was shorter than the campaign fought to prevent it being built.

Finally, there was the issue of outdoor relief, which was a problem throughout the life of the board and this led into the Cotton Famine, where it was the major issue between the Commissioners and the Rochdale Board. From the very start, when the Commission was asked about the fact of there being only three elected guardians, and if one or two were absent, what should they do. The Commission replied that they should call upon some of the magistrates. The board was not happy, replying that a board of one to administer relief was very awkward.<sup>201</sup> At the start of 1853, the Commission complained that the board was going against practice in allowing relief. They wanted a major form filling in for each case and a lot of

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<sup>194</sup> Cole, *Down Poorhouse Lane*, Illustration (3) after p. 42.

<sup>195</sup> Rose, 'Anti-Poor Law Movement', p.78.

<sup>196</sup> RBGM 26 July 1850.

<sup>197</sup> RBGM 25 September 1857.

<sup>198</sup> RBGM 2 September 1858.

<sup>199</sup> TNA, MH 12 6181 16 March 1859.

<sup>200</sup> RBGM 24 February 1860.

<sup>201</sup> TNA, MH 12 6176 23 January 1846.

detail as each case was for outdoor relief.<sup>202</sup> The board started using one sheet per case then quickly moved to one sheet per family. The board also gently chided the Commission in the case of George Taylor and his family and their outdoor relief.<sup>203</sup> The Commission had queried the relief, stating that:

They had felt some hesitation in the subject looking to the number of George Taylor's family and the amount of their weekly earnings.

The clerk replied:

Whether the hesitation felt by the Board in considering the case of George Taylor was in consequence of the earnings of the family being in their opinion sufficient for their maintenance without relief, or whether they were of the opinion that the relief proposed to be granted by the guardians was too little for the relief of the family.

The first mention of the Cotton Famine was on 15 November 1861.<sup>204</sup> The next day, the Commission sent a letter recognising that this was an issue, but they were sure that the guardians could manage and would seek help if necessary. They wanted a separate report for each district.<sup>205</sup> In January 1862, there were five applications for outdoor relief for able bodied people, and on 18 January, the board sent a memorial to the Commission pointing out that they could not meet the requirement for separate orders because of the pressure of work, they could not meet the rules on able-bodied people because they had no work to give them and because of the level of distress in the mills and finally giving a report on each case was time consuming and unreasonable.<sup>206</sup> The reply the following week said that they could not ignore the rules as they were in existence before the Famine, and that they should use the

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<sup>202</sup> *TNA*, MN 12 6178 March 1853.

<sup>203</sup> RBGM 22 February 1861.

<sup>204</sup> RBGM 15 November 1861.

<sup>205</sup> *TNA*, MH 12 6183 16 November 1861.

<sup>206</sup> *TNA*, MH 12 6184 January 1862.

labour test to identify the able-bodied requiring help. A further letter at the end of the month required them to apply the test and set up workshops to provide work.<sup>207</sup>

By May, the Commission were demanding separate lists of disapplication for each district as well as weekly returns.<sup>208</sup> In July, the Board passed the following resolution:

That this Board, having regard to the exceptional nature of the distress now overtaking the working class population considers that the indiscriminate application of the Labour Test as required by the Poor Law Board to the unfortunate applicants for relief at this time to be both injudicious and unjustifiable as needlessly degrading men who have committed no fault and as a cruel visitation of the poor who bear unwanted and unmerited suffering with a patience which does honour to human nature and entitles them to all the consideration which the nation can show them in the hour of their destitution.<sup>209</sup>

This was sent on 11 July with a request that the regulations about outdoor relief be suspended till April 1863.<sup>210</sup> Livsey had a very clear view as to how relief was to be approached. In August 1863 he opposed publishing the names of those receiving relief, stating that 'he had always reminded respectable persons compelled to apply for relief that they were only receiving aid from the fund to which they had contributed'.<sup>211</sup> He was also not slow to attack the Commission over what he saw as needless bureaucracy, in this case providing an alphabetical list of all those who had already received outdoor relief. The following report showed his views very clearly:

The clerk read a letter received from Mr. Farnall, the Poor Law Inspector, in which he asked to be favoured with a report of the distress in the Rochdale Union. Mr. Livsey

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<sup>207</sup> *TNA*, MH 12 6184 30 January 1862.

<sup>208</sup> *TNA*, MH 12 6184 21 May 1862.

<sup>209</sup> *RBGM* 9 July 1862.

<sup>210</sup> *RBGM* 11 July 1862.

<sup>211</sup> *RO* 29 August 1863.

enquired who was to pay for the labour of getting up so formidable a document. Mr. Farnall would be better in London minding his own business than interrupting the guardians of the manufacturing districts in the discharge of theirs. Mr. Livsey then moved 'That Mr Farnall be written to, stating that the preparation of the report he asked for would entail such labour on the officers of the union that it cannot be prepared without extra assistance, and that the Board would be glad to be informed in what manner the expense of such extra assistance may be met'. The resolution was seconded and passed unanimously.<sup>212</sup>

It seemed to work, because on 3 January 1863, there is a report in the Commission files allowing a salary to James Smith to be employed to make out an alphabetical list of all those in receipt of relief.<sup>213</sup>

Large sums of money were involved. For the relief of the quarter ending Christmas 1862, the board spent £14,382. 9s.11d. and had to borrow £5887 from the Commissioners.<sup>214</sup> For the next quarter, the sum was £12,925. 6s.6d. and they had to borrow a further £4430.<sup>215</sup> Finally, at a public meeting in October, the Board agreed to seek a grant of £30,000 for local improvements and in January 1864, a major project of work was started in laying cobbles on Bury Road up to the new cemetery.<sup>216</sup> Poignantly one of the first coffins to go up the new road was that of Thomas Livsey, in late January. It was a measure of the respect and affection that the board had for him that they suspended their meeting on hearing of his death and put a black edge around the minutes in the record for that day and they attended his funeral as a board.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> *RO* 26 September 1862.

<sup>213</sup> *TNA*, MH 12 6185 9 January 1863.

<sup>214</sup> *TNA*, MH 12 6185 17 January 1863.

<sup>215</sup> *TNA*, MH 12 6185 8 May 1861.

<sup>216</sup> *RBGM* 1 January 1864.

<sup>217</sup> *RBGM* 29 January 1864.

The figures for relief in Rochdale show the size of the problem faced by board and show the number of times relief was granted. Rochdale's figures are to be found in the Commission reports and show the number of people helped.<sup>218</sup> There were no figures for 1864, so any figures for overall relief in Rochdale are at best an estimate. In the records are figures for Spotland, Wardleworth, Castleton and Whitworth. This was not the total area of the Union but there were no figures given for the other townships. Over the period from August 1862 till August 1865, without figures for 1864 the totals of people given relief were:

Spotland	16,159	Wardleworth	13,383	Castleton	13,470	Whitworth	16,182
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This gave an overall total of 59,194 people in 13,673 cases. Like Oldham, there was not enough in the rates to keep up with this level of need and an appeal was made for help from the town and help was sought from the Manchester fund to ensure all had support.

By 8 November 1861, the clerk reported that the funds were running out, and on 22 January 1862, the board rejected a demand from the Commission that the rules regarding outdoor relief were enforced. The Commission wanted workshops to be opened and people employed in various ways. Livsey objected to the continued application of the labour test and some of the tasks proposed.

But to discriminately apply the labour test at times like the present is both unjust and impractical - to me it seems a felon's test. I was very sorry to see that there could be found in Rochdale some guardians who advocate the putting of working men to pick oakum; in its very sound it has a felon's bearing; and when a man is no unwilling idler and is thrown upon the streets from mere adverse circumstances, I say that instead of applying the labour test, he has a right to go to that fund he has assisted in creating-for

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<sup>218</sup> TNA, MH 12: 6183, 6184 and 6186.

property of every description is the emanation of labour, the concentration of the essence of labour- and to have such help as will keep him from starvation and want.<sup>219</sup>

The relief committee was set up after a public meeting of 9 January 1862,<sup>220</sup> at which John Bright spoke and a further meeting on 1 February 1862 divided the town into districts for collecting subscriptions and for delivering relief.<sup>221</sup> George Leach Ashworth was the chair and George Brierley treasurer. One of the visitation books has survived and gives a small picture of the privations common during the Famine. The visitor was Mr. Curtis and he called on Miss Worsley, a single lodger, aged 18. She had total earnings of 1s 11d a week and had only had fifteen days work in the last nine weeks. She was given cards and tickets for soup once, bread twice and a meal four times. The card was returned 'with thanks' when she came off the list. For James Street Mr. Curtis recorded: 'I have not finished this street. We must canvass here for contributions to the fund as every house is in comfortable circumstances'. The reality was found in the entry four lines above: 'Benjamin Lees – silk raiser – dead in the house'.<sup>222</sup>

One way in which Rochdale fared better than Oldham was in the nature of its textile industry, in that Oldham's was totally reliant on the cotton industry whereas Rochdale's was split between cotton and wool, and thus the part of the town engaged in woollen work was able to help the cotton workers. There were continued disputes with the Commission, such as the request to apply for a loan of £1,000 for public works in February 1864.<sup>223</sup> The board wanted a repayment time of twenty years, given the number and size of the loans they had already taken out. The Commission refused and told them that the loan period was ten years not twenty and that they would have to reapply and resubmit their bid.<sup>224</sup> In the end, the

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<sup>219</sup> RO 1 March 1862.

<sup>220</sup> RO 16 January 1862.

<sup>221</sup> RO 8 February 1862.

<sup>222</sup> Rochdale, RLSL, Rochdale Relief Fund District No.1. DB LA Z /1/RCF/1.

<sup>223</sup> RBGM 12 February 1864.

<sup>224</sup> RBGM 19 February 1864.

board went to private finance for the loan on better terms.<sup>225</sup> Slowly, the need for help reduced and the last meeting of the relief fund was held in May 1865.<sup>226</sup> The board returned to its normal function and further disputes with the Commission this time over the compilation of a daily Provision Consumption Book, to be filled in by every master in each of the workhouses.<sup>227</sup> The other major issue still to be decided was the plan for a new workhouse.

As with Halifax and Oldham, Rochdale always tried to prioritize local needs as it perceived them, and resist the imposition of central demands. Like Halifax, it moved quickly to implement a Board of Guardians under the 1834 Act; but this haste was chimerical for, as in the case of Oldham, resistance to centralised direction of poor relief was then successfully resisted.

### Conclusion

At the start, there was considerable backing for the board from the ex-officio members but that declined over time and their attendance was poor. The leading figures were liberal or radical and very close to the working people, as their continued re-election showed. As the case of Benjamin Lees revealed, the results of failure to help were often fatal. In all three towns, three elements can be identified as central to the development of these boards. First of all, all three engaged with the central Commission, though to varying degrees. There was no violence but a lot of passive resistance and deliberate delay. Within the towns of the Unions, they were the keepers of control and not the Commission. However hard the Commission tried, it was only if the board agreed that any steps were taken. Secondly, the drive came from the elected members, not from the magistrates and ex-officio members. The levels of attendance at what were weekly meetings were very high from the central figures, and all of this work was unpaid. Even where expenses could be claimed, the prospect of it being

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<sup>225</sup> RBGM 26 February 1864.

<sup>226</sup> RO 27 May 1865.

<sup>227</sup> TNA, MH 6187 10 February 1867.

disallowed by the Commission did not deter members. They only came back more strongly. Finally, they were utterly convinced that they were the best people to help the poor of their area. They understood the problems, they knew the people and the area and they should and would organise the help needed. There was no need for any direction from any central power. This involvement with central control helps to explain why these three towns moved towards incorporation and their own town council.

## Chapter Seven

## Radical Reformers

The Oxford English Dictionary defines radical as 'advocating thorough or far reaching political or social reform: representing or supporting an extreme section of a party'. In a more specific definition it explains a radical as someone 'belonging to and supporting or associated with the extreme wing of the Liberal party which called for a reform of the social and parliamentary system of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries'. Leaving aside the question as to whether such a party as a Liberal one existed at that time, the common word used is 'extreme'. Raymond Williams gives a more specific definition, and argues that the term as extended to political matters belongs specifically to the late eighteenth century, especially in the phrase 'Radical Reform', and that the use of the word 'Radical' as a noun belongs to the early nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> 'Radicalism' was formed at the same period from this use. 'Radical' with a capital letter was used in the later nineteenth century and was almost as respectable as 'liberal', but 'radical' was still used in the sharper early nineteenth century use. It is this sense in which it will be used here, linked closely to the idea of reform.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the role of radical reformers in the three towns in the development of municipal governance and to see to what extent they could be described as extreme or radical. This will involve an examination of the major movements and the people involved, most notably Chartism, but also other movements of that time, including the Anti-Corn Law League. This must commence with Oldham, which, since the controversial work of John Foster in the 1970s, has dominated the historical literature on radicalism.

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<sup>1</sup> Raymond Williams, *Keywords: a Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1976), pp. 209-11.

## Radical Reformers

It is outside the scope of this work to go into a detailed examination of the debate about John Foster's work on the Oldham Radicals, the main elements of which are outlined in Chapter Two along with the main arguments put forward in response to his work.<sup>2</sup> Here the intention is to look at his work in relationship to the people Foster identified as radicals, and at the evidence available to support his categorisation. Foster tabulated them in the second of two lists, the first, of 'working class leaders' active up to 1830, is shorter.<sup>3</sup> The second part lists 131 names of 'Oldham working class leaders active 1830-57'.<sup>4</sup> Nowhere does Foster define what this title means. His lengthy footnotes shed no light either.<sup>5</sup> It is also important to note that both Gadian and Winstanley include names which can be cross referenced with Foster.<sup>6</sup> This exercise shows that the numbers are nowhere near as high. Winstanley lists twenty three names but only thirteen of them match Foster's list. Gadian, across both articles, lists seventeen names but only twelve of them correspond to Foster.

Foster categorised his 131 names under seventeen sub-headings. This approach has a number of inconsistencies. The first of these is the way that Chartism is dealt with offering sub-categories for '1838-41' and '1848 Charter', but nowhere dealing with Chartism in the interval, especially 1842. Another category is headed 'Irish Protests', but this is responses to the problems within Ireland, not the local problem of the influx of Irish workers into Lancashire after the potato famine. The critical year of 1847 has two headings. The first is '1847 Holladay' and the second is '1847 Cobbett', attempting to show which candidate they supported in the parliamentary elections. Yet this ignores the central role of John Fielden, whose choice of

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<sup>2</sup> John Foster, *Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution* and Chapter Two, p. 33.

<sup>3</sup> Foster, p. 152.

<sup>4</sup> Foster, pp 154-159. The headings are set down the side of the page.

<sup>5</sup> Foster, p. 317, notes 77-8.

<sup>6</sup> Chapter Two, p. 34, also David Gadian, 'Class Consciousness in Oldham and other North West Industrial Towns', *Historical Journal*, 21 (1978), 161-72, and 'Class formation and class action in north-west industrial towns, 1830-1850' in *The Victorian City: a Reader in British Urban History, 1820-1914*. ed. by R. J. Morris (London: Longman, 1993) pp. 24-66, as well as Michael Winstanley, 'Oldham radicalism and the Origins of Popular Liberalism 1830-52', *Historical Journal*, 36 (1993), 619-43.

Cobbett as his election partner produced a split in the radical group. A number of people, for example, Alexander Taylor, were not necessarily in favour of Cobbett but were passionate about Fielden. It was support for Fielden that mattered. A final criticism is the inclusion of the names of people arrested in the disturbances of 1842. Forty eight names are listed thus, yet for thirty six of them, (75% of the total) this is the only category under which they appear. Many were arrested in 1842, but this cannot be an absolute indicator that they were leaders of the working class as Foster suggests. Webster gives a similar list for those arrested in Halifax but never suggests they were the leaders.<sup>7</sup> The same problem appears with the category for strikers in 1842. Twenty one are listed yet for eight this is the sole category. Another factor worth noting is that the lists of strikers and of those arrested are mutually exclusive, implying erroneously that no strikers were arrested.

Sixty five names, half the total, only appear once. This is not to say that the real leaders are missing. Alexander Taylor appears nine times, John Knight appears eight, James Greaves, Len Haslop and James Holladay each seven, William Fitton and William Knott appear six and Richard Cooper, John Kay and Thomas Swire appear five times each. There are oddities in the list. The most obvious is that of Richard Stump. He is listed in *Slater's Directory* in 1842 as a haberdasher and jeweller.<sup>8</sup> In the 1861 version he is listed as a gentleman, therefore of independent means.<sup>9</sup> He was a member of the Police Commission and was chair twenty three times.<sup>10</sup> More importantly he was a churchwarden in the select vestry and he was the vicar's choice as churchwarden.<sup>11</sup> The Oldham Poll Books show him voting for Lees the Tory candidate in 1835,<sup>12</sup> not voting in July 1852<sup>13</sup> and voting Tory again for Heald in December 1852.<sup>14</sup> Foster

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<sup>7</sup> Eric Webster, 'Chartism in Calder Vale', *THAS*, ns, 2 (1994) 55-77, p. 57.

<sup>8</sup> *Slater's Directory for Oldham* 1842.

<sup>9</sup> *Slater's Directory for Oldham* 1861.

<sup>10</sup> OPICM B PCO/1/1-2.

<sup>11</sup> Oldham St Marys Vestry Minute Books: Acc. 2005. 084.

<sup>12</sup> Oldham, OLSL, Poll Book 1835, JFG 1.

<sup>13</sup> Poll Book 1852, JFG 1.

<sup>14</sup> Poll Book 1852, JFG 1.

lists him as a Chartist 1838-41 and being in favour of short time working in 1831-33 and of a compromise in the situation in the town in 1842. Extensive searches have failed to identify two people named Richard Stump and there are no footnotes in Foster to clarify where he takes his evidence from. It was unlikely that Richard Stump was a radical.

The top ten figures identified by Foster fall into four groups. The first is what may be termed 'old radicals', John Knight and William Fitton, active in politics during the Napoleonic wars and present at, and arrested as a result of, Peterloo. Knight, a cotton manufacturer, went to prison three times and the experience wrecked his business and his wife's health. He ended his life as a schoolteacher.<sup>15</sup> Fitton was listed as a doctor and he had financial problems, with his wife twice claiming support from the parish.<sup>16</sup> Both were dead by the end of 1840, Knight in 1838 and Fitton in 1840. Both are listed by Gadian and Winstanley. Parallel to that group are two other less well known names, Richard Cooper, a lecturer and John Kay, a weaver. Foster lists Cooper as arrested in 1842 and a Chartist in 1848. He opposed the Poor Law and rural police and was also vocal in the Irish protests. Kay is listed as active before 1832, and as a Chartist both in 1839-41 and 1848. Neither is mentioned by Gadian or Winstanley.

The third group are James Greaves, (spinner and publican), Leonard Haslop, (hatter and Temperance cafe owner), and Thomas Swire, (clogger). Swire was active before 1832, was a Chartist between 1839-41, but not 1848, and opposed to the Poor Law. Haslop was a Chartist in 1839-41, arrested in 1842, and supported Holladay in 1847. He was against the rural police. He was elected to the Poor Law board of guardians and attended seventy four meetings in 1859 and 1860.<sup>17</sup> Greaves was a leader of the Oldham Political Union in 1832, supported the local strike in 1834 and was a major figure within Oldham Chartism. He was active in 1832, listed by Foster as a Chartist in 1839-41 but not 1848. He was against both the rural police and the new Poor Law. Greaves campaigned for factory reform and in support of the Glasgow

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<sup>15</sup> *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, ed. by Joyce Bellamy, John Saville and David Martin, Vol. 9 (London: Macmillan, 1993), pp. 166-7.

