

In the Shadow of Empire: Rethinking local agency in Tower Hamlets at the fin de siècle

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Abstract

Through an examination of how local politicians developed, cultivated and maintained relationships with their constituents and national parties, this thesis will explore the ways that the contingent and contested nature of popular politics impacted on the daily lives of the working classes in Tower Hamlets, from 1895 to 1906.

Through a synthesis of election material, local newspapers and recollections this thesis will explore popular political and economic practices and their articulation at ground level, using the Boer War, 1899 - 1902, and The Tariff Reform Campaign, 1903 – 1906, as case studies to highlight the uncertainty of politics at this time. These studies will highlight how individual agency within political parties negotiated and asked for power from the communities they represented. Simultaneously, it will analyse the agentic political culture which was inherent within working-class constituencies in Tower Hamlets, to highlight how local politicians reconstructed a popular image based on their local networks and relationships. The thesis will conclude by arguing that the interaction between politicians and their constituents were more complicated than some historians have argued, as national and imperial politics were mediated through the prism of working-class aspirations and concerns.

The aim of this thesis is to paint a picture of a more vibrant political scene, where national and imperial politics were constructed from ground level, and working-class agentic political culture had a larger impact on the course of British history. Examining the interaction between political rhetoric and working-class aspiration, and concerns, this thesis will shed light on how discourses shaped patterns of allegiance within a constituency, and thus altered national politics from the ground.

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as references.

Introduction

In 1901 Charles F. C. Masterman explored the literary construction of the 'New Imperialism' in a lecture entitled 'Imperialism in Literature', as part of his 'Modern Movements in Literature' series. Contrary to popular opinion, Masterman argued that Seeley's imperialism was in fact a continuation of the 'old' imperialism of Froude, Tennyson and Kingsley, 'it was England as essentially England still'. The origins of this new movement in literature was located in the works of Rudyard Kipling, whose 'pride of empire', delight in adventurism and passion for the sea appealed to the 'primitive emotions of simple people'.¹ The rise in popularity of this new approach to communicating ideas through specifically constructed language appeared at a crucial juncture in the history of the construction of British society and the future of politics and empire. The 'new' was the adjective of the day, with the late-Victorian period witnessing the emergence of new unionism, journalism and radicalism, as well as the transformation of the public from 'deferential subjects to assertive citizens', with a growing electorate and the creation of ideas concerning citizen-soldiers and the citizen-consumer.²

At the local level structural and material changes in the socio-economic and cultural make-up of constituencies created a necessity, and opportunity, for local politicians and agents to deconstruct and re-create a more accessible and populist language. Local discourses emphasise the importance of place and identity in constructing relationships and developing networks of support, which created new identities at a time when local political activism was becoming increasingly essential for the survival of national parties. The use of language and creation of discourses on the ground was not a one way street and the

¹ Eastern Daily Press, 9th December 1901, P. 6

² Richard Price, "One Big Thing: Britain, its Empire, and their Imperial Culture." *Journal of British Studies*, Vol 45, No. 3, 2006, PP. 602 – 627, P. 616

existence of an agentic political culture has often been overlooked by historians of political and imperial British history.

The aim of this thesis is to develop a greater understanding of the everyday interactions between national parties, local politicians and ‘the people’ they sought to represent, within the framework of an in-depth local study. It will be argued that discourses in Tower Hamlets were not based upon assumptions of working-class aspiration, but the creation of relationships between politicians and those they sought to represent. Local political agency was in tune with the currents and counter currents of vocabularies attached to working-class identities and developed communal networks which stressed local concerns above national policy. Through this process political discourses assimilated working-class concerns and mediated them to resolve tension within their constituency and in Westminster. By placing working-class concerns at the forefront of electoral interface, this thesis aims to highlight the vibrant and contested nature of working-class politics in the late-Victorian and Edwardian period, arguing that the construction of local relationships was crucial to the popular appeal of national parties.

Turning away from traditional narratives focusing on political and economic analysis, the ‘new imperial history’, championed by historians such as Kathleen Wilson, Catherine Hall and John Mackenzie, instead prioritises cultural analysis.³ Through this field the pervasiveness and impact of the empire on the day to day lives of the British public has been reassessed, and emphasis has been placed on the cultural agency of actors outside the pantheon of traditional political players. This in turn has helped to open the door for the reassertion of empire into British history. However, the limitations of the field were

³ See, John Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of Public Opinion 1880 – 1960*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984

exposed with the challenge and methodological criticism laid down by Bernard Porter, who argued that there was in fact a 'variety of imperialisms' on show in the late Victorian period.⁴ Subsequently, Andrew S. Thompson argued for a more nuanced approach, concluding that knowledge of empire was pervasive among the public, but its 'appeal and meaning varied considerably'.⁵ Recently, developments in the field of British imperial history have witnessed a synergy between interdisciplinary fields; contextualising a history of consumption and political economy, analysing the growing trends of citizenship and leisure activities against a backdrop of rising imperial and national sentiment, as well as looking into political discourses and situating urban and suburban constituencies within the wider empire. Whilst these discourses have polarised the debate, a promising avenue of research presents itself in the form of focusing on history from below with an attempt to give agency to 'the indigenous people of the empire and the citizens of the imperial metropole'.⁶

The use of the term 'citizen' in this discourse is problematic, in that it was not a legal classification in itself during the period covered in this thesis. Daniel Gorman viewed the issue of imperial citizenship through a cultural lens, attributing the status of citizenship to an attempt to forge a common imperial identity.⁷ By the 1906 general election the theme of citizenship was increasingly incorporated into the language of imperial and metropolitan discourses, with local politicians referencing the sacrifices of 'citizen soldiers' in the aftermath of the Boer War and, Liberals in particular, referring to constituents as citizens. For scholars like Frank Trentman, citizenship was linked to consumption, with politicians

⁴ Bernard Porter. *The Absent Minded Imperialists*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004

⁵ Andrew S. Thompson. *The Empire Strikes Back?* Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2005. PP. 240 -1

⁶ John Mackenzie, "Comfort and Conviction: A Response to Bernard Porter". *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, vol. 36, 2008, Issue 4, PP.659 – 668

⁷ Daniel Gorman. *Imperial Citizenship: Empire and the Question of Belonging*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007

promising their constituents more goods and improved services in exchange for their support. In this sense electoral language bridged private interests with public responsibility, where a demand for consumer and citizen rights became part of the debate linked to empire and social reform.⁸ Finally, the issue of citizenship has been broached by historians looking into the nature of popular culture at the fin de siècle. Brad Beaven has argued that the late-Victorian period witnessed a turning point in the dissemination of the concept, turning from a series of rights based on status towards an adhesive entity connecting the individual and the state.⁹

Despite this turn towards top down cultural analysis, local studies continue to connote 'images of parochialism, obscurity and irrelevance'.¹⁰ However, recent historiographical trends in the field of 'new political history' have sought to prioritise the role of language and discourse in establishing the localised culture of political communities, as well as politician's authority to represent the public. Influential studies by Jon Lawrence, Mike Savage and Alex Windscheffel have stressed the importance of interactions between political rhetoric and working-class aspiration, with the latter two having begun to answer Lawrence's call for further analysis into how popular parties constructed a 'politics of everyday life'.¹¹ Drawing on the linguistic turn, historians like Windscheffel argued that political 'language needed to be continually restated and renewed, and party appeals to a

⁸ Frank Trentman, *Empire of Things*. Milton Keynes: Penguin Books. 2016. PP. 184, 356, 389, 680; *Free Trade Nation*. Oxford: Oxford University press, 2012, PP. 14 -15, 78

⁹ Brad Beaven, *Leisure, Citizenship and Working-Class men in Britain, 1850 – 1945*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005 [2009], P.8

¹⁰ Jonathan Healey, "Why Local History Matters" Oxford: Oxford University Lecture, 2012

¹¹ Jon Lawrence, *Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England, 1867 – 1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. P. 45; Mike Savage. *The Dynamics of Working-Class Politics: The Labour Movement in Preston, 1880 – 1940*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1987; Alex Windscheffel, *Popular Conservatism in Imperial London, 1886 – 1906*. Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2007

constantly changing electorate needed to be reformatted and reconfigured'.¹² Studies in high politics have been fascinated by how mainstream parties sought to develop popular appeal during this period, with Ewen Green describing the Edwardian period as time of crisis within the ranks of Conservatism. However, the revisionism of historians like Windscheffel and David Thackeray have acted as useful correctives here, stressing both the contingent and contested nature of electoral practices, as well as the importance of structural factors in establishing popular electoral appeal.¹³

On the other hand, this thesis also stakes the claim that cultural analysis alone is an inadequate method for ascertaining the relationship between politicians and their working-class constituents. There was a material reality to the linguistic construction of constituency networks and relationships, where an analysis of what was said, and by whom, needs to be contextualised against what was consumed, how time was spent and space transformed around local identities. The impact of the British Empire on the metropolis was reappraised upon the 'character of economic power and political authority' by Cain and Hopkins in their seminal work *British Imperialism*.¹⁴ More recently there has been an explosion in the studies of consumption, with Trentman arguing that the mobilisation of groups within society in the late-Victorian and Edwardian period had a greater impact on public politics than hitherto realised.¹⁵ Through engagement with emerging fields of historical analysis, this thesis aims to expand our knowledge of the relationship between individual politicians,

¹² David Thackeray, "Review of Windscheffel, *Popular Conservatism in Imperial London 1868 – 1906*" *H-Albion, H-Net Reviews*, June, 2008, <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=14569>

¹³ E. H. H. Green. *The Crisis of Conservatism*. Oxfordshire: Routledge, 1995 [1996]; David Thackeray, "Rethinking the Edwardian Crisis of Conservatism". Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, *Historical Journal*, Vol. 54, No. 1, 2011. PP. 191 – 213.

¹⁴ P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins. *British Imperialism, 1688 – 2000*. London: Pearson Education Limited, 2001

¹⁵ Trentman, *Free Trade Nation*, P. 14

the people they sought to represent and national parties, illuminating the uncertain, often violent and always contested nature of local politics at the turn of the 20th century.

This thesis is geographically situated in the East End of London, which consisted of eleven parliamentary constituencies, dominated by the Borough of Tower Hamlets, owing to the areas high working class demographics and the contested nature of its electoral practices. Whilst the phrase 'East End' was not pejoratively applied until the 1880s, the tradition of generalising the various constituencies as a 'homogenous region' can be traced back to John Strype's 1720 'Survey of the City of London', in which the city is divided into four parts and the area denoting the East End referred to as 'that part beyond the Tower'.¹⁶ For the purpose of this thesis, the spatial demarcation of Tower Hamlets shall be defined by that of the modern Borough of Tower Hamlets, comprising the likes of Bethnal Green and Poplar, which became separate Metropolitan Boroughs after the Local Government Act 1899, until reuniting with the Borough in 1965.¹⁷

A brief outline of the three general elections results in Tower Hamlet, from 1895 to 1906, emphasises why this period is crucial in our understanding of popular politics in the late-Victorian and Edwardian eras. In the 1895 general election the Conservative Party won six out nine seats in Tower Hamlets, with a 7.5 per cent swing from the Liberal Party and 52.4 per cent of the vote. In the 1900 election, commonly referred to as the 'khaki election', the Conservatives took seven seats with 55.1 per cent of the vote. The campaign was dominated by the issue of the South African War, 1899-1902, and the Conservatives gained

¹⁶ John Strype, *A Survey of the City of London*, Book II, Chapter 1. The part beyond the tower was comprised of St. Katherine's, East Smithfield, Wapping, Shadwell, Ratcliff, Limehouse, and so eastward to Blackwall.