<sup>16</sup> OBP D: BUT/4.18 February 1834 and D BUT/9.

<sup>17</sup> OBG M 1859-60.

spinners in 1838, and was appointed a lecturer by the Chartists on the south Lancashire circuit.<sup>18</sup> During 1841 he started to make and sell beer and he was accused of being bribed by the Anti-Corn Law supporters to change his allegiance. He was then sacked as a lecturer, and joined the Complete Suffrage Movement whose 1842 and 1843 conferences he attended as an Oldham delegate. He was also elected to the Poor Law Board for 1850 and 1851, attending fifty eight meetings in those years.<sup>19</sup> Greaves is mentioned by both Gadian and Winstanley, Haslop only by Winstanley and Swire by neither.

The final group were perhaps the best known of the Oldham radicals and in many ways, after Knight's death, the local leaders of the movement. They were James Holladay (cotton manufacturer), William Knott (hatter), and shopkeeper Alexander Taylor. Holladay was born in County Durham and moved to Oldham when he was five. He was involved in most forms of radical action, and Foster listed him as involved in 1832 in agitation for reform, as a Chartist 1838-41 and opposed to the Poor Law. He unsuccessfully contested the first Council elections in 1849<sup>20</sup> but was briefly a member of the board of guardians in 1850, attending nineteen meetings.<sup>21</sup> Knott had a profile very similar to Holladay and the two men were close friends. Knott never stood for election to the guardians but he was elected to the Police Commission in 1831 and chaired its meetings three times.<sup>22</sup> He too was defeated in the first Council elections.<sup>23</sup> He was elected in 1857, holding the seat until made an Alderman in 1865 when he was made Mayor.<sup>24</sup> Taylor meets more of Foster's criteria than any other man. He was active before 1832, a Chartist 1838-41, involved in the issues of 1842, supported Cobbett in 1847 and was opposed to the Poor Law and the rural police. More importantly, he was John

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<sup>18</sup> NS 8 May 1841.

<sup>19</sup> OBG 1850-51, as well as Gadian, 'Class Formation', p. 31, and Winstanley, 'Oldham Radicalism', p. 637.

<sup>20</sup> OCM 1849, CBO 1/1/1.

<sup>21</sup> OBG 1850-51.

<sup>22</sup> OPICM 1831 B: PCO/1/1.

<sup>23</sup> OCM: 1849.

<sup>24</sup> OCM: 1865.

Fielden's agent in every election the latter fought.<sup>25</sup> He was a member of the vestry and served a term as Overseer of the Poor.<sup>26</sup> Taylor was also a police commissioner chairing the commission four times.<sup>27</sup> He did not stand for the board of guardians, but became a non-elected Alderman in the first Council in 1849.<sup>28</sup> Taylor and Knott are mentioned by both Gadion and Winstanley, but Holladay is only mentioned by Winstanley.

What is also interesting are the names mentioned by Gadion and Winstanley which are not on Foster's list. Benjamin Wolstencroft and Abraham Crompton are described by Winstanley as 'lifelong radicals'.<sup>29</sup> James Bardsley, a Chartist, James Wild, a barber and Thomas Haslam, a school master are also described as radical. Gadion mentions James Halliday, a leading radical,<sup>30</sup> and Samuel Kydd, Oldham's delegate to the Chartist Convention in 1848.<sup>31</sup> The other interesting person was Jesse Ainsworth. It was unlikely that he would be included by Foster as he was not working class, being a land, mine and mill owner. Winstanley describes him as 'an eccentric Quaker' and he accompanied O'Connor on his first visit to the town in 1835.<sup>32</sup> Foster, by casting his net very wide, has included many names that were clearly not 'leaders' and so does damage to his argument about Oldham's working class, because, as will be seen, it was no different in size or depth to the other two towns.

Knott, Holliday and Taylor were always to be seen in Oldham, speaking and more often chairing meetings about reform, the Corn Laws or the Poor Laws. Butterworth's news files show this scenario repeatedly.<sup>33</sup> It was the events of 1847 and the general election of that year that saw the major split between Taylor on the one hand and Knott and Holladay on the other,

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<sup>25</sup> Winstanley, 'Oldham Radicalism', p. 626.

<sup>26</sup> OSMVM 1 October 1845.

<sup>27</sup> OPICM 1838-47.

<sup>28</sup> OCM 1849.

<sup>29</sup> Winstanley, p. 629.

<sup>30</sup> Gadion, *Class Consciousness*, p. 246.

<sup>31</sup> Gadion, *Class Formation*, p. 42.

<sup>32</sup> Winstanley, p. 629.

<sup>33</sup> OBP D BUT F 3, 1832.

though Winstanley argues that the split went back to 1835.<sup>34</sup> Taylor was a fervent supporter of Fielden and thus tended to support Fielden's fellow candidates, first William Cobbett, then George Johnson and finally John Morgan Cobbett. Knott and Holladay however were unhappy with John Morgan Cobbett, particularly his views on the disestablishment of the Church of England. They supported Feargus O'Connor in 1835, and thus helped deprive John Morgan Cobbett of the seat, allowing the Tory J. F. Lees to take office instead. Without time to find an alternative candidate in 1837, they supported Johnson. As the election of 1841 was unopposed it was 1847 before they could put up an alternative candidate. Holladay was the man chosen.

Fielden would not stand with any other candidate than John Morgan Cobbett, whom Holladay, Knott and a large number of radicals would not support.<sup>35</sup> Taylor stood by Fielden, even organising his campaign, which included widespread exclusive dealing. W. J. Fox was the Liberal choice of candidate and just before the election Holladay stepped aside to allow him the maximum vote. Fox came from East Anglia and was a Unitarian holding a ministry in London. He was also a writer and editor of the *Monthly Repository*. He was a better speaker than he was a writer, and he supported both the Anti-Corn Law League, for whom he lectured, and the extension of the franchise. This type of free trade radicalism made him an ideal choice as an alternative to Fielden and Cobbett.<sup>36</sup>

They were defeated: Fox was elected as was John Duncroft the Conservative. On the day of the election Taylor harangued the crowd from a hotel window and a riot started which required troops to suppress it.<sup>37</sup> Benjamin Grime was a supporter of Taylor:

The writer was one of a family all of whom including himself greatly lamented the defeat of their party and he would have carried on exclusive dealing to its bitter end

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<sup>34</sup> Winstanley, 'Oldham Radicalism', p. 627.

<sup>35</sup> Benjamin Grime, *Memory Sketches* (Oldham: Hurst and Rennie, 1887) p. 61.

<sup>36</sup> DNB, William Johnson Fox 1786-1864, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004-11).

<sup>37</sup> Grime, p. 65.

but for the dread of subjecting himself to the resentment of, and punishment by, his employer.<sup>38</sup>

There was a lot of recrimination in the town. Fielden and Taylor blamed Holladay and Knott for their defeat; they in turn rejected that charge and blamed the 'dictation' (as Grime called it) of having Cobbett and no other. Taylor was especially criticised for the profits he was thought to have made from exclusive dealing, and Grime seems to confirm this,<sup>39</sup> stating that Taylor founded the Committee of Working Men, a pressure group to support Fielden.<sup>40</sup> Taylor subsequently moved closer to the Tories, and attended dinners with the leaders at the Licensed Victuallers Association. When the first Council was elected, Taylor stood as a Liberal but was defeated. He was then chosen by the victorious Tories as an unelected Alderman, the only one of eight from outside the Tory party.<sup>41</sup> Taylor and Holladay died just over six months apart. Winstanley described Taylor's death as follows:

Ridiculed in local broadsheets by those with whom he had once worked, and pushed into an unsavoury alliance with Tories whom he had once despised, Taylor had become 'troubled and distressed'. One morning in March 1853 he climbed into the loft of a neighbour's house and cut his throat.<sup>42</sup>

Holladay was already dead, collapsing on stage at the Working Men's club that he had done so much to create. He had just made another speech supporting Fox in the 1852 election caused by Duncroft's sudden death.<sup>43</sup>

Another factor needing to be examined in relation to the leading Oldham radicals is their religion. Both Holladay and Knott were Wesleyan Methodist preachers. Knott, however,

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<sup>38</sup> Grime, p. 64.

<sup>39</sup> Grime, p. 62.

<sup>40</sup> Grime, p. 62.

<sup>41</sup> Grime, p. 129.

<sup>42</sup> Winstanley, p. 641.

<sup>43</sup> *Manchester Examiner* 25 September 1852.

was expelled as a lay preacher.<sup>44</sup> He had supported J. R. Stephens, a Dissenting preacher from Ashton-under-Lyne who had left the Wesleyan Connexion. Stephens spoke all over the North of England in favour of the working class, factory reform and against the Poor Law. He was a strong proponent of church disestablishment and supported the Chartist movement initially. He was arrested and charged with making seditious speeches in 1838 and imprisoned for eighteen months. He changed after his time in prison and rejected Chartism and even became a Poor Law guardian.<sup>45</sup> Given the range of his beliefs it is easy to see why he would appeal to many in the three towns. Holladay preached at a small chapel in Slaithwaite, near Huddersfield for seven years before his death, and had a house there.<sup>46</sup> Jesse Ainsworth, a close associate of Holladay's was a Quaker. John Fielden, originally raised a Quaker, became a Methodist Unitarian (a regional sect combining Methodist piety with Unitarian rationalism) and built his own chapel.<sup>47</sup> A large number of their supporters were also dissenters and many were active within the Temperance movement, of which Ainsworth and Haslop were leading lights.<sup>48</sup>

Halifax presented a completely different picture. It is very hard to find any evidence of radicals within the institutions and committees of the town. There were clearly Chartists and Temperance members as well as factory reformers and opponents of the Poor Law. Jowett comments that 'Halifax was never as radical as Bradford or the Lancashire towns', and it is hard to find radicals in places of influence and leadership within the development of civic governance.<sup>49</sup> There were several reasons for this. The first has already been stated (in Chapter One) in that the large employers of the town had big enterprises employing a lot of the workforce. Firms such as Akroyds and Crossleys had huge influence within Halifax, and their

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<sup>44</sup> *Manchester and Salford Advertiser* 24 May 1834.

<sup>45</sup> For a fuller examination of his life, see Michael S. Edwards, *Purge this realm: a Life of Joseph Raynor Stephens* (London: Epworth Press, 1994). See also Malcolm Chase, *Chartism: a New History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007) p. 34.

<sup>46</sup> *Huddersfield Chronicle and West Yorkshire Advertiser* 2 October 1852.

<sup>47</sup> Stewart A. Weaver, *John Fielden and the Politics of Popular Radicalism 1832-47*, p. 36.

<sup>48</sup> *NS* 20 November 1841.

<sup>49</sup> J. A. Jowett, 'From Whiggery to Liberalism: Sir Charles Wood and Halifax 1832-65', *THAS*, ns, vol.2. (1994) 43-54 p. 53.

workers rarely operated against the wishes of the employers. Akroyd was a major opponent of John Fielden and, along with the other major local owners, produced a fourteen point plan for factory reform that severely limited the shorter-hours campaign in the locality.<sup>50</sup> Because of their dominance of the bodies that exercised local power (such as the vestry, the Trustees and the board of guardians), there were no opportunities for radical movements within the town to become members of these bodies. A possible model is provided by Malcolm Chase in his work on Middlesbrough.<sup>51</sup> He compares Middlesbrough with Stockton, where in Stockton the lower and lower middle class were quite strong whereas in Middlesbrough, 'the working and 'middling' class were united in that both were excluded from the exercise of significant political power'.<sup>52</sup> An Improvement Commission was formed in 1841, but for the first three years the commissioners were nominated by the Act and only then were elections held. In Halifax the Trustees had held sway for over sixty years. There was a strong Chartist presence, including the likes of Benjamin Rushton and Ben Wilson, but they could not get access to the Commission. Dalby identified ninety active Chartists, but even he set nine of them aside as only visiting a meeting once, and amongst those nine were the four men later identified as 'Chartists' in the municipal elections of 1847.<sup>53</sup> The town's MPs, whilst solidly Liberal, were not involved in the towns politics. Sir Charles Wood, MP for thirty three years was best summed up by the *Halifax Guardian* writing after the 1857 election: 'he took flight to London, never more to revisit Halifax except on compulsion until he needs the votes of his electors'.<sup>54</sup>

Both the vestry and the Trustees were in place before the French Revolution, and both were to a large extent self-perpetuating, meaning that the upper and more substantial middle

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<sup>50</sup> *Huddersfield and Halifax Express* 12 March 1831.

<sup>51</sup> Malcolm S. Chase, 'Chartism, 1838-1858: Responses in Two Teeside Towns', *Northern History*, 24 (1988), 146-71.

<sup>52</sup> Chase, p. 155.

<sup>53</sup> G.R. Dalby, 'The Chartist Movement in the Town and District of Halifax', Unpublished work, (1948) HRL, p. 55.

<sup>54</sup> *HG* 4 April 1857.

classes had total control of the two bodies.<sup>55</sup> When a property qualification was introduced for the Trustees in 1823, it was a high one of £40,<sup>56</sup> and reinforcing the exclusion of the lower-middle and working class people. There is no evidence of men in Halifax, like Holladay, Knott and Taylor in Oldham, or Livsey and Heape in Rochdale, being part of the major bodies and having a profound effect on their work and outcomes. Although major accounts of radical activity appear in Halifax newspapers, the reports are from Rochdale and Oldham.

What may be a factor was the size and complexity of the parish which would require lengthy study of minute details. It was massive in area, over 129 square miles, and very diverse in social and political terms.<sup>57</sup> There was a complex mix of rural and urban communities. Before the Poor Law Act of 1834 there were the twenty three separate townships, and whilst Halifax itself was large, other townships, such as Flixby were very small, yet independent. There was a great deal of stability within the Church of England, with only one vicar throughout this period from 1827 till 1875, and no issues over Church rates as they were not collected on 'on account of the great opposition experienced'.<sup>58</sup> This was due to a strong nonconformist presence, whose leading figures were men like Jonathon Akroyd and Francis Crossley. The impact of radical reformers can be seen in the parliamentary elections of 1847 and 1852. Edward Miall (Radical) and Ernest Jones (Chartist) stood against Wood (Liberal) and Henry Edwards (Tory). Miall was a leading Dissenter, a former Congregationalist minister and editor of *The Nonconformist*. He was also one of the founders of the Anti-State Church Association (later the Liberation Society) dedicated to the disestablishment of the Church of England. Miall polled 349 votes, Jones polled 281 votes. Between them this represented 38% of the total poll. Radical and non-conformist positions clearly appealed to the radical

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<sup>55</sup> See the list of 224 names in the Local Government Act (1762) Halifax, HRL: Act of Parliament: Box 1. Also see the Halifax Parish Registry Minute Book 1816-1899, Wakefield, WYAS, D: 53/6/1.

<sup>56</sup> Halifax 1823 Improvement Act.

<sup>57</sup> Edward Baines, *History, Directory and Gazetteer of the County of Yorkshire, Vol.1: West Riding*, (Leeds: Mercury Press 1822).

<sup>58</sup> *PP* 1852 (38): Abstract Return from each Parliamentary Borough in England and Wales of the number of Church Rates, p. 23.

reformers, and the vote for Jones is significant given the small number of votes held by the Chartists. When Jones stood again in 1852 he only gained thirty eight votes, a sign of the decline in support from radicals in the town.<sup>59</sup>

Though a textile town, the main industry was predominantly wool and so the town did not suffer from anything like the problems caused in Lancashire by the Cotton Famine. Whilst there was strong opposition to the new Poor law, that was an external imposition and rejected by the majority of all classes, even if for different reasons. However, Halifax moved to create a board of guardians in 1837, unlike the other two towns which delayed the process for another ten years.

Rochdale was much more like Oldham than Halifax. It had a combination of old radical activists and radical M.P.s as well as a body of involved people working in every institution. It is important first of all to examine the role John Bright played in Rochdale. Given Bright's very prominent national role as a politician, both as a leader of the Anti-Corn Law League and a major Liberal speaker across the country, it is possible to lose sight of how he was regarded within his native town.<sup>60</sup> He was always treated with great respect and was invited to attend and speak at many functions, either on the subject of the Corn Laws, or Parliamentary reform. He was still seen as a mill owner, part of Jacob Bright Senior's family. His plan during the Cotton Famine, to offer loans to struggling workers, was not well received,<sup>61</sup> nor was his attempt to influence the shape of the proposed new Council in 1857.<sup>62</sup> Bright had a somewhat frosty relationship with Thomas Livsey. He described Livsey at the time of his death as 'a

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<sup>59</sup> For further details on Miall, see D. W. Bebbington, Miall Edward (1809-1881), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) and Chase, *Chartism*, pp. 193-6. For Jones see Miles Taylor, *Ernest Jones, Chartism and the Romance of Politics 1819-1869* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>60</sup> The most recent work is by Bill Cash and it concentrates on Bright's national role, as the title suggests. Bill Cash, *John Bright: statesman, orator, agitator* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2011). See also Herman Ausubel, *John Bright: Victorian Reformer* (New York: Wiley and Sons, 1966) and Keith Robbins, *John Bright* (London: Routledge, Keegan and Paul, 1979).

<sup>61</sup> RO 16 January 1862.

<sup>62</sup> MG 10 March 1856.

diamond though not highly polished',<sup>63</sup> and Livsey said of him, when the Parliamentary Reform Association was seeking a candidate as MP to replace William Sharman Crawford, that 'he would support Bright if they could not get a better man'.<sup>64</sup> It is also worth noting that the inscription on Livsey's tomb came not from Bright but from Richard Cobden. It was Jacob Bright his brother who played a much more prominent role within the town and became the first Mayor. The third brother, Thomas, ran the mills. One area that Bright was involved in was that of the Church Rates. The Brights were Quakers and John's father Jacob was involved in the challenge to the vicar over the issue of rates. John joined him and became the leading figure in this campaign in the town. In what was probably his first published work he refuted the case put by first of all Reverend Hey, then Reverend Molesworth.<sup>65</sup> Livsey joined him in this campaign and the rates, though set, were never collected.<sup>66</sup>

The first prominent radical was James Taylor, a hatter from Spotland, born in 1787. He was a preacher at the Clover Street Unitarian Chapel, and in politics, he stood as the Ultra-radical candidate at the General Election of 1832. At the hustings, he proposed a programme of abolition of the Corn Laws, a reduction in taxation and the army and navy, total abolition of the slave trade, annual parliaments, universal suffrage and the vote by ballot.<sup>67</sup> He won by a large majority at the hustings, but considering how few of his supporters were able to vote, he gained a respectable total of 109 votes in a total poll of 632 votes cast.<sup>68</sup> He then became a Chartist and rose to be the most prominent member within the town. He represented Rochdale at the National Convention of 1839 and was to be found speaking and chairing meetings around the North of England up to 1842.<sup>69</sup> He was a supporter of O'Connor and

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<sup>63</sup> RO 8 February 1864.

<sup>64</sup> HG 5 April 1851.

<sup>65</sup> Rochdale, RLSL, John Bright, *Address to the Inhabitants of Rochdale on the late Church Rate contest*, RCHA/9/12/4.

<sup>66</sup> PP 1852 (38) Abstract Return for each Parliamentary Borough for the number of Church Rates and the amount paid 1833-51, p. 43.

<sup>67</sup> William Robertson, *The Social and Political History of Rochdale* (Rochdale, 1889) p. 170.

<sup>68</sup> Robertson, p. 186.