¹⁷ This thesis will focus on nine constituencies: Bethnal Green North East, Bethnal Green South West, Bow and Bromley, Limehouse, Mile End, Poplar, St. George's-In-The-East, Whitechapel and Stepney.

a 5.6 per cent swing from the Liberals. The election of 1906 was dominated by the issue of free trade versus tariff reform, with the Liberals, championing the former, going on to win a landslide victory, taking eight seats, 58.3 per cent of the vote and gaining a 16.3 per cent swing from 1900.¹⁸

The candidates for Tower Hamlets were by and large local, through either birth or occupation in London. Of the candidates surveyed, three were born in the East End, all Liberals, namely: William Benn (Hackney), William Pearce and W.C. Steadman (Poplar). There were few instances of 'carpet beggars', candidates with no connection to the area, with a large portion of candidates having business links to the communities they sought to represent. Of the large local employers, Conservative candidates stand out prominently with Spencer Charrington owning Anchors Brewery, Mile End, the whisky distiller Thomas Dewar in St. George and William Bullivant in Poplar, the rope manufacturer. Conversely, the Progressive candidate for Limehouse, William Pearce, owned was a chemical manufacturer in Silvertown. The largest occupational groupings of the candidates were law, business and journalism, with the Conservative candidates Harry Marks, St. Georges, and Harry Levy-Lawson owning the Financial News and the Daily Telegraph respectively. Amongst the Lib-Lab candidates a higher proportion came from working-class and union backgrounds, notably George Lansbury and W.C. Steadman. The religious backgrounds of the candidates is proportionately representative of Tower Hamlets on the whole, with a larger than average concentration of candidates with Jewish heritage. The most notable example was the banker and philanthropist Samuel Montagu in Whitechapel, however Harry Samuel in Limehouse, Harry Marks and Bertram Straus in St. Georges, as well as Montagu's nephew Stuart Samuel all belonged to that faith. Whilst there was a small showing for Irish politicians, with Arthur Du Cros born in Dublin, there were no Irish

¹⁸ See Appendix 1 for detailed analysis.

political candidates of any note. The other candidates were of the established or free churches, with Charles Clarke in Mile End a strong Nonconformist. Whilst only a snap shot of the candidate's backgrounds, this overview signifies that the candidates for political office in Tower Hamlets had links to the communities and it will be seen how these were built upon to connect with constituents.

The nine constituencies focused on in this thesis had a total combined population of 596,986, comprising 13.26 per cent of the total population of London in 1901. Of this number, some 100,000, or 16.75 per cent of the East End population were Jewish, with 60,211, or roughly 10 per cent made up of Irish.¹⁹ Brodie has asserted 'of the 180,000 – 190,000 adult males employed in the East End, more than half were in occupations classified as skilled, professional, or trading/merchant', with only '55,000 classified as being in completely unskilled positions'.²⁰ Despite this, the majority living in Tower Hamlets were disenfranchised, either due to casual and low paid nature of work or as a result of migration out of areas. Davis and Tanner have shown that following the Reform Act 1867 and the 1878 Parliamentary and Registration Act many double and single room tenants could get onto the register.²¹ However, through a systematic study of electoral registers, Brodie has shown that your ability to gain access to the register depended more on your position as a tenant, stating that 'there was a significant under-representation of those male household heads living in separate dwellings of one or two rooms'.²² This suggests that regularity of decent paid work was the principal means by which to get onto the register, although landlords preference of collecting rent through a chief tenant, who was

¹⁹ Henry Pelling, *Social Geography of British Elections, 1885 – 1910*. London: Macmillan. 1967, P. 42; Guilia ni Dhulchaoitigh. *The Irish Population of London, 1900 – 1914: Connections and Disconnections*. Ph. D thesis, University of Dublin, 2013

²⁰ Marc Brodie. *Politics of the Poor*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004, P. 25

²¹ John Davis and Duncan Tanner, "Borough Franchise after 1867" *Historical Research*, Vol. 69. 2007

²² Brodie. *Politics of the Poor*. P. 54

usually then entered onto the register, further complicated the process. A detailed analysis of census returns and electoral registers is beyond the scope of this study. However, this overview will provide context for the subsequent discussion of how politicians sought to develop appeals to certain groups and how some appeals had more success in parts of the region than others.

This thesis will utilise a multiple-framed approach to analyse the language and discourses of local constituency politics at the fin de siècle. In the first chapter, structural factors, such as the political economy and patterns of local consumption, will be contextualised against candidate-electoral relationships to ascertain how we locate the working-classes and how they located themselves within the wider context of contemporary political discourses. The chapter will position Tower Hamlets within the broader imperial politics of the late-Victorian period, establishing the area and its inhabitants as a significant imperial contact zone. Viewing the origins of a national and civic identity within Tower Hamlets as a historical construction, layered over time through multifaceted connections and dialogues stretching time and space, Tower Hamlets is established as an important nexus between imperial and cultural politics. Within this context, the electoral discourses of the 1895 election are scrutinised to emphasise how political agency formulated a popular language to create relationships with working-class constituents. The theme of naval contracts is, for the first time, placed under the lens to show how politicians, particularly Conservatives, were in tune with local anxieties and stress the importance of structural factors in determining popular appeal.

In the second chapter, the assertion of political agency and creation of a broad social appeal will be scrutinised to determine the impact of local discourses and relationships on the electoral process. The national campaign, or 'Khaki Election', of 1900, and the

municipal elections of 1901, will be systematically reviewed to show how traditional fault lines were intersecting and an emphasis on place helped to reconstruct party image from the ground up. The relationship between the candidates and their parties will be scrutinised to illuminate the tensions within rank and file membership, as local politicians became as dependent on local relationships as they were with Westminster. Through an analysis of the dichotomy between general and local election results, it will be argued that the nature of politics in Tower Hamlets was contested and uncertain, creating a necessity for politicians to negotiate and reconstruct their identity, often in contrast to the boarder party mandate.

Chapters three and four use two critical moments during this period in British history as case studies to analyse how imperial concerns impacted relationships, electoral process and discourses in Tower Hamlets. The first of these flashpoints is the Boer War, often viewed as a litmus test for gauging working class imperial sentiment and regarded as the 'high point of what was known as the New Imperialism'.²³ This chapter will analyse how imperial concerns impacted on the construction of language and relationships between politicians and their constituents, whilst simultaneously asking what being an imperial citizen meant to the working classes of Tower Hamlets. Chapter three will begin a process of resituating Green's 'Crisis of Conservatism' thesis, arguing instead that both the Liberal and Conservative parties underwent a crisis of identity in the 1890s, and through climacteric episodes, such as the Boer War, were forced to adapt to the changing nature of constituency politics or face electoral oblivion. Chapter three will also make the first sustained effort to evaluate the place of President Kruger and Cecil Rhodes within the discourses of local politics, at a time of heightened anxiety and animation, to explore how

²³ V. B. Parkhouse. *Memorializing the Anglo - Boer war*. Leicester: Troubador Publishing, 2015, P. XIV

politicians and semi-political groups incorporated external imperial themes into the electoral process.

The second flashpoint will focus on the fiscal and political climacteric in the beginning of the twentieth century: the battle between free trade and tariff reform from 1903 to 1906. It will be shown that discourses surrounding tariff reform had a revitalising effect on ground level and national politics, as politicians redefined their electoral language and therefore the relationships which had been established throughout the period discussed. This chapter will focus on how politicians framed discourses to attract working-class votes at a time when community identity and culture was pivotal to establishing electoral prominence.

This thesis will place significance on the role of local political culture in the construction and direction of national and imperial policy, as well as the role that individual party agents played in shaping the future of popular party politics. Simultaneously, it will be shown that an agentic political culture was established in the working class borough of Tower Hamlets, and citizens of this important area were active in the construction of local networks and relationships.

Chapter One: Imperial politics of Tower Hamlets

Empire and identity

The modern history of the Borough of Tower Hamlets has proven to be fertile ground for researchers interested in social history, owing to the areas diverse and fluctuating demographics, topographical features and proximity to the Thames, as well as the areas severe poverty, high mortality rates and crime figures. But with the growth of interest in the New Imperial History, emphasising shifts in academic focus towards cultural analysis, the East End of London has proven to be just as rich a hunting ground for recovering the voices of working-class citizens at the turn of the nineteenth century. Whilst local history remains a somewhat colloquial field, recent literature from a cross disciplinary spectrum has shed light on the impact of empire on the quotidian lives of the inhabitants of the metropolis. A nuanced reading of Gareth Stedman Jones's *Outcast London*, a staple of class relations in Victorian metropolitan society, reveals pecuniary links to empire such as ship building, dock work and silk manufacturing. Subsequently, Schneer and Windscheffel have produced works expanding the dimensions of our understanding of the imperial metropolis and how ordinary citizens contributed to the discourses of imperial ideology. The development of social imperialism in liberal political thought is charted by Bernard Semmel in *Imperialism and Social Reform*, whilst Brodie and Windscheffel focus on popular imperialism and conservative electoral dominance. More pertinent to this chapter, the works of historians such as Frank Trentmann and Brad Beaven have illustrated how the political economy formed a cultural and commercial nexus to empire through the consumption of goods, interaction with space and the use of time to establish a more

vibrant imperial culture in late Victorian and Edwardian society.²⁴ This chapter will aim to add to the aforementioned literature by looking at how the citizens of Tower Hamlets perceived empire through political discourse and working patterns, the use of leisure and recreation and finally through consumption in everyday life.

The East End of London was synonymous with various adjectives, mostly pejorative. However, its most identifiable characteristic was also its most distinctive topographical feature, the docks. As a force of change, both cultural and economic, no entity had such a transformative effect on the region of London's East End as did the various dock yards, wharves and factories along the twenty-five miles stretch from London Bridge to Tilbury Docks in Essex. The construction of the London Docks in Wapping, completed in 1805, caused an exodus of intra-urban migration, acting as a catalyst for the expansion of districts such as Limehouse, Poplar and Blackwall, as over two thousand homes and businesses were demolished to accommodate the development.²⁵ As the nature of casual labour and the monetary position of many inhabitants of such constituencies required living in as close a proximity to potential employment as possible, naturally those displaced flocked to the neighbouring, affordable, areas. Whilst casual and unskilled labour dominated the employment patterns of constituencies such as Limehouse and Poplar, Tower Hamlets had a considerable concentration of artisan dwellers that were localised in constituencies such as Bethnal Green and Whitechapel. The largest group of sweated out-workers, were women, who were quite often the wives of out of work dock labourers, or dressmakers

²⁴ Bernard Semmel. *Imperialism and Social Reform*. New York: Anchor Books, 1968; Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971; Victoria Nead. *Victorian Babylon*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000; Jonathan Schnerer, *London 1900: The Imperial Metropolis*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001; Brodie, *Politics of the Poor*, 2004; Alex Windscheffel, *Popular Conservatism*. 2007; Brad Beaven, *Visions of Empire*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012', PP. 25-7; Trentmann, *Empire of Things*, 2016.

²⁵ Fiona Rule, *London Docklands: A History of the Lost Quarter*. Surrey: Ian Allen Publishing, 2009, PP. 196-7

formerly of the West End who had drifted 'away eastward'.²⁶ Civic identity can be argued to have been historically created through the specific milieu of the commercial and industrial layer of employment; the close proximity of various warehouses and docks, as well as the networks associated with out-workers, helped to engender a civic identity that was constructed through the layering of the boroughs diverse ethnic make-up, and the necessity to maintain trade and commerce. Tower Hamlets, then, acted as an area of agglomeration, where small firms could ill afford to relocate from the locality where 'ideas are created and technical services are available'.²⁷ Through large scale immigration into the area and the type of work so heavily dependent on empire and colonial trade, the citizens of Tower Hamlets came into daily contact with a variety of narratives, networks and discursive constructions of empire.