<sup>69</sup> A pen portrait of Taylor was given in the *Operative* 24 March 1839.

opposed to the idea of the 'Sacred Month'.<sup>70</sup> Livsey was often found in his company and Cole states that Livsey was buried next to Taylor in the cemetery.<sup>71</sup> In fact the grave is that of James Taylor's son, also called James with whom Livsey was very friendly. The elder James Taylor became very disillusioned with politics after 1848 and moved to Todmorden to the Unitarian Chapel, where he died in 1854. One of his congregation in the early days would have been John Fielden, who built the chapel. Weaver mentions twice that Taylor and Fielden were close friends,<sup>72</sup> and Taylor was the minister at Fielden's funeral.<sup>73</sup>

Another early radical was James Leach, also born in Spotland in 1798, in a family of weavers. He was arrested with Samuel Bamford in the reform protests in 1817. On his release he fell out with Bamford and accused him of being a collaborator. He then started a business supplying tallow and candles. He became quite wealthy but remained a radical. He became a Chartist and was elected a Chief Constable of Rochdale in 1840.<sup>74</sup> Robert Schofield was also identified by Robertson as a radical who organised reading sessions, mainly of Cobbett's writings, and debates to allow the working class to be better informed. He was the uncle of Thomas Livsey and Livsey acted as the candle man and substitute reader. The Chadwicks, who were magistrates, were often present.<sup>75</sup>

Rochdale also had two radical MPs, William Sharman Crawford and Edward Miall. Crawford was MP from 1841 to 1852 and Miall till 1857. There was a brief period when Ramsay was the Tory M.P. before the election of Richard Cobden in 1859. Crawford was an Ulsterman yet he supported Catholic Emancipation and the Chartist movement. He was also a friend of Joseph Sturge and a supporter of the Complete Suffrage movement. He was the M.P. for Dundalk from 1835-37 then moved to London. He was invited by the radicals to stand in Rochdale and he had their support throughout his period of office. Edward Miall had already

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<sup>70</sup> NS 3 August 1839 and 4 September 1841.

<sup>71</sup> John Cole, *Conflict and Cooperation*, p. 28.

<sup>72</sup> Weaver, *John Fielden* pp. 36-37 and p. 219.

<sup>73</sup> MG 9 June 1849 refers to the funeral procession 'led by the minister, Mr. Taylor'.

<sup>74</sup> Cole, p. 27.

<sup>75</sup> Robertson, pp. 9-10.

stood in Halifax, but was defeated.<sup>76</sup> His campaign for the disestablishment of the Church of England won him a lot of support in Rochdale. As Gadian pointed out, using the 1851 Religious Census, Rochdale was the strongest centre of dissenting religion in the area of East Lancashire.<sup>77</sup>

By far the most important radical was Thomas Livsey. He was born on 18 June 1815, the son of a publican and blacksmith. The driving influence of his childhood was his mother Mary, sister to Robert Schofield. Thomas was well educated and was middle class, as he himself pointed out when talking to a working class audience in 1846. He supported them 'though he was not of their class'.<sup>78</sup> He too started as a blacksmith, before he became a brass founder, a cotton manufacturer until his mill burnt down and finally a railway agent. What makes him slightly unusual was that unlike many other radicals he was an Anglican. He was baptised, married and had his funeral, all at St Chad's, the parish church. He was chosen as a churchwarden, and whilst this cannot be seen as suggesting membership of the Church of England, he was also chosen as a sidesman, which was a church post.<sup>79</sup> This did not make him a friend of the vicar. When the Corn Laws were repealed in 1846, Livsey arranged for the church bells to be rung as a sign to the town of the success of this project. Molesworth, a strong Tory, objected, and Livsey and his friends refused to allow the vicar to get into the bell tower. The vicar's secretary grabbed Livsey in an attempt to move him but Livsey resisted him and told Molesworth that whilst the altar and sanctuary were his, the bell tower belonged to the people and the bells would be rung.<sup>80</sup>

Livsey was active in virtually every area of political activity seeking change for the people and the town. He came to public notice first of all when he became a member of the

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<sup>76</sup> See Chapter Three, pp. 62-63.

<sup>77</sup> *PP* 1853 (89) Census of Great Britain: Religious Worship, p. 399.

<sup>78</sup> *NS* 5 December 1846.

<sup>79</sup> *RCSVM* 1837-1857 CBR/3/1.

<sup>80</sup> *Manchester Times and Gazette* 4 July 1846.

Castleton select vestry in 1840. Between then and 1845, he attended seventy one meetings and was chair fifteen times. There are no figures for the next five years but from 1851 until 1852, he attended four more meetings, three as chair. He attended five further meetings of which the last was in 1859.<sup>81</sup> At about the same time as he joined the Castleton vestry, he also started to represent Castleton on the improvement commission. He attended 260 times, fifty four as chair, the highest recorded attendance.<sup>82</sup> He was also chosen as the Chief Constable from 1852 till 1854, which made him the leader of the Commission.<sup>83</sup> He was a member of the board of guardians, again representing Castleton from 1849 until his death in 1864, with a brief gap in 1861.<sup>84</sup> His attendance figures, where available, show him present at 112 meetings of which he was chair thirty seven times. He was in the top ten attendees for the Board. In 1855 he joined the committee to obtain a Charter of Incorporation, attended over half the meetings and was chair once.<sup>85</sup> He was a member of the Rochdale Reform Association between 1848 and 1864 and attended twenty four meetings.<sup>86</sup> He was elected to the Council in 1857 and was chosen as one of the first Aldermen, though he was never Mayor.<sup>87</sup>

None of this includes his work to remove the Liverpool dues, the tax imposed on all goods coming into Lancashire through the port of Liverpool, a major bone of contention in Manchester and the other towns who relied on the import of cotton to survive. There was the work testifying to Parliament on working conditions, and his help for the Pioneers, the founders of the Cooperative movement in Rochdale. As secretary of the Reform Association he helped the Pioneers to get a room where they could meet in the early days and he became an Arbitrator for them in the eighteen fifties.<sup>88</sup> Neither does it include the work that was closest

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<sup>81</sup> RCSVM 1837-57.

<sup>82</sup> RPICM 1839-1858: CBR/1/2-6.

<sup>83</sup> RPICM April 1852.

<sup>84</sup> RBGM 1837-65 PUR 6-12.

<sup>85</sup> Rochdale, RLSL, Charter of Incorporation and Minutes, LA/1/1/1/1.

<sup>86</sup> Rochdale, RLSL, Minute Book of the Parliamentary Reform Association, 1848-52 REF/2/1/1.

<sup>87</sup> Rochdale, RLSL, Council Election 1858 PE/A/4.

<sup>88</sup> Cole, p. 28.

to his heart, the work that he regarded as his major function, that of being a Chartist. He made no apology for it and in the meal given in his honour shortly before his death, he boasted about his membership.<sup>89</sup> Cole describes him as 'the most extraordinary character that the town has produced' and that 'his contribution to the development of nineteenth century Rochdale cannot be overstated'.<sup>90</sup> Garrad says 'he was the single most influential figure in Rochdale politics throughout the eighteen forties, fifties and early sixties, and his influence was felt long after his death in 1864'.<sup>91</sup> He also sets Livsey's funeral in its context:

Perhaps the ultimate sign of the way in which these elites were open can be found in a funeral. Local leaders died with enormous panache. The final exit of those who had reached the very top was often accompanied by the closing of shops and factories. Large crowds turned out and many of the still extant leaders took the opportunity to put themselves on show. The funeral procession in which they took part would meander imposingly around the town before reluctantly depositing its burden in the graveyard.

Given the significance of such occasions, it is doubly indicative that the greatest funeral of the whole period in any of the three towns, (Bolton, Salford and Rochdale), should have been that of Thomas Livsey in Rochdale in 1864. During a twenty year political career he held nearly every major office in the town and was an immensely influential figure, politically and socially. When he died the *Rochdale Observer* appeared for the first time, with black borders, and his funeral procession was attended by the mayor, the entire council, most corporation officers and the board of guardians, along with an estimated 40,000 people. There could be no greater tribute

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<sup>89</sup> RO 21 November 1863.

<sup>90</sup> Cole, p. 27.

<sup>91</sup> John Garrad, *Leadership and Power*, p. 127.

to the rewards that might await men of modest economic endowment but great political energy.<sup>92</sup>

It does need to be stated that he was the first serving member of the Council to die and so they took great care as to how they acted, so that a clear precedent should be set.<sup>93</sup> When he died, the people of the town had a public subscription which raised £1,724 12s 6d at the peak of the impact of the Cotton Famine.<sup>94</sup> Some of the money was used to build him a large red granite tomb, which still stands close to the gates of Rochdale cemetery.

It would be a mistake, however, to see Livsey as the only working radical in the town. He was part of a group, which had a wide variety of members. For magistrates, William and Thomas Chadwick were very radical. There was an alliance of mutual benefit between the leading Liberal figures in the town and the radicals. The Liberal group was made up of manufacturing families such as the Ashworths, especially George Leach Ashworth, who was very involved in the council; Thomas Heape, the longstanding chair of the Board of Guardians; John Pagan who worked on the Improvement Commission as well as Jacob Bright, John Petrie and John Tatham. To these must be added the smaller business men such as Edward Taylor, John Dania and William Shepherd. They did not always agree, for example on the number of wards for the Council, but they worked for each other and against the leading Tories in the town. This alliance also had the support of the large number of working class people who could not vote but still had a powerful voice.

Radicals were not essential to the formation of civic institutions or municipal corporations, as the case of Halifax clearly shows. None were in evidence working in the public bodies and being leaders of them. Where such men were involved and were leaders, then the nature of the bodies was different. The way that the Boards of Guardians evolved in Oldham

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<sup>92</sup> Garrard, p. 35.

<sup>93</sup> *RO* 30 January 1864.

<sup>94</sup> *MG* 6 November 1865.

and Rochdale shows the impact that radicals had. Men such as Holladay in Oldham and Livsey in Rochdale showed the different ways that working class concerns could be brought to bear on the public bodies, even though most of the townspeople could not have a vote. Where radicals stood for election such as in the Improvement Commission elections, they tended to lead the poll. They did not always triumph, as the elections for the Council in Oldham in 1847 showed very clearly, but they could not be ignored and they did keep the needs of the town's people very much to the fore, as shown by the work done in Oldham and Rochdale during the Cotton Famine.

### Non-electors

The other group that needs to be considered with the radicals is that of the non-electors. There are very few references to these groups but they did play a part in giving voice to the radical demands of the working class. There seem to be only three references to non-electors in Halifax. The first was in the *Halifax and Huddersfield Express* in December 1833. It refers to a meeting of non-electors, and urges them 'to abstain from accepting all liquor or any other bribe from Tory, Whig Radical or other for the purpose of obtaining an undue or corrupt influence'.<sup>95</sup> The other two concern the Parliamentary election of 1847 and the choice of Ernest Jones and Edward Miall as the radical candidates. In June 1847, there is a reference to a non-electors meeting selecting Ernest Jones as their candidate<sup>96</sup> and the following month, Miall addressed the non-electors as part of the campaign.<sup>97</sup>

In Oldham there were no references to non-electors in the press, or in Butterworth. Grime however does make reference to a group. He pondered the issue of the time and effort spent on the non-electors but concluded that it was a pressure group for those without the vote and ended by stating that 'the vote was held in trust for the public, not for the use of the

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<sup>95</sup> *Halifax and Huddersfield Express* 18 December 1833.

<sup>96</sup> *HG* 19 June 1847.

<sup>97</sup> *Bradford and Wakefield Observer and Halifax, Huddersfield and Keighley Reporter* 22 July 1847.

individual'.<sup>98</sup> He reported on a list for a non-electors party in 1853 which included James Greaves, the Chartist and William Swire, who was a clogger and who was included on Foster's list of radicals. He was the general secretary. Other names on the list were those of J. Nield, W. Wolstenholme and T. Livesey. John Nield was a Liberal member of the Council, William Wolstenholme was a member of the Board of Guardians and Thomas Livesey was also a councillor, but a Tory one.<sup>99</sup> It does suggest that the non-electors were lead by electors, at least in terms of organisation. One other organisation was mentioned and this was the Committee of Working Men. Grime suggests this was set up by Taylor as a way of enforcing the exclusive dealing that took place during and after the 1847 General Election. The group issued a 'Remembrancer' which was a list showing how everyone voted at the election.<sup>100</sup> This was used to help target those who had not voted for Fielden and Cobbett. It was a pressure group, not a non-electors group.

There is a lot more evidence from Rochdale of a more organised group. There is reference to a Rochdale Non-electors Association in December 1858.<sup>101</sup> There are earlier references in the Rochdale papers. In March 1857 Edward Miall addressed a meeting of non-electors which Livsey called and chaired. Apparently, this was the third meeting, as the paper mentions two former ones, of which no record survived.<sup>102</sup> In August there was a demonstration with Livsey as the chief speaker.<sup>103</sup> In April 1858, a meeting was critical of the board of guardians for not supplying them with information.<sup>104</sup> At a Parliamentary Reform meeting in May, both Sharman Crawford and Livsey spoke to the non-electors.<sup>105</sup> In February 1859, there was an attempt to arrange a meeting with the Tory M.P. Sir Alexander Ramsay, but

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<sup>98</sup> Grime, p. 181.

<sup>99</sup> Grime, p. 215.

<sup>100</sup> Oldham, OLSL, 'Remembrancer for 1847', JGF.

<sup>101</sup> *MT* 18 December 1858.

<sup>102</sup> *RO* 21 March 1857.

<sup>103</sup> *RO* 1 August 1857.

<sup>104</sup> *RO* 10 April 1858.

<sup>105</sup> *RO* 8 May 1858.

he declined, stating that he wished to listen to 'calmer and more practical views'.<sup>106</sup> In August at a dinner planned for Cobden, the non-electors complained that the price of a ticket to attend was too high,<sup>107</sup> but Cobden fixed a further meeting at the same venue the following night to allow them to put their views across.<sup>108</sup> In 1860 they sent a letter to Cobden<sup>109</sup> and in 1865 they held a meeting with the mayor to urge him to call a public meeting to demand further Parliamentary reform.<sup>110</sup> It is sad that there are no further detailed records as these groups were always present, yet appear to be ignored by both the press and leading diarists, such as Butterworth. The members were very involved in both Chartism and the debates over incorporation.

#### Anti-Corn Law League

Given the nature of this movement, and the organisation that went into its success, it is strange that it too has very few records extant at local level. One possible reason was the shortness of the campaign, lasting only seven years from 1839 till 1846, and the success itself may have seemed a reason not to preserve any full accounts. Fortunately, one of the best kept set of records was that of Halifax, and there are press reports of meetings in the other two towns to help build a much fuller picture. There was a considerable amount written about this organisation as a national movement, and the best work currently available is that of Pickering and Tyrell.<sup>111</sup> Central to the development of this body was the relationship it had with the Chartists, with the League seen as middle class and the Chartist as working class. This led to conflict at meetings and over the reasons for repeal and their impact on the working class.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> *Liverpool Mercury* 7 February 1859.

<sup>107</sup> *Morning Post* 8 August 1859.

<sup>108</sup> *Bury and Norwich Post and Suffolk Herald* 23 August 1859.

<sup>109</sup> *Liverpool Mercury* 23 January 1860.

<sup>110</sup> *MT* 4 February 1865.

<sup>111</sup> Paul A. Pickering and Alex Tyrell, *The People's Bread: A History of the Anti-Corn Law League* (London: Leicester University Press, 2000).

<sup>112</sup> See Malcolm Chase, *Chartism: A New History*, pp. 194-9.

The Halifax branch was formed in 1 February 1839, and held its first public meeting at the Old Assembly rooms on 13 February. The main instigator was Jonathon Akroyd, the textile manufacturer. The other main manufacturers were the mainstay of the League. The first meeting was not well received by the editor of the *Halifax Guardian* who complained that he was not invited.<sup>113</sup> Equally, a large number of Chartists were not invited but arrived anyway and proceeded to elect Henry Rawson, a leading Chartist in the town, as chair. Akroyd had proposed George Whiteley, the Senior Constable as chair. Akroyd was forced to close the meeting and move it to the Talbot Inn where they held a more select meeting with Whiteley as chair.<sup>114</sup> They did allow operatives in from March 1840, provided they paid an annual fee of one shilling.<sup>115</sup> In April 1840 there was a repeat of the public meeting, and the result was the same. A large group of Chartists attended and requested that a notion be put to the meeting seeking support for universal suffrage. Akroyd was in the chair and he refused. He closed the meeting.<sup>116</sup>

The League had a very mixed response from Sir Charles Wood, one of the M.P. s, as he voted against repeal in February 1842, whilst the other M.P. Edward Protheroe voted for repeal.<sup>117</sup> The League wrote to Wood but his reply putting his case was rejected.<sup>118</sup> The same scenario was played out in 1843. Wood was asked to support repeal, but his reply gave no hint of how he would vote.<sup>119</sup> In March 1843, both Richard Cobden and John Bright attended the meeting.<sup>120</sup> From then on, according to the records, the frequency of meetings declined. Whereas there were ten meetings in 1843, it declined to seven in 1844, three in 1845 and only two in 1846, the year of repeal. There are few mentions in the press in this period either. The

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<sup>113</sup> *HG* 2 February 1839.

<sup>114</sup> HACL, HAS/B: 11/1 13 February 1839.

<sup>115</sup> HACL 2 March 1840.

<sup>116</sup> HACL 27 April 1840.

<sup>117</sup> HACL 28 February 1842.

<sup>118</sup> HACL 15 March 1842.

<sup>119</sup> HACL 3 June 1843.

<sup>120</sup> HACL 12 December 1843.

League gave the middle class Liberals an opportunity to voice their views on a major issue, but it did create difficulties with the working class, who had the belief that some of this work was an attempt by the employers to lower wages.

There are no such records for Oldham and Rochdale, but there is evidence of similar activity, and a greater degree of co-operation. Butterworth in Oldham recorded opposition to the Corn Laws from weavers in the town as early as 1830, at the very start of his diaries.<sup>121</sup> Meetings to discuss Parliamentary reform were often linked to the repeal of the Corn Laws,<sup>122</sup> and Alexander Taylor chaired a meeting on the subject in July 1831.<sup>123</sup> By 1839, when the campaign began in earnest, there were more frequent meetings but no evidence of a branch of the League being formed. In January 1840, Fielden spoke against the Laws at a public meeting<sup>124</sup> and in March, over 1,000 people attended a meeting with Holladay in the chair.<sup>125</sup> In April 1841 at a lecture about the campaign, many Chartists were present and there was a dispute with Alexander Taylor supporting the League against the Chartist.<sup>126</sup> Further disputes arose in 1842. A meeting attended by all the leading radicals was disrupted and although motions were put and passed, the League supporters left and the Chartists remained.<sup>127</sup> There was only one more mention of a meeting on 15 December 1843, before Butterworth's diaries ended.<sup>128</sup> As there were no local Oldham newspapers before 1854, few other sources are available. What was clear was that the radicals were opposed to the Corn Laws and attended meetings about their repeal, and there is little evidence of middle class involvement in the way there was in Halifax. One other possibility was that the leading employers in Oldham may have been involved through Manchester, which was within reach and was the centre of the Repeal movement.

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<sup>121</sup> OBP 8 March 1830.

<sup>122</sup> OBP May 1831.

<sup>123</sup> OBP 9 July 1831.

<sup>124</sup> OBP 2 January 1840.

<sup>125</sup> OBP 9 March 1840.

<sup>126</sup> OBP 16 April 1841.

<sup>127</sup> *Manchester Courier* 9 February 1842.

<sup>128</sup> OBP 15 December 1843.

Rochdale has a similar picture, despite the fact that it was the home town of John Bright, one of the founders of the League. On 2 February 1839, Bright called a meeting to discuss the Corn Laws and proposed George Ashworth, a manufacturer, as the chair. James Taylor then proposed Job Plant from Heywood as chair and this was carried by a large majority. Bright then proposed a motion that 'it was in the interest of the working classes to assist in calling for a repeal of the Corn Laws'. Taylor then proposed an amendment to the effect that:

It is of the opinion of this meeting that though the Corn Laws is an injurious tax, yet the present House of Commons, or any other House of Commons constituted on the present suffrage will never repeal the Law and this meeting is of the opinion that the present Corn Law agitation is made up for the purpose of diverting the people from the only remedy for all political grievance: therefore it is necessary that the people must first be in possession of their political rights to affect the repealing of the Corn Laws .<sup>129</sup>

The amendment was carried by a large majority to the disgust of the meeting's organisers. On 4 June 1842, Bright called another meeting on the Corn Laws and this time, Thomas Livsey chaired it.<sup>130</sup> Livsey was in favour of the repeal, as his actions on the day the Act was passed and referred to above clearly show.<sup>131</sup>

Again as with Oldham, the radical leaders of Rochdale were prepared to support repeal of the Corn Laws, if it did not damage the workers conditions by lowering wages. Jenkins examines this and a speech Bright made in 1842,<sup>132</sup> advocating wage reduction.<sup>133</sup> Bright did not get full support. The radicals were more than ready to invite his

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<sup>129</sup> William Robertson, *The Life and Times of John Bright* (Rochdale, 1877) pp. 72-3.

<sup>130</sup> *NS* 4 June 1842.

<sup>131</sup> See p. 220.

<sup>132</sup> *MG* 23 July 1842.

<sup>133</sup> Mick Jenkins, *The General Strike of 1842* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1980) p. 58.

collaborator Richard Cobden to be their candidate and then M.P. in 1859. So powerful was the impact of his arrival that the sitting MP, Sir Alexander Ramsay, withdrew before the election.

### Chartism

There is evidence of the presence of Chartism across all three towns in many sources. Again, the overall national picture of Chartism is beyond the scope of this work and is best examined by looking at the most recent work of Malcolm Chase.<sup>134</sup> What can be found in the three towns were leaders, meetings, outside speakers and unrest, especially in 1842. Before 1839, the picture is somewhat confused by the use of different names for the meetings. There was a Radical meeting on 23 January 1838 in Halifax at which both Ben Rushton and Robert Wilkinson, two early Chartist leaders, spoke.<sup>135</sup> There was a further meeting on 4 August of that year which was addressed by Feargus O'Connor.<sup>136</sup> In February 1839, the Chartists disrupted the opening of the Anti-Corn Law League in Halifax as has already been shown.<sup>137</sup> At the time of the first petition, in June 1839, there were reports of Chartists drilling across the northwest,<sup>138</sup> and this was followed by a large meeting at Peep Green on 11 May.<sup>139</sup> O'Connor was present but unable to speak because of a weak voice. Robert Sutcliffe of Halifax was there as was James Taylor from Rochdale and James Mills from Oldham. Further reports followed in August, before the arrest of O'Connor and the Newport Rising.<sup>140</sup>

There was a similar picture in Oldham. Here there was a very clear link between the old radicalism and the new Charter in the person of John Knight. He was a friend of O'Connor's and supported him, but he died in 1838 and the movement had new leaders in the town from 1839. James Mills was elected as the delegate to the National Charter Association. More important was the candidature of Feargus O'Connor in the Oldham by-election of 1835

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<sup>134</sup> Malcolm Chase, *Chartism: A New History*.

<sup>135</sup> HG 23 January 1838.

<sup>136</sup> HG 4 August 1838.

<sup>137</sup> HG 16 February 1839.

<sup>138</sup> HG 11 May 1839.

<sup>139</sup> HG 18 May 1839.

<sup>140</sup> HG 10 August and 17 August 1839.

following the death of William Cobbett. John Fielden, the sitting M.P. wanted John Morgan Cobbett to take his father's place but the radical vote was split between Cobbett and O'Connor. He gained only thirty two votes but the winning margin for the Tory, J.F. Lees was only thirteen. O'Connor was never forgiven by Cobbett's supporters.<sup>141</sup> On 27 September 1838, there was a large meeting to prepare for the Kersall Moor meeting held on 30 September.<sup>142</sup> James Mills was in the chair, and James Holladay and James Greaves spoke. On 8 November a large outdoor meeting was held to adopt the terms of the Charter and to elect delegates.<sup>143</sup> William Fitton and Alexander Taylor spoke, and in the report, Butterworth refers to both Stephens, the radical preacher, and O'Connor as 'physical force' supporters.<sup>144</sup> This division became more evident as the year progressed. In March there was a report of 6,000 weapons in Oldham, and of drilling and references to 'big knives'.<sup>145</sup>

It is clear that there was a lot of confusion and rumour. Looking just at the magistrates, they were at odds with themselves. They decided to swear in 520 special constables on 3 May 1839.<sup>146</sup> Taylor questioned why they were needed. Travis, another special constable asked who was threatening them and the magistrate refused to tell him, threatening him with a fine. On 23 May a further 120 constables were sworn in.<sup>147</sup> A Chartist meeting was called, the magistrates refused to allow it but it still took place, with speeches from O'Connor and John

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<sup>141</sup> Winstanley, p. 631.

<sup>142</sup> OBP 27 September 1838.

<sup>143</sup> OBP 8 November 1838.

<sup>144</sup> For a more detailed account of the work of Stephens, see J. T. Ward 'Revolutionary Tory: The Life of Joseph Rayner Stephens of Ashton-under-Lyne', *Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society* 68, (1952) and Michael S. Edwards, *Purge This Realm: The Life of Joseph Raynor Stephens*, (London: Epworth, 1994). For a life of O'Connor see James Epstein, *The Lion of Freedom: Feargus O'Connor and the Chartist Movement 1832-42*, (London: Croom Helm, 1982).

<sup>145</sup> OBP 3 March 1839.

<sup>146</sup> OBP 3 May 1839.

<sup>147</sup> OBP 23 May 1839.

Fielden, the town's M.P.<sup>148</sup> One enterprising landlord took advantage of this confusion, as Butterworth reported under the heading 'A Chartist Demonstration'.<sup>149</sup>

It was rumoured a few days ago in the town and neighbourhood of Oldham that one of the weapons of the much talked of Chartists was to be seen in one of the rooms of the Black Swan, a highly frequented house in Greenacres Moor, Oldham. A number of individual Chartists and anti-Chartists hastened to see the warlike pike but on beholding the noted rarity of the witty host they were astonished to find instead of a military article, a very fine fish of the description called 'pike'.

In Rochdale James Taylor was the leader. O'Connor visited the town in 1835 and a Radical Association was formed with Taylor as president and Livsey as treasurer. Taylor was a hatter from Spotland but he went bankrupt and became an itinerant speaker and later a preacher. Before the end of 1839 he had spoken at Dewsbury, Halifax, Whitworth, Colne, Oldham, Bury and Manchester.<sup>150</sup> He supported Stephens both at his trial and after, and went to the National Convention in March 1839.<sup>151</sup> He led the town's contingent to Kersall Moor and he spoke there, using quite strong terms. 'One of the principles of which the House of Brunswick sat on the throne was the right to resist oppression, and if the House of Brunswick would not admit that principle, it had no right to the throne.'<sup>152</sup> By the time the petition was presented in June 1839, the Chartists were well established in the towns, with very little difference between them in the nature of the leaders and what they wanted.

The period between 1839 and 1842 saw the differences begin to emerge. There were splits between physical and moral force, over the 'sacred month' and over the national leadership. There was violence as well in 1842, with Halifax experiencing the worst. In January

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<sup>148</sup> OBP 27 May 1839.

<sup>149</sup> OBP 3 June 1839.

<sup>150</sup> NS 14 April, 28 July, 20 October, 27 October, 3 November, 29 December 1838 and *Operative* 20 January 1839.

<sup>151</sup> *Charter* 10 March 1839.

<sup>152</sup> *MG* 13 March 1839.

1840 there was the trial and sentencing in Monmouth of the Newport rioters.<sup>153</sup> On 16 May O'Connor was convicted and sent to prison, from where he complained about the treatment of Chartist prisoners.<sup>154</sup> Then the riots of 1842 followed bringing problems in the town. In the words of Benjamin Wilson:

The trade of the country had not been so bad for many years as it was in 1842; and more particularly in Lancashire, where a great number of factories were idle, thousands of people out of employment and in a wretched condition. In August of that year nearly all the Lancashire mills were standing in consequence of the drawing of the plugs by the operatives and it was rumoured that they were coming to Halifax to stop the mills by similar means, which greatly alarmed the authorities.<sup>155</sup>

The trouble erupted on 15 August when a large mob came towards Halifax from Bradford. The troops had been called out and the Riot Act was read. A large number of people were arrested, but the real problem only began the next day when the soldiers tried to move eleven of the men by horse carriage to Elland to be taken by train to Wakefield. They were attacked by a large mob, but managed to get the men on the train. On their way back they were attacked again and several of the soldiers were injured. Wilson mentioned that some men were killed but there are no confirming reports. The soldiers opened fire and charged and the crowd finally dispersed. Wilson was very clear as to the nature of the rioters. He said: 'Those who attacked the soldiers at Salterhebble were neither Lancashire people nor people from a distance, but principally young men from the surrounding districts; the mills had been stopped two days'.<sup>156</sup> In October O'Connor and fifty eight others were arrested and then tried at Lancaster in March 1843.<sup>157</sup> They were acquitted, much to the disgust of the editor of the

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<sup>153</sup> HG 3 January 1840

<sup>154</sup> HG 15 July 1840

<sup>155</sup> Benjamin Wilson, *The Struggles of an old Chartist*, p. 199.

<sup>156</sup> Wilson, p. 201.

<sup>157</sup> HG 11 March 1843.

*Halifax Guardian*.<sup>158</sup> It was at this trial that Richard Pilling gave his famous defence including the retort when he asked for charity: 'Oh he's a Chartist, he must have none'.<sup>159</sup>

The death of William Fitton on 15 November 1840 robbed Oldham of another veteran radical. By then other leaders were taking over. In late January 1840, a meeting was held to offer support to the three men from Newport condemned to death. 9840 signatures were collected in the first three days and two days later this had risen to 18,000.<sup>160</sup> A further meeting on 3 April was chaired by William Knott.<sup>161</sup> The Chartists began to be more involved in local institutions. On 8 March 1841, Butterworth reported that there were 'a considerable body of Chartists present' at a vestry meeting.<sup>162</sup> On 1 April, Joseph Platt objected to Henry Smethurst being on the select vestry. The magistrates, when they heard the case, agreed with Smethurst.<sup>163</sup> In July, James Dawson was fined for holding a Chartist meeting in an unlicensed room and was then imprisoned for three months when he refused to pay the fine.<sup>164</sup> On 27 November O'Connor, just released from prison came to the town and was met by a crowd of some 2000 people to welcome him back.<sup>165</sup> On 22 May 1842, Rochdale and Oldham shared a joint meeting at Shore Edge.<sup>166</sup> Following the rejection of the national petition, there was a meeting on 18 July, before the problems of the mills erupted in August.<sup>167</sup>

The trouble came from Ashton, where there had been a major Chartist meeting on Sunday 7 August, and from where a large crowd marched the next morning, part of it to Hyde, the other part to Oldham. They pulled the plugs in every mill and, except for one, they met no resistance. Oldham Chartist leaders had for some time advocated a peaceful response and had

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<sup>158</sup> *HG* 3 June 1843.

<sup>159</sup> Chase, *Chartism: A New History*, pp 229-235.

<sup>160</sup> OBP 30 January 1840.

<sup>161</sup> OBP 20 April 1840.

<sup>162</sup> OBP 8 March 1841.

<sup>163</sup> OBP 1 April 1841.

<sup>164</sup> OBP 8 July 1841.

<sup>165</sup> OBP 27 November 1841.

<sup>166</sup> OBP 22 May 1842.

<sup>167</sup> OBP 18 July 1842.

even become special constables to keep the peace at meetings. Samuel Yardley was arrested whilst acting as a constable. Alone amongst Lancashire towns they had rejected the national holiday. James Greaves was sacked as has been shown for supporting the campaign against the Corn Laws.<sup>168</sup> The unrest went on for several days and the rioters from Ashton moved on to Rochdale.<sup>169</sup> By the end of August all seemed to be quiet.<sup>170</sup>

Events in Rochdale had moved on from 1839. The Chartists had their own music band.<sup>171</sup> Taylor remained as the delegate to the National Convention, but in the town it was increasingly Livsey who was in charge. In 1841, after the resignation of John Fenton as M.P. and the liberal group deciding to ask Milner Gibson to be their candidate, Livsey, backed by Taylor, invited William Sharman Crawford to be the candidate and he was selected. At the election on 1 July 1841, Crawford was chosen as the town's M.P. Crawford supported the Chartists and in his turn he was supported by them.<sup>172</sup> When the economy worsened at the start of 1842, the magistrates prepared for trouble. This has already been examined in Chapter Four. On 11 August, the rioters came from the direction of Royton, assisted by some from Ashton. There was an attempt to hold them and divert them past the town, but this failed and many Rochdale workers joined the crowd the next day as it moved on to Whitworth, Padiham and Todmorden. Livsey was back at the centre of trouble on 18 August as the mill owners attempted to re-open the mills. Another group of workers came from Oldham and in the confrontation that followed Chadwick was injured and rescued by Livsey.<sup>173</sup> Chadwick warned Livsey to leave the town as there was talk of getting a warrant for his arrest as the Chartist

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<sup>168</sup> Winstanley, 'Oldham Radicalism', p. 635.

<sup>169</sup> OBP 12 August 1842.

<sup>170</sup> OBP 31 August 1842.

<sup>171</sup> NS 27 November 1841.

<sup>172</sup> Chase, *Chartism: A New History*, p. 181.

<sup>173</sup> Cole, *Conflict and Cooperation*, p. 33.

leader. Livsey at first refused to go but was finally persuaded to go by his fiancée, Sarah Lord. He was back by October however, to marry Miss Lord in St. Chad's church.<sup>174</sup>

The three towns took different routes between 1842 and 1848, but what was clear was that they all moved away from any involvement in physical force. The experiences of August 1842 were reflected in the choices that were made in the following years. In Halifax, there was still very little involvement in the municipal institutions, perhaps best summed up by Ben Wilson:

The first vestry meeting I attended would be about the year 1843; I was the only working man present – working men scarcely ever attending those meetings then; there being about twelve gentlemen present, comprised several of the largest ratepayers in the township. I felt uncomfortable, and wished I was nicely out. Mr. Robert Wainhouse was chairman, and when he put a motion to the meeting he looked on to the table and said – 'Carried unanimously, I suppose'.<sup>175</sup>

He moved on to the election of 1847. Here there was Chartist interest in the shape of Ernest Jones, a former barrister,<sup>176</sup> who had become a Chartist in 1845. He was joined by Edward Miall, a non-conformist minister and radical politician who was later to be the MP for Rochdale. There was a meeting for Miall on 26 June 1847 and the editor of the *Halifax Guardian* lamented that there were no local men standing for the town. The non-electors met and fully supported Miall and Jones. Things changed very rapidly with first of all the withdrawal of one candidate, the Liberal, Edward Protheroe. The *Halifax Reformer* argued that his withdrawal was to allow a Tory-Whig alliance to stop Miall. The Tories wanted a seat so Protheroe went into 'sorrowful and sulky retirement'.<sup>177</sup> Then, at a meeting, Jonathon Akroyd

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<sup>174</sup> Robertson, *Social and Political History*, pp. 22-24.

<sup>175</sup> Wilson, *Struggles of an Old Chartist*, p. 203.

<sup>176</sup> For more details, see Miles Taylor, *Ernest Jones, Chartism and the Romance of Politics 1819-1869* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>177</sup> *Halifax Reformer* 18 August 1847.

died. He was the leading supporter of the Liberals. The result of the election showed that Miall and Jones did well given the longstanding support for Wood within the town. Miall got 351 votes and Jones got 280. Wood got 507 votes but the clear winner was Edwards, the Conservative with 511 votes.<sup>178</sup>

The process of incorporation was underway,<sup>179</sup> and by 1848, the plans for another Chartist petition were producing a lot of meetings.<sup>180</sup> The nature of the first municipal elections will be examined in the next chapter. In May, the Charter was again rejected by Parliament. In June, Jones was arrested for making seditious speeches. He was sentenced to two years in solitary confinement.<sup>181</sup> There was still some talk of arming as Wilson showed.<sup>182</sup> He bought a gun but never used it. Jones's release was celebrated in style.<sup>183</sup> Wilson was at pains to point out that they had to remember that he was weak from his time in prison, but 'as clever as ever'.<sup>184</sup> He increasingly became the leader of the Chartists as O'Connor slipped into insanity in 1852, and died in August 1855. Jones stood again in the election of 1852 but only got thirty seven votes. Edwards was removed and replaced by Frank Crossley, a Liberal. The last major event after 1848 was the funeral of Benjamin Rushton, the leading Chartist in the town, who died on 19 June 1853. Wilson accepted a figure of between 6,000 and 10,000 at his funeral and the coffin was carried by six veteran Chartists.<sup>185</sup> The last meeting of the Convention was held in 1858 and the only other event was a dinner, held on 7 July 1885, when

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<sup>178</sup> See Kate Tiller, 'Late Chartism: Halifax 1847-58' in *The Chartist Experience: studies in working class radicalism and culture 1830-60* ed. by J Epstein and D Thompson (London: Macmillan, 1982) 311-344, p. 315.

<sup>179</sup> Care needs to be taken with the press reports in this year in Halifax as there were a lot of meetings headed 'Charter' that are to do with incorporation and not the Chartist movement.

<sup>180</sup> *HG* 8 April, 15 April, 22 April and 29 April.

<sup>181</sup> *HG* 15 July 1848.

<sup>182</sup> Wilson, p. 209.

<sup>183</sup> *HG* 20 July 1850.

<sup>184</sup> Wilson, p. 213.

<sup>185</sup> Wilson, p. 220.

twenty two veteran Chartists met and gave a vote of thanks to Gladstone for the reforms he had made.<sup>186</sup>

Tiller in her work sets out the legacy of the Chartists in Halifax and quotes the letter of October from John Snowden in reply to an appeal for funds by Ernest Jones: 'I am sorry to inform you that there is no Chartist organisation in Halifax nor in any of the numerous villages surrounding it'.<sup>187</sup> Tiller identifies Halifax's place in the history of the movement and examines the involvement in the major events and themes of the movement at national level. She shows the major part they played in elections and petitions. What there is not, is any evidence of involvement in local institutions and municipal government. She states: 'Yet the fact remained that political participation was still largely by proxy, indirectly exercised through men like Crossley or Jones' shopkeeper supporters in 1847'.<sup>188</sup> Unlike the other two towns, they were not part of the development of the town, but seemed to have developed in parallel, showing great commitment and involvement but rarely crossing over into the running of the town.

In Oldham, O'Connor still played a major role after 1842.<sup>189</sup> Holladay appeared as a defence witness and gave a character reference for O'Connor at his trial.<sup>190</sup> Holladay and Ainsworth accompanied O'Connor when he came to lay the foundation stone of the Working Men's Hall in March 1844,<sup>191</sup> and again when he came to open it the following year.<sup>192</sup> It closed within weeks and reopened as a music hall.<sup>193</sup> Backed by men such as Quarmby and Haslop, there were moral force Chartists, supporting Temperance work and self improvement. As Winstanley says 'they eschewed violence as a means of achieving their aims'.<sup>194</sup> Men such as

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<sup>186</sup> Wilson, p. 241.