Whilst the docks of London were expanding in the early 19th century, simultaneous events in Europe were transpiring that would imbed within East London maritime culture a nationalistic ethos and sense of civic identity. Historians have argued that the Napoleonic Wars were central in the invention of the British Nation, which developed as sense of identity through opposition to international competition and aggression.²⁸ In the wake of the Battle of Trafalgar the country had to reconcile the loss of a national hero alongside the necessity of maintaining her rejuvenated naval and commercial supremacy. A poem in the Morning Chronicle shortly after the battle typifies the symbiosis between civic attachment and naval identity:

²⁶ Ibid, P. 171

²⁷ A. Marshal, *Principles of Economics*, 8th Edition, 1920, P. 271

²⁸ Linda Colley. *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1701 – 1837*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992; J. E. Cookson. *The British Armed Nation, 1793 – 1815*. Oxford: OUP Oxford. 1997.

‘When civil triumph led to regal power,
but patriotic valour scorns to know,
repose or pleasure in this public woe,
and feels that glory rightly understood,
guides but to one great end – its country’s good.’²⁹

In death Nelson was immortalised as a national symbol ‘fixed in the collective imagination as an authentic being who embodied enduring national characteristics’.³⁰ The legacy of Nelson as a maritime and national hero contributed to the reconfiguration of the metropolis along more imperial lines, with the construction of Trafalgar Square transcending notions of class, acting as both a national monument as well as a space for politically organised demonstration. Similarly, the merging of national identity with ubiquitous working class leisure activities can be noted in the growing popularity to honour fashionable heroes by naming public houses and roads after them. Throughout the Borough of Tower Hamlets, and the East End more generally, numerous public houses popped up displaying Nelson’s name and likeness above the door, such as the Lord Nelson on Robin Hood Lane, Poplar; The Lord Nelson, Commercial Road and The Victory Public House on Nelson Street, Bethnal Green.³¹ The fusion of commercial leisure and maritime civic culture is an important theme in the political economy of the East End, as the public house was not merely a space to relax and indulge, but an extension of the workplace. Whilst the consumption of alcohol has been a constant recreational habit for working-class men, its function has often been viewed as instant gratification, whereas John Benson has suggested traditional notions of consumption be expanded to incorporate saving and

²⁹ Morning Chronicle, Tuesday 26th November 1805

³⁰ Sheila Watson, ‘England Expects’: Nelson as a Symbol of Local and National Identity within the Museum’. University of Leicester, 2006, P. 131.

³¹ East London Observer, 13th April 1861; 6th May 1893; 22nd July 1893

investment.³² It can be said that nationalistic and militaristic events ran concurrently with the burgeoning development of the commercial and engineering capabilities of The Tower Hamlets, against a backdrop of large movements of immigration to the borough. This layering of civic identity over time wedded the local economy to both maritime and imperial culture.

Local economy and political agency

Dock labourers of Tower Hamlets seem to have been adept at petitioning the state for improved conditions in the late nineteenth century. Conversely, electoral candidates, almost exclusively on the right, appear to have been as perceptive to the call to revitalise the London Docks, shedding light on the duality of working-class agency in the period. Research into both local concerns and electoral addresses highlight the prevalence of calls to award naval contracts to the Thames shipyards, with discourses from employees and employers alike, as well as politicians, using imperial and nationalistic rhetoric to press the state for a larger share of admiralty contracts.

Out of the eleven constituencies comprising the area of Tower Hamlets, nine of them were Liberal seats prior to the general election of 1895, with constituencies like Sydney Buxton's Poplar, James Stuart's Hoxton and Samuel Montague's Whitechapel being seen as assuredly safe seats. Whilst the three safe liberal seats mentioned above survived the electoral onslaught, both Buxton and Stuart had their majorities slashed and in the aftermath of the 1895 election, Tower Hamlets was left with only four remaining Liberal

³² John Benson, "Working-Class Consumption, Saving and Investment in England and Wales, 1851 – 1911". *Journal of Design History*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 1996, P. 87. Whilst it cannot be denied that drinking was a favourite pastime, among any class and enjoyed by both sexes, the socio-economic necessity of drinking for dock labourers was paramount to ensuring they had employment the next day.

seats. The historiography is rich with explanations for the Unionist landslide in the East End of London in 1895, which will be discussed in the next chapter. However, a sustained focus on the important local issue of naval contracts, especially in boroughs like Limehouse, Stepney and Poplar has not yet been undertaken. The election year of 1895 was unique in the sense that both the London County Council and the Parliamentary elections were held in the same year, supporting the contemporary views that the municipal election would be an indicator of parliamentary results, as well as that both elections were fought along distinctly party lines. In the matter of municipal politics as an indicator for parliamentary results, the local elections of 1895 did see the Moderates make significant gains in working-class areas.³³ Whilst election discourses generally ran along the same lines, the matter of naval contracts for the Thames appears to have been viewed as a strictly imperial affair, playing little role in the municipal elections. This makes the question of its omission from progressive and, extraordinarily, Liberal campaigns perplexing and requires exploration.