<sup>187</sup> Tiller, p. 335.

<sup>188</sup> Tiller, p. 317.

<sup>189</sup> There is a slight problem with local sources as Butterworth ended his work in 1844, and there were no local papers before 1854.

<sup>190</sup> *NS* 24 December 1842.

<sup>191</sup> *NS* 13 March 1844.

<sup>192</sup> *NS* 29 March 1845.

<sup>193</sup> A. Marcroft, ed., *Landmarks of local Liberalism* (Oldham, 1913), p. 101.

<sup>194</sup> Winstanley, 'Oldham Radicalism', p. 635.

Henry Smethurst and John Crowther were active in the town but only as Chartist lecturers and not involved in any other local work such as the Board of Guardians or the Police Committee. They did not represent the main stream of local Chartism.<sup>195</sup>

Just as in Halifax, the period 1847-48 was a major watershed in the development of the town. Incorporation came with the Parliamentary election which has already been studied, as well as the imposition of a Board of Guardians. The radicals split and Chartism suffered. Holladay and Taylor were both dead by the end of 1853, but both had reduced their contacts with the Chartists. Holladay had already been instrumental in forming the Oldham Reform League, dedicated to the pursuit of electoral reform, cheap government and the expansion of civil and religious liberties.<sup>196</sup> Taylor had become identified with the Tories. Only Knott remained proudly Chartist. He was unsuccessful in the Council elections of 1847 but was elected in 1857 and despite a constant running battle with the *Oldham Standard*,<sup>197</sup> including attacks on how he spoke. Knott went on to be mayor in 1865.<sup>198</sup> There were still Chartist meetings as late as November 1858, but they were the last signs of the movement in the town.<sup>199</sup>

Rochdale was different, partly because there was a radical M.P. in place until April 1857, first of all Sharman Crawford and then Edward Miall. Equally there were no municipal elections till 1856, Rochdale having rejected the idea of incorporation on 22 May 1847.<sup>200</sup> Taylor was still active but less so after 1842, but Livsey was more active. He did not believe in physical force as his efforts to prevent riots in 1842 showed. He stated quite clearly at a major meeting in April 1848 that 'I have not come here to recommend physical force'.<sup>201</sup> Later he commented that the split in the movement between O'Connor and his opponents saddened

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<sup>195</sup> Winstanley, p. 638.

<sup>196</sup> Winstanley, p. 641.

<sup>197</sup> *Oldham Standard*, 22 September 1860.

<sup>198</sup> *Oldham Standard*, 13 October 1860.

<sup>199</sup> *OC* 13 November 1858.

<sup>200</sup> *HG* 22 May 1847.

<sup>201</sup> *Manchester Times and Gazette* 8 August 1848.

him as he was a friend of both.<sup>202</sup> He had his opponents. The *Pilot* attacked both his grammar and his style of speech,<sup>203</sup> and the assistant Inspector of the Poor Law Commissioners, Mr. Mainwaring, felt it important to inform the Commission when Livsey travelled to London as part of a delegation to the Commission that 'Mr. Livsey is the leader of the Chartists at Rochdale'.<sup>204</sup> That is all the letter says.

The Chartists continued to meet. Livsey was in the chair at a meeting where Jones and Gammage spoke in June 1853.<sup>205</sup> He was also the last chair of the National Convention when it met in February 1858. He was supported by the *Observer*<sup>206</sup> but attacked by the *Pilot*.<sup>207</sup> In a speech he gave just before he died, he spoke of being a Chartist, of being proud of that and of making no excuses for it. By then he had been involved in the improvement commission, the board of guardians and the Council where he was one of the first Aldermen of the town. The views of the *Pilot* were not shared by the majority of the town. The paper even managed to describe John Bright as a Chartist.<sup>208</sup> Livsey's place and reputation in the town was shown by his funeral.

### Conclusion

Chartism was a force in all three towns. In Oldham and Rochdale this was allied to the other organisations for reform and the leaders were involved in many areas. Halifax however, whilst having a strong and active Chartist presence, did not seem to transfer that impetus into other areas of the town. Once again the settled and stable nature of the people running the other institutions may have been a factor in dissuading Chartists from becoming involved, as Wilson's account has shown. In general, the radical forces worked very much for the good of the towns and especially for the people who had no vote and who needed the support of the

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<sup>202</sup> *Rochdale Banner* 13 October 1855.

<sup>203</sup> *RP* 18 April 1863.

<sup>204</sup> *TNA*, MH 12 6180 7 October 1858.

<sup>205</sup> *MG* 25 June 1853.

<sup>206</sup> *RO* 13 February 1858.

<sup>207</sup> *RP* 20 February 1858.

<sup>208</sup> *RO* 11 May 1861.

Commissioners, the Guardians or the Council. There is little evidence that they were extreme. All tried very hard to avoid violence and to keep to constitutional methods. They believed in, and accepted, the rules of a meeting, the need for proper motions and the rule of the chair. These were what all bodies did and the bodies of the three towns were no different. Ultimately, this reached its peak in the work of the councils, the major body that represented the whole town.

## Chapter Eight

## Municipal Corporations

Corporations have a long history in the development of English local government. By the time of the 1832 Reform Act there were nearly 250 municipal corporations. The Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 was introduced to reform the running of municipal boroughs. The issue was raised as a result of the terms of the 1832 Act which had thrown into light the problems of the old boroughs.<sup>1</sup> It also allowed towns and cities to apply to be incorporated and to have a council with local powers. It was permissive; it was up to the town to apply for a Charter and to carry out the process of incorporation with all its attendant costs. The vast majority of towns that chose to do so already had Improvement Commissioners, and it was usually from that body that the process would be started, though public meetings could put pressure on the Commission to start to apply for Incorporation. That was the case with all three towns under study. In Halifax twenty seven of the original forty one men elected had served on the Trustees. In Oldham twenty six of the thirty people elected had served on the Police Commission, and in Rochdale twenty four of the thirty elected served on the Improvement Commission.

It is equally true that all three towns started the process, not to improve the running of the town, but to avoid further interference in their affairs. The two major factors involved were the imposition of more central control and the continued presence of the rural police with the attendant high costs. All three towns began to look at this possibility when Morpeth's Health Bill, with its element of central control, was being discussed in 1846. Another key factor was that the main architect of this bill was Edwin Chadwick, and almost all of the various Improvement Commissioners had seen the extent of his work in the Poor Law Boards and did not want a repetition in any other area of local life. Only two, Halifax and Oldham went on to

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter Two, p. 27, fn. 2.

apply for a Charter in 1847, Rochdale rejecting the idea and only applying nine years later in 1856. Rochdale's rejection was on the grounds that the new Corporation would be elected on the voting system of the Police Commission and would cost a lot.<sup>2</sup> They all had issues over the number of wards and all of them were subject to change within the first twenty years of their existence. Nevertheless they survived and prospered as the main body of the town till reorganisation in 1974.

Halifax, as with other bodies, was the first to start the process. The Trustees were concerned about the impact of the proposed public health reforms and wanted to keep control within the town. Dalby suggests that the fact that both Wakefield and Huddersfield were also in the process of application for a Charter and Bradford had just got theirs may have spurred the Trustees on. It was somewhat ironic that Morpeth's Bill was eventually dropped. As with Oldham the process was carried out in the midst of Parliamentary elections, which in both towns were far from straightforward.<sup>3</sup>

The Trustees did not meet between 6 January and 23 April in 1847 and by then other groups had taken the initiative.<sup>4</sup> On 17 and 24 April the *Halifax Guardian* had two editorials on the subject of Incorporation, which aroused considerable interest.<sup>5</sup> On 1 May, a special meeting of the Trustees took place with 103 members present. Both Akroyd and Michael Stocks spoke in favour of applying for incorporation.<sup>6</sup> A public meeting was held on 7 May, when Appleyard took the chair.<sup>7</sup> By 15 May, a canvass of opinion was under way, and there were no objections.<sup>8</sup> By 19 June, the Government Inspector, Captain Warburton had given notice of his hearings.<sup>9</sup> Matters were delayed awhile during the general election, and it was 21

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<sup>2</sup> *MG* 10 April 1847 and *RPICM* 5 May 1847.

<sup>3</sup> *HG* 31 July 1847.

<sup>4</sup> *HTM* 6 January and 28 April 1847. See also Chapters Three and Seven.

<sup>5</sup> *HG* 17 April and 24 April 1847.

<sup>6</sup> *HTM* 1 May 1847.

<sup>7</sup> *HG* 7 May 1847.

<sup>8</sup> *HG* 15 May 1847.

<sup>9</sup> *HG* 19 June 1847.

August before he started his inquiry.<sup>10</sup> He was finished by 28 August. His conclusions were that there should be six wards, the four that already existed within the Parliamentary borough, with the remainder of Northowram to be added to form a new ward and Southowram as well. Thirty councillors were to be elected, six each for the four original wards and three each for the two new wards created. There were to be ten aldermen and a mayor to be chosen by the newly elected Council.<sup>11</sup>

The Charter was applied for but its arrival was slightly delayed. It finally arrived on 18 December.<sup>12</sup> The elections were held at the start of May and the results were published on 6 May 1848.<sup>13</sup> There are several points to be made about the results of these elections and the subsequent elections of aldermen and the mayor. The council elections were reported in the local press and a copy of the *Halifax Reformer* held in the Reference Library has additional description written in pencil in the margin.<sup>14</sup> This recorded the names of the elected councillors and next to them their supposed party affiliation. Edward and Henry Akroyd were defeated as was their uncle George Beaumont. It shows seventeen radicals, four Chartists, six Whigs and three Tories. Dalby describes this as a council dominated by Radicals.<sup>15</sup> Wilson described it as a victory for the friends of Jones and Miall.<sup>16</sup> Close examination reveals this to be an exaggerated claim. Eric Webster cast doubt on the Chartists in the list and records that the four of them only attended one meeting.<sup>17</sup> This happened quite a lot. Many people went to the meetings who would never have described themselves as Chartists. John Morgan Cobbett, for example, went to a Chartist meeting in Oldham but could never be described as a

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<sup>10</sup> HG 21 August 1847.

<sup>11</sup> HG 28 August 1847.

<sup>12</sup> HG 18 December 1847.

<sup>13</sup> HG 6 May 1848.

<sup>14</sup> *Halifax Reformer* 10 May 1848.

<sup>15</sup> G. R. Dalby, 'The Chartist Movement in Halifax and District', *THAS* 1956, 93-111 p. 106.

<sup>16</sup> Wilson, *Struggles of an Old Chartist*, p. 208.

<sup>17</sup> Webster, 'Chartism in the Calder Valley', p. 58.

Chartist.<sup>18</sup> Webster does describe the list: 'it was only in pencil, in the surviving copy in the archives, and as such it could be the anonymous scribe's opinion.' He then adds that, taken with the accompanying text from Henry Martin (the editor), it seems likely that they are correct.<sup>19</sup>

A different view is given in the same editorial. Martin examined the new Council in terms of its religion, and saw it as a triumph for the non-conformists.

Only three or four were churchmen, there were three members of the Society of Friends, three Baptists, nine or ten Independents, one Wesleyan, four or five of the Methodist New Connexion and altogether at least five-sixths of the body are non-conformist.<sup>20</sup>

It is the term 'radical' that causes the biggest problem. Seventeen are listed, but five of them had been members of the Board of Guardians and they were split as to membership of the Trustees. Neither of these bodies had shown a great deal of radical persuasion during their existence. Four are listed as 'gentlemen', a group not normally seen as radical. Overall the description of someone as a radical needs much tighter definition and evidence than is shown here. There are two possible refinements that would help to clarify the point. The first is to use the definition given by Williams in Chapter Seven, and look at these men as 'radical reformers' within the context of the leading members of the town.<sup>21</sup> The second is to see them as religious reformers in the context of the religion of the time. In this way the title 'radical' is more tightly defined and fitted more closely to the situation in May 1848. The three Tories were all in one ward, Market ward, which also had two Whig councillors and David Binns (described as a Chartist). Again the description does not seem to fit the nature of the ward.

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<sup>18</sup> Arthur Marcroft, *Landmarks of Local Liberalism: Oldham Liberal Bazaar Souvenir* (Oldham: Wildgoose, 1913), 18 November 1838.

<sup>19</sup> Eric Webster, 'Cradled in Strife: The Incorporation of the Borough of Halifax, 1848' *THAS* (1999) NS Vol.7, p.109.

<sup>20</sup> *Halifax Reformer* 10 May 1848.

<sup>21</sup> Chapter Seven, p. 207.

This is not to say that none of them were radical, but there is a serious lack of evidence of radical activity either in the groups they belonged to before the Council came into existence or on the Council itself when it began to work.

The Council had a very confused and complicated start in contrast to the way the Trustees had operated. There were problems, when Joseph Thorp, who had been elected as a councillor in Trinity Ward, refused to serve. He was fined but had to be replaced.<sup>22</sup> This explains why there were thirty one elected councillors. When the members came to decide on a mayor, the first choice was Michael Stocks, but at the next meeting he declined the offer and was replaced by John Baldwin.<sup>23</sup> Robert Hartley was elected as an Alderman, but he too declined and was replaced by William Thompson.<sup>24</sup> Given that there were ten people elected as Aldermen who all had to be replaced as councillors, there was a lot of electoral activity. One of the councillors elected in this phase, John Ingham, failed to take the required oath at his first meeting and had to be sworn in at the start of the next meeting.<sup>25</sup>

The other item of interest at the start of the Council was the issue of the seal. For some time the Trustees had been using a seal to affix to all major documents as a sign of the Trustees approval. The seal showed the head of John the Baptist, the patron saint of the parish, to whom its church was dedicated. One was needed for the Council as well. The Council commissioned a local artist to draw up sketches of possible seals. One of these was then sent to the College of Arms in London. The outcome was given in detail in a report from the seal committee written by Alderman Daniel Ramsden, chair of the committee.<sup>26</sup> The design, showing the head of John the Baptist surrounded by armorial bearings, was rejected. Ramsden put this down to the College being annoyed that they had not been consulted and that one of

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<sup>22</sup> HBCM 31 May 1848.

<sup>23</sup> HBCM 9 June 1848.

<sup>24</sup> HBCM 9 June 1848.

<sup>25</sup> HBCM 9 November 1848.

<sup>26</sup> HBCM 13 September 1848.

their artists had not been used. The College sent a proposed drawing of their own. They had rejected the head of John the Baptist on the grounds that there should be no religious symbols on the seal, but then put a drawing of the god Mercury on their proposal. Ramsden pointed out that he was the God of thieves and robbers, asking what the College was trying to say about Halifax. They had also included a drawing of a bale of wool and little else. Again Ramsden complained that they were saying that wool was all there was to Halifax, to the exclusion of all the other trades that were undertaken. He advised complete rejection of the College's suggestions. This was accepted by the Council, the armorial bearings were removed from the original proposal and the head of St. John remained as the seal for many years till a new seal was given approval. Ramsden's report illustrates two points. The first is the immense pride that the men running local affairs had in their town and its organisations. The seal was the corporate sign of the Council and thus of the town. The second reason is that it shows once again the refusal of local people to be dictated to by a central authority, in this case the College of Arms.

There were further technical problems concerning the transfer of control from the Trustees to the Council. Their boundaries were not identical. The Trustees had power under the 1823 Act over the old township. Power was transferred from the Trustees to the Council. This gave the Council its power, but the transfer only applied to the area under the Trustees' control. The new Council included parts of Northowram and all of Southowram, which could not simply be added as part of the powers of the Trustees as set up by the 1823 Act. The first part of the transfer was carried out fairly swiftly, when the Trustees passed a Deed Poll on 18 October 1848, which was ratified at the final meeting of the Trustees on 1 January 1849. This gave the Council power over the old township. To have gained the power over the outer townships would have meant another Improvement Act which would have been costly and slow. The solution was to use the Public Health Act of 1848 which allowed the setting up of a local Board of Health. Halifax Council applied to be a Board and so acquired power over the

other parts of the Borough. This process brought William Ranger to the town to investigate and it was as a result of his reports that permission was given.<sup>27</sup> Finally in November 1852, steps were taken to obtain a new Improvement Act which would apply to the whole Borough<sup>28</sup> and this was granted and became law on 4 August 1853.<sup>29</sup>

Apart from the issues of water, gas and health that run through any council at this time, the other major issue was that of a Town Hall. The development of new improved civic buildings was a common feature of many of the new councils. The building was another expression of civic pride and importance. The Improvement Act of 1853 allowed the Council to borrow up to £15,000 to build such offices. The sighting, cost and design of these civic buildings was of immense importance to the Council. By 1855, Halifax was ready to discuss this new venture,<sup>30</sup> but the first discussions did not go well, and they decided to put any developments back a year.<sup>31</sup> It did not reappear till 1857.<sup>32</sup> Three architects were asked to design plans<sup>33</sup> and Sir Charles Barry was asked to judge their plans.<sup>34</sup> He did not like any of them so he was asked to design his own, and this was the model used. He died in 1860 but his son Edward completed the work and it was opened in August 1863 by the Prince and Princess of Wales.<sup>35</sup>

The other major change came with a new structure for the wards in 1865.<sup>36</sup> The old structure of six wards was replaced by ten wards to make the representation more even across the borough. The new Council was elected for these wards in November 1865.<sup>37</sup> Instead of six councillors for some wards all wards had three with the number of Aldermen unchanged. By

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<sup>27</sup> See Chapter Five.

<sup>28</sup> HBCM 19 October 1852.

<sup>29</sup> *Halifax Courier* 6 August 1853.

<sup>30</sup> HBCM 31 October 1855.

<sup>31</sup> HBCM 14 January 1856.

<sup>32</sup> HBCM 4 August 1857.

<sup>33</sup> *HG* 7 August 1858.

<sup>34</sup> *HG* 4 June 1859.

<sup>35</sup> *HG* 8 August 1863.

<sup>36</sup> *HG* 7 January 1865.

<sup>37</sup> HBCM 7 November 1865.

then many of the original members had either retired or died.<sup>38</sup> The most prominent of the remainder were either aldermen or given the most prestigious role of mayor. Daniel Ramsden attended 146 meetings and was mayor in 1861. Robert Brook attended 142 meetings along with Thomas Collinson (112) and Samuel Dennis (136). John Crossley (133) was both mayor and alderman from 1849, and Thomas Walsh (105) was an alderman from 1853 and mayor in 1858. All these men can be found to have worked either on the Trustees or the board of guardians. These were the men who took Halifax forward after the Reform Act of 1867.

For Oldham, the lack of sources once again provides a problem. Butterworth ended in 1844 and there are no local papers before 1854. There are some reports in the *Halifax Guardian*, but it is mainly the Manchester papers and the minute books that have the details. Grimes simply recorded that incorporation happened but gave no details.<sup>39</sup> Bateson, writing in 1936, records that there was a very early consideration given to incorporation in 1833.<sup>40</sup> Two Government commissioners came to the town and proposed four wards, Oldham above Town, Oldham below Town, St. James and Greenacres. On 12 February 1834, there was a public meeting on the issue held at Domingo Street. Both William Knott and Thomas Swire spoke against the proposal and the meeting decided to drop the idea, arguing that the town was well run and that the expense would be too high.<sup>41</sup> There was a further examination in 1839 when the magistrates decided to implement the Police Act.<sup>42</sup> Twenty one constables were to be charged to the rates. In December, there was a further public meeting to look at the police and the idea of incorporation. Again the idea was dropped because of the cost.<sup>43</sup>

The next major discussion did not take place until after the very divisive general election of 1847. In July, at a meeting of the Police Commission, Holladay, Knott and Quarmby

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<sup>38</sup> All these figures are taken from HBCM.

<sup>39</sup> Grime, *Memory Sketches*, p. 86.

<sup>40</sup> H. Bateson, *Newspaper Cuttings 1936-1938*(Oldham: Oldham Chronicle, 1939) OLSL F53. 1833.

<sup>41</sup> *Preston Chronicle* 22 February 1834.

<sup>42</sup> Bateson, 12 February 1839.

<sup>43</sup> *Manchester Times and Gazette* 4 January 1840.

expressed great anger that a memorandum from the Commission complaining about increases in the cost of the County Police had not been presented to the magistrates. The issue of incorporation was discussed as part of the meeting.<sup>44</sup> In August there was a very long public meeting on the question of incorporation. Holladay was in favour of moving for a council because of the issue of the county police. Taylor was opposed because of the cost of getting a Charter. John Platt walked out of the meeting in disgust, at the inability of the two sides to reach agreement. He was in favour of seeking incorporation.<sup>45</sup> This was one of the first occasions that John Platt had a public presence in the town.<sup>46</sup> Platts' firm was growing in size and it became a major international engineering force, as even John Foster conceded.<sup>47</sup> The meeting ended in favour of seeking incorporation.

At this point John Morgan Cobbett attacked Holladay, not only for his views on incorporation, but also for his views on the two new MPs, at a meeting to discuss the Ten Hour Act proposals. He also attacked the views of Knott and Quarmby.<sup>48</sup> This was a precursor to more attacks as part of the municipal election campaign that followed the next year. In December 1848 the Police Commission had a major meeting on incorporation which 154 Commissioners attended, some in an attempt to prevent the move towards a Charter. These included Knott and Taylor on cost grounds. Platt, Holladay and Quarmby were against stopping the process already begun and they won the vote on the day, with fifty three against incorporation but one hundred in favour.<sup>49</sup> The Commissioners came from London and at a public meeting on 12 February 1849 the vote was three to one in favour of getting a Charter.<sup>50</sup> The petition was presented to Parliament that month and was granted on 13 June 1849 and

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<sup>44</sup> *Manchester Times and Gazette* 8 July 1848.

<sup>45</sup> *Manchester Times and Gazette* 5 August 1847.

<sup>46</sup> OC 12 September 1857. James was elected to Parliament for the town in April 1857 as a Liberal but died tragically in September of the same year.

<sup>47</sup> John Foster, 'Revolutionaries in Oldham' *Marxism Today* November (1968) 335-43 p. 343.

<sup>48</sup> *Manchester Times and Gazette* 2 September 1848.

<sup>49</sup> OPICM 13 December 1847.

<sup>50</sup> *HG* 24 March 1849.

the elections were held on 2 August. There were to be eight wards with three councillors and one alderman for each ward.<sup>51</sup>

The election that followed was a disaster for the radicals. Already split as a result of the general election of 1847, they won only one third of the seats. Holladay, Knott and Taylor all stood and all were defeated. Holladay was bottom of the poll in the Westwood ward and had to defend himself against the charge that his actions in both elections had led to the defeat of Fielden and Cobbett and of the radical group in 1849.<sup>52</sup> Holladay's reply was that Fielden's 'dictation' was the cause and that Fielden and Cobbett brought it on themselves. Of the three, only Knott was elected to play any part in the future work of the council. Holladay began to involve himself far more in his Methodist ministry.<sup>53</sup>

The Tories swept to power. The result was not only an indication of the cracks in the radical camp, but also of the growing strength of the Tory side. They had won a seat in Parliament in 1847, and they had increased strength on the magistrates' bench. Four leading Tory men had been made magistrates during Peel's Government, J. F. Lees in 1842 and Nathaniel Worthington, William Jones and Andrew Schofield, all in 1846.<sup>54</sup> This helped the Tories to gain sixteen seats on the new Council to the Liberals eight. At this point it is worth looking in more detail at the people who were involved in the new Council. In the absence of any leading radicals, James Platt became the leader of the Liberal group.<sup>55</sup> Holladay did attempt to gain a Council seat when the next elections were held in 1850, but he was defeated by James Wild.<sup>56</sup> With this majority, the Tories were able to select all the aldermen and all were Tories except one. He was Alexander Taylor who was made an alderman by the Tories, thus creating a greater gap between him and his supporters and the main body of radical

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<sup>51</sup> Grime, *Memory Sketches*, pp. 86-91.

<sup>52</sup> *Manchester Times* 1 December 1849.

<sup>53</sup> *Huddersfield Chronicle and West Yorkshire Advertiser* 28 February 1852.

<sup>54</sup> OPICM 13 December 1848.

<sup>55</sup> *Manchester Times* 1 December 1849.

<sup>56</sup> *Manchester Times* 26 October 1850.

townspeople. Of the other seven chosen men, Elkanah Moss and James Collinge had already been elected. They were then replaced as councillors by Edward Wright and Asa Lees. Two others, William Skelhorn and Richard Shiers had been defeated at the election. The other three were Joseph Jones Junior, James Lees and Richard Redfearn.<sup>57</sup> Oldham went outside the council to appoint Aldermen, the only one to be run by Tories and the only one of the three councils to do so.

William Jones was elected as mayor by the Council, and was re-elected for the following year.<sup>58</sup> For the next four years the mayor was a Tory. Jones was succeeded by James Collinge and then James Lees. Both served for two years each. The first Liberal mayor was John Platt, younger brother of James. Later, he was made mayor again in 1861 before being elected as one of the town's MPs in August 1862. Josiah Radcliffe was the next mayor. He was a Tory and served for two years as well as another year in 1864. The other mayors in this period, George Barlow, Abraham Leach and John Riley were all Liberal. The exception was William Knott, elected as Mayor in 1865 for just one year. (By then the practice of having the same mayor for two years had been dropped.) Knott had battled hard to get to that position. He had been elected to the Council only in 1857, in the face of a strong campaign against him waged by the editors of the *Oldham Chronicle* and the *Oldham Standard* over his position as a Chartist.<sup>59</sup> At the end of his three year term of office Knott was defeated after the papers' campaign was started again.<sup>60</sup> The attack by the *Standard* was particularly vicious. In September 1860, the paper described him as 'Dictator Knott'<sup>61</sup> and the editor followed this by deriding his manner of speech, describing it as 'a mish-mash' of the English language.<sup>62</sup> Knott came back again in 1863 when he defeated Hamilton, despite further attacks from the

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<sup>57</sup> Arthur Marcroft, *Landmarks in Local Liberalism: Oldham Liberal Bazaar* (Oldham: Wildgoose, 1913), p. 75.

<sup>58</sup> OBCM, 1849-67. All this information is taken from the minutes.

<sup>59</sup> OC 24 October 1857.

<sup>60</sup> OC 13 November 1859, 18 August 1860 and OS 22 September 1860.

<sup>61</sup> OS 22 September 1860.

<sup>62</sup> OS 13 October and 3 November 1860.

*Standard*, who supported his opponent.<sup>63</sup> After the Council elections of 1864, there was a contest for the position of mayor, the first time this had happened in Oldham. The two candidates were William Knott and Josiah Radcliffe. Radcliffe won, but there was considerable support for Knott. The *Standard* attacked Platt during the General Election of 1865<sup>64</sup> and then went on to predict that Knott would be made mayor as a reward from Platt for Knott's help during the election.<sup>65</sup> The events of the council in 1864 would seem to dispute this interpretation. He was finally chosen, first as an alderman in November 1865, and then as mayor at the same time.

After the 1849 election, the Police Commission decided to hand power over to the Council. Since the two areas, those of the commission and the municipal borough, were the same, there were few problems. A proposal was made on 5 September 1849 and on 4 October the transfer was approved.<sup>66</sup> The final meeting of the commission was held on 6 February 1850 with twenty one members present and all power and control of the finances passed to the Council.<sup>67</sup> In August 1850 the new Council produced the by-laws and the relevant committees were set up. From then on there was very little that upset the running of the Council or caused great discussion in the town. The *Oldham Chronicle* commented in October 1855:

There is nothing connected with the coming Municipal elections calling for particular remark. The town bestirs itself very little on the subject – a clear indication we would naturally think that the labours of the corporation have been amply appreciated by their constituents.<sup>68</sup>

After the events of 1849, there were two trends that became clear within the Council. The first was in the choice of aldermen. With two exceptions the men chosen to hold this

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<sup>63</sup> OS 10 October 1863.

<sup>64</sup> OS 15 July 1865.

<sup>65</sup> OS 16 August 1865.

<sup>66</sup> OPICM 5 September and 4 October 1849.

<sup>67</sup> OPICM 6 February 1850.

<sup>68</sup> OC 27 October 1855.

office after 1850 came from within the Council. The two exceptions were Nathaniel Worthington, a Tory magistrate and Francis Little, another leading Tory. Worthington was appointed in 1850 after the resignation of Joseph Jones Junior, one of the original aldermen. Jones attended just seven meetings before his departure.<sup>69</sup> Worthington served for seven years, attending fifty eight meetings in that time. Little was far less effective. He was chosen in 1854, following the deaths of both William Skelhorn and Alexander Taylor in 1853.<sup>70</sup> He attended just twelve meetings in two years and then resigned.

The other feature was the increasing involvement shown by the councillors over the years. Apart from the initial six meetings of 1849, when an average of twenty four members attended, the next nine years showed an average of less than twenty meetings being attended by the members.<sup>71</sup> After that the average rose to twenty four and even twenty five members in attendance. Strangely, the highest years were those when the distress of the cotton famine was at its peak, yet there is hardly any evidence of this issue being discussed in the council minutes. The mayor, John Riley, did call a public meeting on 2 August 1862 but this was outside the council and subscriptions were collected to help the poor under Kinder Smith, a local Chartist.<sup>72</sup> The improvement may also be a reflection of the growing influence of the Liberal group. Led by the Platt brothers, first James, then John after James's death, the party won election after election to reverse the Tory control gained in 1849. John Platt's position as leader became clear as he was one of only two men to be made mayor on two separate occasions. Others had held the post for two consecutive years, but Platt was mayor in 1854 and 1855 then again in 1860. He then went on to become the town's MP. Towards the end of the period under study the council was moving towards gaining greater control over public

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<sup>69</sup> OCM 9 November 1850.

<sup>70</sup> OCM 9 November 1853.

<sup>71</sup> This analysis is taken from the OCM at Oldham, OLSL: CBO: 1/1/1-4 1849-1870.

<sup>72</sup> OC 2 August 1862.

health with discussions held in June 1863 about adopting Public Health Acts.<sup>73</sup> This was adjourned whilst Villiers's Bill was examined and put to Parliament.<sup>74</sup> Again in March 1866, there was a special Council meeting to discuss an outbreak of cattle disease and its impact on the town.<sup>75</sup> On the whole, however, the minutes show that the view of the *Chronicle* expressed in October 1855 and quoted above were correct. The town was either happy with the way the council was run or they were not very interested.

In terms of the main personnel involved, the man with the largest number of attendances at full council was John Riley, a Liberal, with 164 meetings spread over fourteen years. He was made an alderman in 1862 and was mayor during 1863 and 1864. Abraham Leach was next with 160 meetings spread over fourteen years. A Liberal, he was made an alderman in 1856 and was mayor in 1859 and 1860. Close behind him was John Schofield, a Tory, with 158 meetings also spread over fourteen years. He always remained a councillor. Josiah Radcliffe, another Tory was the longest serving member of the Council. He was an original member and was the other man to serve two terms as mayor. He was mayor in 1856 and 1857 and again in 1864 in the disputed election with William Knott. He was made an alderman in 1859. In all he served for seventeen years and finally retired in 1865. It needs to be stated that full council meetings were only part of the work these men did. From 1861, the minutes record the full attendance at all council meetings and these sheets, published annually, show the full extent and time spent on council work by these unpaid people. Given that many of them had worked for the Police Commission before being elected to the Council, and that seventeen of them served on the board of guardians at the same time, it is clear that there was the same level of public service and dedication shown in Oldham as there was in the other two towns.

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<sup>73</sup> OCM 3 June 1863.

<sup>74</sup> OCM 7 June 1863.

<sup>75</sup> OCM 19 March 1866.

Rochdale started down the road to incorporation at the same time as the other two towns but their first examination of the issue in 1847 ended in a decision to postpone the matter, because of the level of the franchise and the cost.<sup>76</sup> Once again the position of Thomas Livsey was central to this. Robertson wrote that:

Up to 1855 Mr. Livsey, together with Mr. E. Taylor and the Messrs. Ashworth of Roach House, had been strongly opposed to the municipal incorporation of the borough, but circumstances occurred which altered Mr. Livsey's views, and he, although at first declaring he would take no part in the application for the charter, subsequently became a leading supporter of it.<sup>77</sup>

Robertson does not say what the circumstances were, but this account, and the timing of Livsey's change of mind, is called into question by a report on the Improvement Commission meeting dated April 1846, where it reports that Livsey had changed his views on incorporation in order to get rid of the county police.<sup>78</sup> The issue did not resurface until 1854 when a long editorial in the *Rochdale Sentinel* examined the issue of whether or not Rochdale should be a borough.<sup>79</sup> By 1855, the editor was calling for incorporation, not only as a means of helping the town have better control over its affairs but also as a way of reducing the power of Molesworth, the vicar.<sup>80</sup> On 4 August, there was a public meeting to look at a petition for a Charter,<sup>81</sup> and further *Spectator* editorials followed before the collection of signatures for the petition.<sup>82</sup> The Petition to get a Charter of Incorporation was launched on 13 October 1855.<sup>83</sup> The Improvement Commission started the process on 2 January 1856.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> *HG* 22 May 1847, *MG* 10 April 1847 and *RPICM* 5 May 1847.

<sup>77</sup> Robertson, *Social and Political History*, p. 37.

<sup>78</sup> *MG* 4 April 1846.

<sup>79</sup> *Rochdale Sentinel* 21 October 1854.

<sup>80</sup> *Rochdale Sentinel* 23 June and 28 July 1855.

<sup>81</sup> *Rochdale Sentinel* 4 August 1855.

<sup>82</sup> *Rochdale Sentinel* 11 and 25 August and 5 September 1855.

<sup>83</sup> *Rochdale Banner* 13 October 1855.

<sup>84</sup> *RCIPM* 2 January 1856.

Two issues were to dominate the meetings over the proposed Council.<sup>85</sup> The first was the number of wards and the second was the voting qualification. The Radical group led by Livsey wanted three wards. This would allow the radicals and the Liberals a much more effective voting pattern within the three wards and thus reduce the effect of the fewer Tory votes spread across five or eight smaller wards. If this could be allied to a wider franchise with lower voting qualifications then it would ensure the election of more radical and Liberal candidates. The group included Jacob Bright and George Healey. The Tories, and a few Liberals, including John Bright supported five wards, and a small group of Tories wanted eight wards as found in Halifax. The case for three wards was greatly helped by the Improvement Act of 1853, which had not only approved the three existing wards but had given the vote to every male person of full age and the owner of any tenement, either as owner or occupier with a value of £20, much lower than the other two towns.<sup>86</sup> During the first months of 1856, the papers were full of reports of meetings and debates about the number of wards.<sup>87</sup> In the February meetings Livsey used the word 'betrayal' to describe the actions of the five ward group, especially aimed at John Bright. He also stated that: 'the quality he most approved of was intellect, not what was in the breeches pocket'.<sup>88</sup> Garrard commented that: 'The radicals of Rochdale were stronger than those in Salford or Bolton and proved it decisively in 1856 by winning the battle over the representational basis of incorporation'.<sup>89</sup>

Garrard also shows that the three ward group wanted a wider franchise. The Commission franchise was set at a £20 rate, but the radicals wanted a £15 rate for the borough elections. This has to be set against a £30 rate in most other boroughs. This higher rate was also what the five and eight ward parties wanted. Signatures for a petition for the three ward

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<sup>85</sup> All the key documents relating to Incorporation for Rochdale have been drawn together in a document headed 'Incorporation' at RLSL Q561.

<sup>86</sup> Report of the Rochdale Charter Enquiry, London 21 May 1856, RLSL: Incorporation, Q561.

<sup>87</sup> *RO* 16 February and 1 March, *MT* 1 March and *MG* 29 February 1856.

<sup>88</sup> *MG* 11 and 15 February 1856.

<sup>89</sup> Garrard, *Leadership and Power*, p. 112.

position were collected on 23 April 1856, and showed 2750 votes in favour and only 700 against. Those in favour had a property value of £21,000 as opposed to £31,000 for those against. The rate value was also different, with £7 12s for those in favour as opposed to £44 for those against. This shows clearly where support for the two different views was situated. Another factor was the number of candidates available if the £30 rate was accepted. The three ward party argued that there would be a shortage of candidates, with only 200 men available. Equally, many members of the current Improvement Commission would be unable to vote if the higher rate was set.<sup>90</sup> Those wanting five and eight wards argued the figure was much higher, at 558. This had to be set against 958 if the rate was set at £15.<sup>91</sup>

Another interesting position was taken by the beer sellers. Traditionally, as John Vincent has shown, the drinks trade was one of the most active interests in elections in the town and one of the most organised.<sup>92</sup> Publicans were traditionally Tory whilst the beer sellers split their votes half and half.<sup>93</sup> On the issue of incorporation however the beer sellers were fully in support of the three ward party. If either the five or the eight ward view prevailed given the £30 rate value then most of them would have been excluded from voting.<sup>94</sup> They were led by Peter Johnson, who was a Tory election agent, paid £100 a year to look after electoral registers for the Tories at that time, yet working here against their interests.<sup>95</sup> He was a major figure in the Parliamentary Inquiry that followed the election of the Tory, Sir Alexander Ramsay, in 1857 and he left the area to avoid being questioned about vote fixing by the inquiry.<sup>96</sup> He was however elected as a councillor for Wardleworth but left before he was due for re-election.

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<sup>90</sup> Charter Report, RLSL, Q561.

<sup>91</sup> Garrard, p. 155.

<sup>92</sup> John Vincent, 'The Electoral Sociology of Rochdale' *Economic History Review* (1963) 76-90.

<sup>93</sup> Vincent, p. 78.

<sup>94</sup> Garrard, p. 155.

<sup>95</sup> *PP* 1857 (128) Report of Committee on Rochdale Election Petition, Session 2 pp. 1999-2015.

<sup>96</sup> *RO* 20 June and 4 July 1857, and *RP* 20 and 27 June and 4 July 1857.

Major Warburton was appointed to conduct the incorporation inquiry and it opened on 21 March 1856.<sup>97</sup> There was a brief adjournment and it reopened on 12 April, concluding in early May.<sup>98</sup> The debate over the wards was intense. Livsey was questioned for three days about the case for three wards but he and his supporters were not hopeful of getting their way.<sup>99</sup> During the inquiry, press reports compared Livsey to the Tsar of Russia for the power he held within the town.<sup>100</sup> The result came in early July with a victory for the three ward party and a very wide franchise, though the editor of the paper still maintained there were only 'faint hopes' of a victory.<sup>101</sup> The report accepted the three ward argument because of the quality of the witness, the strength of the petition vote, and the view taken by Major Warburton that the overwhelming strength of feeling within the town could not be ignored and that the people who supported the three ward case would provide strong effective municipal government.

The party after the victory was interesting according to the *Observer* for the late arrival of some prominent guests. Jacob Bright, up till then an eight ward supporter, proclaimed himself now to support the winning side and George Leach Ashworth had been a neutral but now proclaimed he had supported the three ward party 'all along'.<sup>102</sup> A burgess association was set up by the three ward party to ensure victory. Livsey stated that the inquiry had given them victory. They now had to protect it. He was appointed as chair.<sup>103</sup> In a public meeting in December, he was asked about the choice of aldermen. He stated that they should be chosen from men who had been elected, from within the Council.<sup>104</sup> In the same edition of the paper, there was an election poster from James Tweedale, who stated that he was an opponent of

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<sup>97</sup> *MG* 10 March 1856.