The Progressive led LCC had run into scandal as recently as 1888 over the awarding of contracts, concerning the building of transport for the Woolwich Free Ferry, to northern firms, instead of those on the Thames. In what became known as the Woolwich Ferry Scandal, the original handing of contracts to Sir William Armstrong & co., a manufacturing company based on the Tyne, were, after a protracted period, rescinded owing to the latter's refusal to ensure union rates of wages and hours. Local papers pressed the case that 'all public men in East London' should push the claim for the 'construction of ferry boats locally'.³⁴ The contracts were given to R & H Green of Blackwall Yard and the two ferries produced in 1888 were named after local heroes with imperial links, the Gordon and

³³John Davis. "The Progressive Council, 1889 – 1907", in Andrew Saint (ed.) *Politics and People of London*. London and Ronceverte: The Hambledon Press, 1989, P. 41

³⁴East London Observer, Saturday 25th February 1888

the Duncan. The opening of the Woolwich Free Ferry by Lord Rosebery on 23rd March 1889 gave the impression of a gala day, with streets leading to the pier being 'profusely decorated; flags floated on streamers' and 'thousands thronged the thoroughfares'.³⁵ David Feldman has argued that 'coalescence between imperialist discourse and the peculiar social and economic configuration of the East End' fused with homologous arguments against the 'awarding of naval contracts to foreign firms'.³⁶ The Woolwich Scandal highlights local opposition to ship building work being undertaken by firms outside of the East End and how local patriotism, civic pride and imperial ethos were utilised to strengthen working-class demands in securing their aims.

If the working classes of Tower Hamlets felt a renewed sense of civic pride in their shipyards, it would appear this was lost on the political organisation of the Liberal Party up to the election of 1895. In a remarkable twist of events, the Liberal Members of Parliament and candidates for the constituencies of Tower Hamlets neglected to acknowledge the question of naval contracts in their election addresses, and subsequent research has turned up only two Liberal MPs who gave the topic serious attention, namely Buxton and John Colomb (Bow and Bromley, 1886 – 1892). A cause for Liberal silence on matters of local imperial defence can be seen in the contrast between the imperial policies of the Conservative and Liberal parties in the lead up to the 1895 election. The Liberal Party, heavily influenced by Gladstonian Liberalism, was committed to limiting government expenditure and in matters of imperial defence had advocated the policy of colonial self-defence, which Gladstone had encouraged since the 1860s.³⁷ The reconsideration in 1893 of the 1889 naval estimates proved to be the crisis that pushed Gladstone to resign in 1894, seeing the swollen estimates as an 'armaments race, of imperialism, of a Europe in the grip

³⁵ London Daily News, Monday 25th March 1889

³⁶ David Feldman. *Englishmen and Jews*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press. 1994. P. 276 – 81

³⁷ Paul Knaplund. *Gladstone and Britain's Imperial Policy*. London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1966, P. 88

of militarism and power-politics'.³⁸ The threat of European militarism was, however, generating great anxiety within parliament and in public. France, hostile on account of Egypt, had been developing a new naval school of thought – The Jeune École – which sought to 'produce economic panic by stampeding interest rates' and in 1894 signed an alliance with Russia, with whom tensions were already high concerning disputes in Central Asia.³⁹ The introduction of Rosebery as Prime Minister in 1894 did not help ease tensions with France. A prominent criticism of Gladstone and the Liberals was their perceived neglect of the empire. Unionist leaflets from the period attack Liberal inertia and tap into public anxieties, with one leaflet dated 1894 quoting the French Admiral Pothau as saying, 'Our aim would be to pursue the 50,000 merchant ships which are continually transporting the wealth the England over the watery plain'. The same pamphlet attacks Gladstone for 'keeping the navy weak' and further states that, 'never was employment more sorely needed than last year and now...but the government did nothing'.⁴⁰ The Conservative Party under Lord Salisbury could point to the passing of the Naval Defence Act 1889, which established the two power standard, effectively locking Great Britain into a naval arms race with France and Russia. At the same time, public agitation was being whipped up through the efforts of the extra parliamentary pressure group The Navy League, formed in 1895, which 'disseminated school maps splashed with red ink and crammed full of facts about the empire's economic worth'.⁴¹ It can then be argued that the failure of the Liberals to capitalise on the naval question lies on the one hand with the policy of reducing naval expenditure and implementing a more moral foreign policy, and on the other with an aggressive and organised Conservative campaign that moved the Liberals to the periphery

³⁸ Richard Shannon. *The Crisis of Imperialism: 1865 – 1915*. London: Hart-Davis, MacGibbon Ltd, 1974 P. 266

³⁹ Ibid, P. 261

⁴⁰ LSE Library, Selected Pamphlets 1889 [leaflets on imperial defence], 'Absolute supremacy of the British Navy at Sea', 1894.

⁴¹ Thompson. *The Empire Strikes Back?* 2005, P. 113

of the debate regarding imperial defence. This carried significant implications for the local economies of working-class constituencies in the Tower Hamlets.

An analysis of local discourses reveals the levels of frustration with local Members of Parliament for perceived apathy on behalf of the hard pressed constituents, whose livelihoods depend on a thriving network of docks. A prophetic warning was printed in the East London Observer scarcely a month prior to the election, stating 'The East End members of Parliament, and especially those who belong to the Liberal Party, and who represent seats on which determined attacks are being made, are throwing away golden opportunities'.⁴² A seemingly decisive point of those determined attacks on Liberal seats concerns the pledge to obtain for the people of Tower Hamlets naval contracts, combining the Conservative rhetoric of imperial defence with local issues concerning both citizenship and political economy. In Limehouse, Harry S. Samuel contested the seat for the Conservative Party, having narrowly lost the 1892 contest, having only been before the constituency for a few months prior to polling. Having retired from the firm of Montefiore and Company, who acted as stockbrokers for wealthy clients including the Rothschild family, Samuel was independently wealthy by the time he was adopted as the Unionist candidate and got to work nursing the constituency. In Samuel's 1895 election address he pledged to 'endeavour to obtain for the working men of the East End of London a fair share of Navy and army contract work', and continuing, 'I would strongly support measures that would encourage and stimulate trade and industry in East London'.⁴³ In contrast, Samuel's Liberal opponent, W. M. Thompson endorsed The Newcastle Programme to the letter, advocating national rather than local policies such as Home Rule for Ireland and the disestablishment of the Welsh Church. When Thompson mentioned London matters, they