<sup>98</sup> *RO* 22 March, 12 April and 10 May 1856.

<sup>99</sup> *RO* 26 April 1856.

<sup>100</sup> *MG* 25 April 1856.

<sup>101</sup> *RO* 5 July 1856.

<sup>102</sup> *RO* 12 July 1856.

<sup>103</sup> *RO* 6 November 1856.

<sup>104</sup> *RO* 6 December 1856

the three and five ward ideas, that he would campaign against them and that he was in favour of more say for men of property.<sup>105</sup> He lost at the election.

The first elections for the Council took place on 11 December after a lengthy process of revision of the burgess role carried out between 15 October and 1 December and fully described in the minutes of the Charter of Incorporation Committee.<sup>106</sup> This was set up in September 1855 and the minutes record the sums of money donated by the members to help the process proceed.<sup>107</sup> It had debated the ward issue and there seems to have been a good deal of consensus shown amongst the major figures and the leading parties.<sup>108</sup> Roberston recorded meetings between the three ward group, led by Livsey and the Tories, led by Albert Royds over the selection of candidates for the three wards. The Tories were invited to nominate fourteen candidates, which was done and the whole raft of chosen candidates was then elected, thus avoiding much animosity at the polls.<sup>109</sup> The *Pilot* attacked Livsey for these meetings as the paper felt they were designed to keep the Tories out of power.<sup>110</sup> Castleton ward had twelve councillors and four aldermen, Wardleworth ward had twelve councillors and three aldermen and Spotland ward had six councillors and three aldermen, giving a council of forty members. Jacob Bright was elected as the first mayor and Zac Mellor was appointed as the new town clerk. There was some confusion when the first aldermen were chosen as both Thomas Livsey and John Tatham voted for themselves, which was against the rules. The matter was quickly sorted out and the new council started work.<sup>111</sup> Of the thirty councillors elected, twenty four had served on the improvement commission and thirteen were members of the board of guardians at the same time.

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<sup>105</sup> RO 6 December 1856.

<sup>106</sup> Rochdale, RLSL, The Charter of Incorporation Minutes 1855-56 LA1/1/1/1, 15 September 1856.

<sup>107</sup> Charter of Incorporation Minutes 27 September 1855.

<sup>108</sup> Charter of Incorporation Minutes 18 February 1856.

<sup>109</sup> Robertson, *Social and Political History*, p. 38.

<sup>110</sup> RP 31 October 1857.

<sup>111</sup> RO 20 December 1856.

The first task was to ensure the handover of power from the improvement commission. This was started in the commission on 7 January 1857, a petition was sent to Parliament on 6 February and the whole process was completed by 13 January 1858.<sup>112</sup> The reason for the delay was that the process of passing the Act was lost when Parliament was dissolved and the 1857 general election was held. When Parliament resumed the Act was passed on 17 August 1857. There were no council meetings between August and the end of October whilst the town waited for Parliament to act. Since there had been no transfer of power, the new Council could not act.<sup>113</sup> The minutes of the council did not survive the fire of 1883, but there was a wealth of committee minutes to give detailed insight to the workings of the council which is outside the scope of this work.

Jacob Bright was the first mayor but he soon left the council for national politics. He was succeeded by Alex Stewart, who had obtained the highest number of votes in the 1856 elections. Robert Heape Taylor was the third mayor, but already the *Pilot* was claiming that the post was being decided in private meetings, not in the Council meetings. It publically criticised the election of J.H. Moore in 1860<sup>114</sup> and repeated those allegations in 1861 when John Pagan was chosen.<sup>115</sup> In 1862, George Leach Ashworth was elected as mayor for the following year, but by then the Cotton Famine had hit the town hard. Ashworth was already very involved as the treasurer of the town's relief fund but the issue was a matter of discussion in the Council. The first mention in the press came in January 1862,<sup>116</sup> and at a meeting held at the Town Hall Livsey proposed that the Council should help with relief. He felt that with some slight modification of the system to gain council help, the board of guardians would be able to cope.<sup>117</sup> There were further meetings throughout the year as the distress grew.<sup>118</sup> Livsey

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<sup>112</sup> RCIPM 7 January, 6 February 1857 and 13 January 1858.

<sup>113</sup> *RO* 16 January 1858.

<sup>114</sup> *RP* 10 November 1860.

<sup>115</sup> *RP* 16 November 1861.

<sup>116</sup> *RO* 11 January 1862.

<sup>117</sup> *RO* 18 January 1862.

rejoined the board of guardians but was already in poor health.<sup>119</sup> He then suggested in the Council that £500 from the profits of the Gas Company should be used for the relief effort.<sup>120</sup> The Gas Company was owned by the council and Livsey was the chair of the Gas Committee, as he had been under the improvement commission. At the Council meeting in early January, Ashworth refused to sign the order permitting the transfer from the Gas Committee funds to the Relief fund, despite advice from the town clerk that it would be in order.<sup>121</sup> Ashworth was concerned that he did not have the power and that such a move would be illegal. Ashworth came under attack in the *Observer*, and then resigned from the relief committee.<sup>122</sup> The vicar was also opposed to the grant.<sup>123</sup> Relations between Livsey and Ashworth turned very unpleasant, with Livsey repeatedly demanding that everything should be done by the rules to 'meet the demands of the mayor'.<sup>124</sup>

This personal feeling came to a head with the election of a new mayor in November. The Burgess Association had already proposed Livsey as the next mayor,<sup>125</sup> but at the Council meeting the next evening Samuel Stott was chosen on the casting vote of the incumbent mayor, George Leach Ashworth.<sup>126</sup> The Tories had already decided to abstain, and there were lots of allegations of a private Liberal meeting held the night before and hosted by Ashworth.<sup>127</sup> The *Observer* claimed that Ashworth already knew it would come down to his vote and he was prepared to use it to keep Livsey out.<sup>128</sup> Recriminations were made in the press and in the town and a major dinner in honour of Livsey was organised on 18

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<sup>118</sup> RO 8 February and 1 March 1862.

<sup>119</sup> RO 12 April 1862.

<sup>120</sup> RO 6 December 1862.

<sup>121</sup> RO 3 January 1863.

<sup>122</sup> RO 10 January 1863.

<sup>123</sup> RP 20 December 1862.

<sup>124</sup> RO 7 February 1863.

<sup>125</sup> RO 7 November 1863.

<sup>126</sup> RO 9 November 1863. This was a special edition.

<sup>127</sup> RP 7 November 1863.

<sup>128</sup> RO 14 November 1863.

November.<sup>129</sup> The mayor was not present and Livsey refused to mention what had gone on, but others were not so reticent and Ashworth and the Tories came in for considerable criticism for the perceived insult to a major figure in the town. The *Pilot* saw the dinner as a huge snub for the Council.<sup>130</sup> Livsey died at the end of January and these events may go some way to explain the size of the crowd at his funeral.<sup>131</sup>

As with all new councils, the question of a new town hall was discussed. There was little debate about the need for one but there was discussion over the site, early in the workings of the Council.<sup>132</sup> A site was chosen and approved and the land was bought in April 1860.<sup>133</sup> The plans for the new building were approved in June 1865, but the building was not completed for another six years and opened in 1871 at a cost of £160,000 after an initial estimate of £40,000.<sup>134</sup> The council purchased the Water works in October 1866, to add to the Gas works.<sup>135</sup>

Owing to the difficulties of the sources there can be no meaningful attempt to analyse attendance as has been done for the other two towns, but a few examples will show that the same level of commitment was shown in Rochdale. In ten years William Simpson attended ninety three full meetings and W. S. Scott attended ninety meetings. The aldermen too played their part with George Leach Ashworth attending eighty two meetings and Thomas Ashworth eighty meetings. There is no evidence that any of the meetings were inquorate.

### Conclusion

It is clear that the progression from Improvement Commissions, whatever form or name they had, to full municipal councils was clear and straightforward. The nature of the

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<sup>129</sup> RO 21 November 1863.

<sup>130</sup> RP 21 November 1863.

<sup>131</sup> RO 6 February 1864. See Garrard, *Leadership and Power*, p. 23, on the significance of Livsey's funeral.

<sup>132</sup> RO 3 December 1859.

<sup>133</sup> RO 21 April 1860.

<sup>134</sup> RO 31 June 1865.

<sup>135</sup> RO 1 October 1866.

social and political composition of the new authorities was less so, though the outcome in Halifax was not in doubt. In Oldham, the Tory victory shook the radical faction and provided the impetus for the Liberals to re-group and regain power in the town. In Rochdale, given the strength of the radical group, it was the question of the number of wards and votes that was at issue and once that was resolved, the radicals took control, to change over time into a Liberal stronghold. What is also clear was that the same group of men, nearly three quarters in each town, had already served on the commissions and thus took their expertise and commitment into the working of the council. One clear piece of evidence of this was the rapid way in which the relevant committees were established, members allocated and the work undertaken. This came from familiarity and experience.

In all three cases, the step to incorporation had two major elements. One was to save money, to keep the costs to the town under control, especially the cost of the police. The other reason was to limit the extent of central control. They had all seen the effects of the Poor Laws as well as the plans for the police and health matters and they wanted to have local control over local matters. Smaller and more efficient than the various improvement bodies, councils were to be central to local life for a long time. There was also a great deal of pride in what the councils did and represented and this is clearly seen in the town halls that virtually every new borough wanted to build. There were later changes, with Halifax being extended to include more townships in 1865 and Rochdale being revised into ten wards in 1872.<sup>136</sup> By that time municipal corporations were in place and were to survive with yet more additions and responsibilities until the major changes of 1974. They had evolved during the nineteenth century and grew in the twentieth, as new responsibilities for health and education were added to their roles. They joined the cities and the larger towns in providing a network of local govern

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<sup>136</sup> *HG* 7 January 1865 and RLSL, Rochdale Improvement and Extension Act 25 July 1872.

## Chapter Nine

## Conclusion

It is important at the outset to establish the limitations of the comparative approach taken here. Halifax, Oldham and Rochdale were all textile towns, in the North of England, in similar geographical locations, roughly equal in size of population and similarity of occupation. All were part of much larger parishes. These similarities can be seen as limitations, but they are necessary. They can also permit informed generalization, and differences, where they occur, often raising important factors for investigation and analysis. Often, comparisons have been made where the similarities were limited and therefore the comparisons are weak, as with the three towns (Oldham, South Shields and Northampton) chosen by Foster.<sup>1</sup> More pertinent is the comparison based on the presumption that one place is the same as another, as has been done with studies of Oldham that presume that Rochdale is much the same.<sup>2</sup> Gadion in particular groups Oldham and Rochdale together with only brief examination of the situation in Rochdale.<sup>3</sup> The similarities have to be there as a bedrock so that the differences can be seen, and analysed against this common background.

Another problem in historical terms is the gaps in the evidence. There is a large amount of documentary evidence for this period in this type of parish and town.<sup>4</sup> Correct record keeping was a matter of local pride and accountability. The laxity of the Trustees in Halifax in the eighteen thirties showed that poor record keeping was not acceptable to the people of the town.<sup>5</sup> Control of the Trustees was very lax and the financial position had

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<sup>1</sup> John Foster, *Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution: Early Industrial Capitalism in Three English Towns* (London: Weidenfield and Nicholson, 1974). See also R. A. Sykes, 'Working Class Consciousness in Oldham 1830-1842', *Historical Journal* 23 (1980), 165-178.

<sup>2</sup> David Gadion, 'Class formation and class action in north-west industrial towns, 1830-1850' in *The Victorian City: a Reader in British Urban History, 1820-1914*, ed. by R. J. Morris (London: Longman, 1993) pp. 24-66.

<sup>3</sup> Gadion, see town comparison, p. 31; wage variation, p. 41 and size of the textile mills, p. 43.

<sup>4</sup> See the sources in the Contemporary Bibliography

<sup>5</sup> See Chapter Five, p. 131 and *HG* 13 February 1838 and *HE* 14 December 1839.

become very grave, with large debts. The retention of these records is a different issue and so gaps appear in the records that cover critical times such as Halifax Board of Guardians after 1841, Rochdale Council Minutes from 1856 to 1883, or all the records for Oldham Board of Guardians in the National Archives. Informed analysis can be made using evidence from sources close to the time, but it can leave the conclusions a little threadbare. Detailed study of the existing records allied to use of the local press can give a more rounded picture.

In 1820 civic governance in the three parishes consisted of vestries, but little else. The population had started to increase in all the parishes and, in the townships where there was industry, expansion had started and was putting pressure on the old facilities and long standing systems within the parish. Industries were growing and roles within them were changing rapidly. In times of economic hardship the rising population placed great strain on the old system of parish and poor house relief. The impact of the Corn Laws on food prices was being felt and the government of the day was enacting oppressive and restrictive laws in an attempt to stifle unrest. Ripples from 'Peterloo' the previous year were spreading beyond Manchester.

There were increasing demands for reform, but often these were seen only in national terms, not local ones.<sup>6</sup> The national reforms did not come till the end of the 1820s, with the repeal of the Test and Corporations Act in 1828, which conferred full civil liberties on nonconformists, and the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829 which gave similar freedom to Catholics. By then local changes were already underway and, it could be argued, they provided the conditions within parishes and towns that allowed the national debate to take place, especially over parliamentary reform. Policing was another issue that started in the 1820s within London, but grew into a national debate. Formal opposition to the Corn Laws started within Manchester and also spread to a national audience. Yet in smaller towns like the ones

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<sup>6</sup> For the national picture, see Boyd Hilton, *Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People?: England 1783-1846* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

studied here, new forms of local governance and responsibility were already in place and operating by the time of the 1832 Reform Act. By the next major reform act in 1867, municipal governance had developed in many different and extensive ways.

The impact of national campaigns and the effect on the towns of those campaigns shows that Halifax was the most conservative of the towns. There were radical candidates in national elections in both 1847 and 1852, but like the Chartists, they never quite succeeded in gaining positions of power. Sir Charles Wood was the longest serving member, but he rarely aroused any passions for reform and did not have a high profile within the town.<sup>7</sup> Oldham had very radical members in Cobbett, Fielden and Johnson, but the effect of the bruising campaign of 1847 brought a more liberal presence with Fox and Platt, as well as Duncroft the Tory. Rochdale had a liberal beginning with Fenton but then a radical theme ran throughout almost all of the period, with Sharman Crawford, then Miall and finally Cobden. Only two years (1857-1859) of the Tory, Ramsay, interrupted this flow. This pattern was reflected in the currents of local radical reform within each town.

The vestry was at the core of local governance. It formed the basis from which the later developments grew and provided the means by which people could get involved in local affairs. Its meetings provided the only public means of debate and decision making. As an element of secular authority, the vestry's connections to the church had become increasingly nominal. By 1820 it was no longer a requirement that a person belong to the Church of England to be a member of the vestry. Dissenters and non-conformists could take office, as Jonathon Akroyd did in Halifax.<sup>8</sup> There were four major offices within the vestry, churchwarden, constable, surveyor and overseer of the poor.<sup>9</sup> All these offices were still there

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<sup>7</sup> *HG* 4 April 1857.

<sup>8</sup> John A. Hargreaves, 'The Church of England in later Victorian Halifax 1852-1914', *THAS* (1991), 27-30 p. 29.

<sup>9</sup> For a fuller explanation see J. W. Houseman, 'The Development of Local Government in the Parish of Halifax 1760-1848', *THAS* (1929).

in 1870, though in different systems. The vestries operated in different ways in the three towns. Halifax had one vestry for twenty three townships, Oldham had one major and one minor vestry and Rochdale had three, each of which provided a churchwarden for the parish church.<sup>10</sup> The vestry provided experience for a wide range of people from a broad class base, and this gave the impetus to the desire to have greater control of local affairs and to improve the town. It was also the only existing form of genuinely local governance, since the law officers and magistrates tended to operate on a county basis.

The vestry was the foundation and the improvement commissions provided the structure, yet little has been done by way of examination of their role. (The acts that created them are difficult to locate in parliamentary records.) They were crucial, as the areas they controlled, the means to improve matters and the officers to carry out these improvements, were all to be found in the municipal corporation. Other institutions carried on, but the commission was effectively translated into the corporation and all power within the town was passed to that body. Furthermore, the development of these commissions with their later acts gave the towns the opportunity to elect members, which happened in both Halifax and Rochdale, though Oldham never elected to the commission, only to the council. This generated an interest in, and an appreciation of, the electoral process, which resulted in the immense interest surrounding the progress of the 1832 Reform Act.<sup>11</sup> Yet levels of local franchise differed from town to town with Halifax having the highest level of qualification and Rochdale having the widest. Each town also had evidence of organised groups of non-electors, those still outside of the franchise system, who had to be considered and who played a role in local and national elections well into the 1860s.<sup>12</sup> The other avenue of opportunity that improvement commissions opened was to enable a wider selection of people to stand for election and as the

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<sup>10</sup> Rochdale, RLSL: St. Chad's Churchwardens and Sidesmen, 1801-1831, R/CHA/7/2.

<sup>11</sup> See Chapter Three.

<sup>12</sup> See Chapter Seven.

figures show, large numbers did take office.<sup>13</sup> The advent of councils actually reduced the number of representatives that a town had, but clearly commission meetings of over one hundred people, which were held in all three towns, were not always efficient.<sup>14</sup>

The areas the improvement commissions covered began very simply with water in Halifax, and later acts added paving, street lighting, cleansing and sewage control. These brought in their turn the control of water and gas supplies, and amenities such as parks. The other major role was that of control of the watch and the police. This brought several problems, not least that of conflict with the county authorities. Underlying all of this was the need to control the costs and the rates, to try to make sure that the burden on all the people was fair. Health issues were also a concern, especially the provision of adequate burial space, as old parish church graveyards were full to overflowing as the population expanded. Control of health provision was just starting to develop at the end of this period.

The commissions were also the place in which the local experts, so central to all towns, began to develop. Under the vestries, people had held posts such as surveyors as part of their civic duties but gradually a core of trained and experienced surveyors was developed, and the same process happened with clerks and legal officers to the various boards.<sup>15</sup> The other key officials were the overseer and assistant overseers of the poor. They were vestry appointments but then worked as the key men in the handling of relief at the local level. The revision courts for the electoral role required trained legal staff to run the courts but also encouraged the emergence of efficient political agents for the parties as they sought to gain an advantage at most elections. The engineers for the water and the gas supply industries and for the building of effective sewers and drains all began in the same environment. These all fed into the town councils and their wide range of officers.

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<sup>13</sup> For example 468 took office in Rochdale, RLSL RPICM.

<sup>14</sup> Halifax 28 September 1847, 103; Oldham 20 October 1847, 205; Rochdale 3 September 1856, 109. All these figures have been taken from the Improvement Commission Records for the three towns.

<sup>15</sup> Houseman, p. 178.

In all three towns, for the twenty years after 1825, the commission provided the forum and the mechanism for matters such as views on the progress of the 1832 Act, the new Poor Law and the growing campaigns to hold power within the towns, and for these matters to be discussed and debated over. Issues were often raised in the commission and the call for a public meeting would come from there. Debates about the wisdom of incorporation were held there, as was the initial response to the Poor Law. More importantly, the commission saw the emergence of the leading political leaders, especially in Oldham and Rochdale. In this respect Halifax was different. Given the length of time that the Trustees had been in existence and the power that the leading landowners and employers had within that body, the leaders of the radicals and the working class could not make any impact on the membership of the leading group. There was a strong working class group, as the membership of the Chartists showed, but the employers were, on the whole, owners of much larger factories than those of the employers in Oldham or Rochdale, and this gave them greater leverage over the workers. Equally, there is little evidence that the self employed independent workers such as the hatters and the blacksmiths made any impact in Halifax, whereas they clearly did in Oldham, where William Knott was a hatter, as was James Taylor, a leading radical in Rochdale. Thomas Livsey began his working life in Rochdale as a blacksmith and brass founder.