⁴² East London Observer, Saturday 22 June 1895, P. 5

⁴³ BUL, Election address, Limehouse, 1895

were broad principles that were not localised to the political economy of Limehouse, and there was no mention of naval contracts. Samuel's position was undoubtedly strengthened by the late retirement of the Labour candidate, J. C. Scott, who issued a statement appealing to electors to 'either vote against the Radical candidate or abstain'.⁴⁴

In St George, The Conservative candidate, Harry Marks, had the distinction of being elected to both the LCC and Parliament in 1895. Similar to Samuel, Marks' states, 'I am in favour of giving to East London a fair share of the shipbuilding contracts ...with equitable compensation for the watermen and others effected'.⁴⁵ Marks had established himself as a popular local figure from 1892 when he advised the watermen during the Union Stairs Grievance, where the Limehouse Board of Works closed the Union steps for repair work and were subsequently out of work for the duration. Marks' Liberal opponent was the popular and local sitting Member, John Benn, who was active during the Great Dock Strike of 1889. Bucking the Liberal trend, Benn failed to reference naval contracts in his election address and revealingly lost the election by the whisker of eleven votes. Marks' victory was tarred with accusations of electoral fraud and a local petition, however the case was dismissed. In Stepney, the long standing Conservative Member of Parliament Frederick Isaacson gave a similar pledge to Marks, supporting the giving to East London its fair share of shipping and other government contracts. Prior to the election Isaacson introduced the controversial Watermen and Lighterman's Bill, which purpose was to deal with the privilege of the Waterman's Company. The Liberal argument against the bill was that it was introduced as revenge for the involvement of the watermen and lightermen in the Great Dock Strike of 1889. The bill was modelled on one introduced by Joseph Chamberlain in 1881, who silenced Liberal criticism during a House of Commons debate when he said,

⁴⁴ Morning Post, Friday 12th July 1895, P. 2

⁴⁵ BUL, Election Address, St. George, 1895

'...For Liberals, even those who belong to the extreme radical branch, are actually defending things which, I had imagined were abhorrent to their principles – defending, in fact, a close monopoly...'.⁴⁶ His Liberal opponent, Willoughby Dickinson, Vice-Chairman of the LCC, ran on a radical platform advocating various London reforms, as well as 'Justice for Ireland and Wales' but made no specific mention of the docks. Isaacson won the seat with a majority of 470 votes.⁴⁷

The largest constituency in Tower Hamlets was Bow and Bromley, whose sitting Member of Parliament, the Liberal John Macdonald, was contested by the Conservative Lionel Holland, brother of Sydney Holland, chairman of the East and West India Dock Company. Holland's address for the 1895 election draws mention to government contracts for English labour as well as a strong navy and united empire, however the prevailing feeling was that the late government's failure to award any ship building contracts to firms on the Thames would 'secure many votes from the industrious classes'.⁴⁸ Holland would win the seat by a majority of 1,161 votes, which would lead Macdonald to assert that wealth won the election, as 'Holland spent nearly three times as much as his unsuccessful opponent... and further point out that Mr Holland spent nearly £200 more than any other candidate in the Tower Hamlets'.⁴⁹

An exception to the trend of conservative discourses on naval defence and victory can be found in the borough of Poplar, where Sydney Buxton overcame a determined contest from the Conservative William Pelham Bullivant. Whilst explaining to his constituents that

⁴⁶ Hansard, HC debate 6th March 1890, vol. 342, cc107-15, '*Thames Watermen and Lightermen Bill*'

⁴⁷ East London Observer, Saturday 13th July 1895, P. 5

⁴⁸ London Evening Standard, Friday 12th July 1895, P. 2

⁴⁹ East London Observer, Saturday 7th September 1895, P. 5

the shipping industry had left the Thames because the iron and coal were more conveniently situated for the northern dockyards than for London, Buxton acknowledged that 'the government could not give, being the trustees of the public purse, the work to the highest priced contracts'. However, he also complained that 'the work of the London dockyards was the finest in the world' and that the Thames had a just claim to a fair share of government contracts.⁵⁰ At a public meeting held in Poplar in June 1895 to discuss the issue of naval contracts, Buxton's name was hissed when announced as an absentee, and one speaker suggested, 'As workmen they ought to consider bread and butter politics, when Sydney Buxton and other M.P.'s came to them for their vote'. The speaker continued, 'Let them tell all the Conservative and Liberal M.P.'s for East London to look out, or they wouldn't get their votes at the next election'.⁵¹ Whilst Buxton appears to have been the focal point for local frustration, owing in no small part to his standing as a Liberal stalwart and position within the administration, he maintained a more favourable image than most other East End Liberals, excepting Samuel in Whitechapel. Buxton's Conservative opponent, Bullivant, made naval contracts for Poplar one of the central points of his campaign, and cut Buxton's majority from 2,032 to 829, which as a standalone result is a landslide, but in context the safe seat of Poplar had become a battleground.

The situation in Poplar highlights the obstacles Liberals faced in securing re-election in the way of radical and labour opposition, as can be seen in the formation of the Joint Committees of the London Shipbuilding and Engineering Industries. In July 1895, Goschen refused to entertain a deputation from the committee. However when Sydney Buxton wrote to them expressing willingness to meet, the Committee 'decided to ignore his