Care must be taken not to paint too bright a picture. There were major differences and disputes, with special interest groups such as the beer sellers and publicans active at the elections, and as major providers of licensed meeting places for all the groups working in a town. The first meeting of the Halifax Anti-Corn Law League showed this clearly, as did the strength of the publicans in Rochdale elections, local and national.<sup>16</sup> There was always the issue of cost, the recommended rate versus the required expense. The pressures brought by rising populations and the demands on facilities were huge, and the demands for fresh

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<sup>16</sup> HACLL 1839-1846, HAS/B: 11/1. Also see John Vincent, 'The Electoral Sociology of Rochdale', *Economic History Review*, (1963).

evaluations of rateable value and exemption from rates were constants themes.<sup>17</sup> This situation was not helped by the economic fluctuations that could cause severe hardship to the lowest paid, like the period around 1842, or the Cotton Famine from 1861 onwards. The towns still contained the employers and the employees and factory reform was a constant issue, especially in this area given the high profile of John Fielden on one side and, to a lesser extent, Jonathon Akroyd on the other.<sup>18</sup> Alongside this was the constant running issue of the demand for a wider franchise, which was later to help the rise of Chartism.

The Poor Law Act of 1834 brought a different dimension to politics in the three towns. It should be emphasised again that this was an external organisation forced on the towns, with Unions decided by outside powers. The Commissioners in London provided a target for the opposition of the whole town. Magistrates, employers, self employed and workers were all united against the new law. Magistrates and employers saw the Act as interference in their traditional role within the community and the position they had built up under the magistracy and the commission, and the workers saw the unions and the workhouses as cruel and oppressive, calling them 'bastilles'.<sup>19</sup> Whilst a lot of research has been done on open defiance of the Commissioners before 1844, little attention has been paid to the longer and more detailed campaign of passive resistance carried out once the Unions had been imposed.<sup>20</sup> It almost seems as though the opposition ended in 1844, yet in all three towns, the resistance was only just starting, a key finding of this study. The Poor Law Commission records in the National Archives show how the guardians frustrated, delayed and on occasion opposed the commissioners.<sup>21</sup> These records form a vast underused resource for local studies, as in keeping with the ethos of the Commission, they kept nearly every record, both incoming and outgoing. The letters, petitions, financial arguments and resolutions made extra work in London, forced

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<sup>17</sup> OPICM, January to July 1829

<sup>18</sup> See Chapter Three.

<sup>19</sup> Michael Rose, 'The Anti-Poor Law Movement in the North of England', *Northern History*, 1 (1966), 70-92 p. 78.

<sup>20</sup> See Chapter Six.

<sup>21</sup> TNA, Halifax, MH 12 14974 – 14985 and Rochdale, MH 12 6176 – 6187.

extra visits from inspectors and ground the workings of the Commission and the Unions almost to a halt. In two areas they were very successful. The first was in their opposition to the ban on payment of any form of outdoor relief. Help for the distressed in both Oldham and Rochdale during the Cotton Famine could not have been achieved if the system had been applied in full. Halifax to a lesser extent used forms of outdoor relief to help its people. The other area was in the imposition of workhouses. Halifax did build one but would not then remodel it to conform with the 1834 Act, whereas Oldham took till 1849 to comply, not as long as Rochdale, however, which delayed having any new workhouse till 1877.

The boards were made up of elected and ex-officio members, and whilst the members in general worked together against the dictates of the Commission, there was less opportunity for the leading people in each town to be involved because of the smaller size of the board. Nevertheless, key figures did stand for election and played a major role in each town. The same names re-occur in vestry, commission and guardians. The level of commitment shown to attend a large number of meetings and the time given, all done with very few expenses and no remuneration and at the same time running a business or working, showed the dedication of many people to improving the place in which they lived. There was in existence a strong culture of civic service and consciousness before the Victorian period with which this ethic has been most closely identified. This applies not only to the major figures but also to the people who turned up for meeting after meeting, like John Jackson in Halifax attending over 300 commission meetings, yet rarely being in the chair. These men enabled the organisations to function without interruption and to achieve impressive developments within the towns.

There were also many examples of radical reformers active in the towns, be they members of the Anti-Corn Law League, factory reformers or Chartists. The best evidence for the League was in Halifax, but clearly it was working in the other two towns, especially Rochdale, given the presence of John Bright. The campaign was brief and seen as very

successful. Factory reform made headway, but the campaign was largely unrecorded in these towns, except for the national work of Fielden. Chartism flourished initially in all three towns, and many of the leading figures attended Chartist meetings, but it is clear that many dropped away either by 1840, or more especially after 1842. There are very few examples within the towns of any open support for violence as a means of achieving reform. Almost all of the evidence points to the leaders being moral force rather than physical force supporters and urging moderation. It is possible that the ethos and constraints of public meetings such as the commission meetings from 1825, with their rules and regulations, the structure of debate and the rule of the chair, may have been a factor in dissuading many from outright force. Change could be achieved by peaceful means as the results from within the commissions showed. Opposition and the threat of force would only bring troops and the risk of alienating those magistrates who were supportive, such as the Chadwicks in Rochdale. Chartists were active and effective for many years after 1849. Livsey in Rochdale died a committed Chartist in 1864, Knott in Oldham became a proudly Chartist mayor in 1865, and Wilson in Halifax attended the famous Chartist tea party of 1885.<sup>22</sup>

It is important to mention the impact of religion in the growth of these three towns, not in terms of the number of attendees at each church but in respect of the affiliation of the civic leaders. Many were Dissenters, yet this did not always produce hostility, nor provide a block to involvement in institutions which had religious connections, as Halifax shows. It is also important to recognise that many reformers and workers within these institutions were members of the Church of England. Non-conformity did not have a monopoly on reform. Thomas Livsey was an active Anglican being elected as a sidesman in St Chad's. The role of the incumbent was important as the moderate support for the vestry and the Trustees given by

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<sup>22</sup> Benjamin Wilson, *'Struggles of an old Chartist'* reprinted in David Vincent, ed., *Testaments of Radicalism: Memoirs of Working Class Politicians 1790-1885* (London: Europa, 1977) 211-225. See also Anthony Taylor, 'Commemoration, Memorialisation and Political Memory in Post-Chartist Radicalism: The 1885 Halifax Chartist Reunion' in *The Chartist Legacy* ed. by Owen Ashton, Robert Fyson and Stephen Roberts (Woodbridge: Merlin, 1999).

Musgrave in Halifax showed. In Oldham the incumbents were indifferent, more intent on infighting within the church. In Rochdale they were hostile to reform and to public progress. Molesworth frequently opposed civic progress where he saw it as infringing his rights and position. That does not mean that the congregation followed him. After 1847, his leading opponent was his Bishop in Manchester and reform of the parish and the development of the new cemetery were achieved.

The other group worthy of consideration were the landowners and the magistrates. Again the picture that emerges here is not one of total hostility to change. The upper class may have wanted to control reform and to go at their pace, but there were many examples of them aiding steps to improve social conditions for the people. The Chadwick brothers, magistrates in Rochdale, were very open supporters of reform as were the members of the Akroyd, Briggs and Waterhouse families in Halifax. All were leading employers and magistrates. In Oldham, the Platt family rose to prominence through local governance and John went on to be an MP as did John and Jacob Bright in Rochdale.

The councils which came into existence in 1847 in Halifax and Oldham and 1856 in Rochdale were to last, in essence, until 1974. The transition from commission to council was not always smooth, but the way in which the council was established, the committees set up, the expert staff such as the clerk and the surveyor appointed and the records kept, all spoke of long familiarity with good practice and efficient running of affairs. Except initially in Oldham, the choice of aldermen came from within the council as did the choice of mayor. The vestry continued, the board of guardians continued, but reading the press accounts of the time, it was clear that the councils were seen as the prime expression of local governance, and increasingly all matters affecting the town came before the elected representatives. It is clear that the response of Rochdale Town Council to the death of Thomas Livsey was because he was the first serving member of the council to die, and the members were extremely anxious

to get things right as they were aware they were setting a precedent and that they had to lead the town in mourning. The other area that clearly dominated early councils was the provision of a town hall. Looking at these structures now, it is clear that the councillors saw them as the physical expression of civic pride, therefore they had to be suitable and whilst there had to be a limit on expenditure, there should be proper funding to provide the town with a symbol of which to be proud.

This study has shown that rather than being a random collection of organisations, the vestries, the commissions, the board of guardians and the councils were in fact integral to the growth and development of local governance. Allied to a very wide and diverse leadership, they allowed the towns to grow in prominence and more importantly enable their inhabitants to help themselves and each other by alleviating major issues such as the condition of the streets, the supply of sewage services, water and gas, control and effectiveness of the police and the economic challenges of poverty (exemplified in the Cotton Famine). They fostered growing democracy, responsibility and accountability from the leaders to the people.

Equally importantly, this study has attempted to examine the people at the centre of these changes, civic activists who lead by example, the meeting attendees and the men who sat on committees and carried out and reported on investigations for the various bodies. These were the people who were increasingly held to public account through elections and the reports of the press. They became accountable, but what is also very clear is that they genuinely served their towns. There was very little, if any, profit to be made from public service, yet these men took the posts and did the jobs that needed doing. In many cases, another possible factor was their religious conviction that it was part of their beliefs to help their neighbour, and whilst this work helped them to achieve prominence both within the town and for a few in national arenas, they all started within the communities to which they belonged and within the mechanisms of the town.

This work only covers three towns in the north of England. The method of investigation used could clearly be used in other northern towns. There needs to be greater investigation of the vestries and the commissions, not just in terms of their outcomes but in the manner in which Acts of Parliament were used to achieve local governance. The study of the impact of religious beliefs and practices within a locality and its effect on local governance needs to be undertaken. There is more work to be done on the second tier of political leadership, where a national profile is effectively melded with committed local loyalty, for example radical MPs like William Sharman Crawford and Edward Miall. On the Poor Law, as already indicated, there needs to be further examination of the relationship between the boards of guardians and the central Poor Law Commissioners. How often, and in what ways, did local guardians thwart the will of the centre and tailor the rules of the Commissioners to meet local needs?

In the area of radical reform, a wider look at the relationship between the Anti-Corn Law League and the Chartists at a local level needs to be undertaken to identify what the differences and similarities were and if the people involved were completely separate or more closely connected. Within Chartism, the broader lives of local leaders, emphasised in Malcolm Chase's recent work,<sup>23</sup> need to be expanded and deepened. More local studies of the type and role of the press also need to be done. The lives and work of the local people who led provincial towns, their connections, the impact of national and local events on them, and in turn their impact on the towns in which they lived, helps to humanize and render more complete our understanding of local government.

It is not difficult to find an image that best sums up the thrust of this work. The parishes and towns which have been studied were all based on textiles. Imagine each town as a piece of fabric. Central to the creation of each piece of fabric is the framework of the loom.

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<sup>23</sup> See the end of each chapter in Malcolm Chase, *Chartism: a New History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

The nineteenth century is the framework. Fixed to the loom are the warp threads. They are the institutions that existed at that time for local governance, the vestry, the improvement commission, the board of guardians and the municipal councils. Other threads running in parallel are the various reform movements, the Chartists, the factory reform movement, the Anti-Corn Law League, as well as the myriad of social reforms such as the Temperance movement. The weft is the more mobile thread, moving through the warp threads, yet it binds all of them together. The weft is the leadership, the people who belong not just to one institution but to two, three, four or even five strands, pulling them all together and giving the fabric its colour, its variety and its uniqueness. Put all the pieces of fabric together and you reveal the rich tapestry that made up civic governance and municipal leadership in early nineteenth century England.

## Appendix A

### Census Figures

#### Townships and Parliamentary Boroughs

#### Halifax, Oldham and Rochdale

#### Including Poor Law Union attachments

#### 1801-1871

These figures have been compiled using the Parliamentary Papers and specifically the Population Abstracts for each year, printed copies of which are located in Leeds University Library.





Parliamentary Borough Figures									
			Town	Halifax			Oldham		Rochdale
	Year								
	1841								
	Parliament			26694			60109		24091
	1851								
	Parliament			33582			72357		29195
	Municipal			Same			52820		Did not exist
	1861								
	Parliament			37014			94344		38114
	Municipal						72333		
	1871								
	Parliament			65510			113100		63485
	Municipal			Same			82629		44559
	Electors			10083			15663		9561
	Wards			6			8		3

## Appendix B

### Occupational figures

#### Halifax Oldham and Rochdale

#### 1841-1861

These figures have been compiled using the Parliamentary Papers and specifically the Occupation Abstracts for each year, printed copies of which are located in Leeds University Library.

##### **1841**

*PP 1844 (27)* 1841 Census Command papers: Accounts and Papers pp. 70-86 and 223-243.

##### **1851**

*PP 1852-53 (88)* Pt 2.1 1851 Census Command Papers: Accounts and Papers pp. 637-647 and 702-724.

##### **1861**

*PP 1863 (53)* Pt 2.1 1861 Census Command Papers: Accounts and Papers pp. 302-223 and 635-652.

1841	Halifax		Oldham		Rochdale		Total	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Textiles								
Wollen Manufacturer	5017	610	328	39	2783	1257	4040	
Worsted Manufacturer	2834	1635	0	0	21	0	21	
Stuff maker	533	153	0	0	0	0	0	
Factory Labourer	331	261	112	59	222	17	239	
Silk	227	84	4	13	0	10	10	
Flax	26	4	3	0	2	0	2	
Cotton Manufacturer	1673	1445	2623	2126	1960	1973	3933	
Fustian Manufacturer	61	10	5	2	4	1	5	
Calico Maker	0	0	5	0	217	0	217	
Weaver (any)	2331	578	397	2441	548	77	625	
Weaver (Hand)	87	50	11	3	66	14	80	
Weaver (Power)	132	216	20	20	71	59	130	
<b>Textile Total</b>	<b>13252</b>	<b>5046</b>	<b>3399</b>	<b>4703</b>	<b>5894</b>	<b>3408</b>	<b>9302</b>	
Farmers	1355	128	112	6	626	58	684	
Wives or sons	0	0	31	0	0	0	0	
Farm Labourers	747	1	135	6	522	8	530	
General Labourers	1430	24	431	3	1161	20	1181	
Domestics	365	1557	66	532	172	996	1168	
Milliners	0	0	0	129	0	177	177	
School Teachers	109	112	44	33	62	56	118	
Coal Miner	409	2	740	0	645	0	645	
Coal Merchant	22	0	5	0	13	0	13	
Iron Manufacturer	94	1	135	0	72	0	72	
Blacksmith	280	0	169	0	214	0	214	
Engineers	255	3	290	0	252	0	252	
Innkeepers-Publicans	207	32	105	17	164	46	210	
Beersellers	80	23	46	13	77	31	108	
Carriers-Draymen	302	2	0	0	0	0	0	
Police	53	0	26	0	63	0	63	
<b>Total Workforce</b>	<b>18990</b>	<b>6941</b>	<b>5785</b>	<b>5449</b>	<b>9954</b>	<b>4802</b>	<b>14756</b>	
<b>Total Population</b>	<b>31606</b>	<b>33085</b>	<b>10327</b>	<b>11161</b>	<b>16875</b>	<b>17286</b>	<b>34161</b>	

1851	Halifax		Oldham		Rochdale		Total	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Textiles								
Wollen Manufacturer	3040	1779	47	8	2980	1542		4522
Worsted Manufacturer	7005	4721	11	0	3	49		52
Stuff maker	38	81	0	0	1	0		1
Factory Labourer	495	0	0	0	92	0		92
Silk	231	81	1952	2220	550	15		565
Flax	13	10	2	0	1	0		1
Cotton Manufacturer	1164	642	6881	5951	356	3958		4314
Fustian Manufacturer	2	0	160	91	26	6		32
Calico Maker	29	0	280	8	294	13		307
Weaver (any)	0	0	0	0	0	0		0
Weaver (Hand)	0	0	0	0	0	0		0
Weaver (Power)	0	0	0	0	0	0		0
Textile Total	12017	7314	9323	8270	4303	5583		9886
Farmers	1154	162	416	33	669	71		740
Wives or sons	224	1051	104	187	115	418		533
Farm Labourers	893	33	518	1	469	1		470
General Labourers	764	1	1025	11	842	15		857
Domestics	158	1307	70	646	73	1352		1425
Milliners	0	944	0	502	0	455		455
School Teachers	98	196	81	61	62	62		124
Coal Miner	724	0	1545	4	950	8		958
Coal Merchant	44	0	38	0	21	0		21
Iron Manufacturer	175	0	294	0	125	0		125
Blacksmith	323	0	316	0	235	0		235
Engineers	172	0	111	0	778	0		778
Innkeepers-Publicans	171	161	79	56	84	33		117
Beersellers	125	23	231	151	243	56		299
Carriers-Draymen	86	0	123	0	0	0		0
Police	34	0	40	0	30	0		30
Total Workforce	17172	11193	14327	9932	9002	8057		17059
Total Population	31023	32238	22623	23457	19094	19959		39053

1861	Halifax		Oldham		Rochdale		Total	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Textiles								
Wollen Manufacturer	4574	1676	45	9	2980	1542	4522	
Worsted Manufacturer	4531	4389	7	7	3	49	52	
Stuff maker	405	37	0	0	1	0	1	
Factory Labourer	151	0	0	67	92	0	92	
Silk	45	155	1586	2331	550	15	565	
Flax	12	18	2	0	1	0	1	
Cotton Manufacturer	1945	1663	8235	8948	356	3958	4314	
Fustian Manufacturer	3	0	143	8	26	6	32	
Calico Maker	96	7	436	24	294	13	307	
Weaver (any)	97	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Weaver (Hand)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Weaver (Power)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
<b>Textile Total</b>	<b>11859</b>	<b>7945</b>	<b>10454</b>	<b>11394</b>	<b>4303</b>	<b>5583</b>	<b>9886</b>	
Farmers	1267	197	360	49	669	71	740	
Wives or sons	168	987	83	231	115	418	533	
Farm Labourers	1153	23	968	0	469	1	470	
General Labourers	450	2	961	0	842	15	857	
Domestics	227	2206	87	1437	73	1352	1425	
Milliners	0	1073	0	704	0	455	455	
School Teachers	110	164	70	70	62	62	124	
Coal Miner	733	0	1840	0	950	8	958	
Coal Merchant	74	0	54	0	21	0	21	
Iron Manufacturer	494	0	2536	1	125	0	125	
Blacksmith	421	0	501	1	235	0	235	
Engineers	283	0	1575	0	778	0	778	
Innkeepers-Publicans	231	257	196	348	84	33	117	
Beersellers	80	20	230	28	243	56	299	
Carriers-Draymen	159	0	113	0	0	0	0	
Police	71	0	58	0	30	0	30	
<b>Total Workforce</b>	<b>18291</b>	<b>12680</b>	<b>20150</b>	<b>14274</b>	<b>9002</b>	<b>8057</b>	<b>17059</b>	
<b>Total Population</b>	<b>33064</b>	<b>36690</b>	<b>29538</b>	<b>31278</b>	<b>19094</b>	<b>19959</b>	<b>39053</b>	

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