⁵⁰ East London Observer, Saturday 22nd June 1895, P. 6

⁵¹ Ibid, P.6

letter'.⁵² The same committee issued a manifesto in the lead up the election declaring that that the shipbuilding and engineering industries of the Thames have 'received their death blow at the hands of a government which professed to have so much sympathy for the worker'.⁵³ The manifesto of the Independent Labour Party calls on workers to abstain from voting in all but twenty-nine constituencies, arguing that whilst the conservatives are the 'defender of property, monopoly and privilege', the Liberal Party is accused of the same 'contemptuous neglect of vital issues'.⁵⁴ Working-class suspicion as to the nature of the awarding of naval contracts naturally fell upon the usual suspects of monopolists and shareholders. A notable criticism was that the Duke of Devonshire, as a director of the Barrow Shipbuilding Company, influenced the cabinet, whilst Campbell-Bannerman was a shareholder of the Fairfield Shipbuilding Company.⁵⁵ Trade Unionists, such as Ben Tillet, encapsulated the prevalent mood among the working classes of Tower Hamlets, stating in a speech at Spring Gardens, 'The Thames is a grand river and considering it flows through the heart of the greatest city of the greatest empire ever known, the best use has not been made of its physical advantages'.⁵⁶ Similarly, employers such as A. F. Hills, chairman of the Thames Ironworks and Shipbuilding Company, pointed out that, 'a considerable proportion of the money necessary for the execution of the new Naval Programme will be raised from the taxpayers of London' and argues for a fairer distribution of contracts. Whilst it was in his companies interest to get those contracts, the company's directors 'voluntarily agreed to forego for the next four years all possibility of profits, for the sake of finding more work for their men'.⁵⁷

⁵² London Evening Standard, Tuesday 16th July 1895

⁵³ London Evening Standard, Friday 12th July 1895, P. 2

⁵⁴ Ibid, P. 2

⁵⁵ East London Observer, Saturday 22nd June 1895, P. 6

⁵⁶ East London Observer, Saturday 28th March 1896

⁵⁷ East London Observer, Saturday 7th July 1894, P. 5

The working men of the East End were equally as perceptive to the link between the docks and prosperity and it can be seen through the adoption of nationalist and civic discourse that the working class petitioned local elites along such lines. One such letter to the local paper argued that if the price of a war ship was more expense on the Thames, the country received value for its money 'by the preservation of an industry, which in time of national danger, would, as a repairing station, be of inestimable public and imperial advantage'.⁵⁸ Whilst the local Members of Parliament petitioned the admiralty for contracts after the 1895 election, the response they received from Goschen was that contracts on the Thames were too expensive and he would be 'asking the inland counties, where men were working for 16s. a week to support men in an attempt to keep wages up to 40s.' However, the First Lord of the Admiralty did acknowledge that 'no one could stand before an East End constituency unless he pledged himself to obtain ship building work for the Thames'.⁵⁹

Overall, it is apparent that the importance of naval contracts as a local issue at the election of 1895 has been overlooked by historians. Whilst Liberals like Buxton had their majorities curtailed, Unionists such as Isaacson, Samuel and Holland increased their majorities by 470, 590 and 1,161 votes respectively. Whereas, in St. George's, Marks' narrow majority of eleven votes emphasises the Conservatives attention to local issues and the success of their defence orientated approach to civic issues. Stedman Jones argued that the nature of the casual labour market made it difficult to envisage a collective loyalty in the East End and further stated that areas such Tower Hamlets were 'easy targets for corrupt Conservative electioneering'.⁶⁰ Contrary to this view, the issue of naval contracts tapped into a local consciousness that transcended class boundaries by uniting master and labourer behind a

⁵⁸ East London Observer, Saturday 14th December 1895

⁵⁹ East London Observer, Saturday 21st March 1896

⁶⁰ Stedman Jones. *Outcast London*, P. 344

common goal. Conversely, Brodie has argued that due to the high rate of residential mobility, with twenty to thirty per cent of voters having been predicted to have moved before an election, as well as patterns of irregular employment, there were a small number of poor amongst the working-class voters.⁶¹ This, however, does not seem to hold water in relation to the ship building industry on the Thames, whose workforce would have primarily consisted of the regularly employed, artisan and labour aristocracy variety. A case in point would be the Thames Ironworks and Shipbuilding Company, who employed 4,000 men in 1897, consisting of civil engineers, clerks and carpenters, amongst labourers, foremen and foundry workers. Additionally, the company's recent history of industrial unrest highlights the solidarity Thames Ironworkers had with other distressed industries on the Thames, making it likely that any issue concerning the prosperity of trade on the Thames would have gained enthusiastic support amongst the skilled and unskilled alike.

Empire and working-class culture

Whilst the docks played a vital role in the creation of relationships between the working classes and politicians, they also played an important role in forming local identity through what Peter Bailey has called the development of a pluralist culture. Bailey asserts that leisure became more atomised as consumers gave more meaning to what they choose to take part in, 'shifting thresholds of inclusion, exclusion, identity and class'.⁶² Other historians have argued that leisure and sport, in particular football, inculcated a sense of 'symbolic citizenship' through which gendered notions of place were constructed.⁶³ Brad

⁶¹ Brodie, *The Politics of the Poor*. 2004, PP. 70, 75

⁶² Peter Bailey, "The Politics and Poetics of Modern British Leisure: A Late Twentieth Century Review". *Rethinking History*, 3, 2, 1999, PP. 131 – 175, P. 158

⁶³ See, Richard Holt, *Sport and the British: A Modern History*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990, P154; J. Hill. *Sports, Leisure and Culture in Twentieth Century Britain*. London: Palgrave, 2002; Taylor. *The Association Game: A History of British Football*, London: Routledge, 2008.

Beaven has argued that male leisure became enmeshed with the 'diffusion of political and civic principles' and notes that contemporary social reformers viewed 'social citizenship as an activity that obliged the individual to engage in public spiritedness and carry out wider social and civic duties'.⁶⁴ The East End docks present a link in the chain of such thought, providing fertile grounds for engagement in both leisure activities and civic duties that embedded within the people of Tower Hamlets a sense of imperial pride.

One such leisure activity that linked working-class competition and nationalism with the reformative qualities of civic duty and recreation was the growth of swimming and lifesaving clubs. The successful cross channel swim of Captain Webb in 1875 generated popular enthusiasm for the sport and soon municipal 'provision of swimming baths was a feature of the urban landscape'. Amendments to the Baths and Washhouses Act in 1878, gave local authorities the power to purchase or build indoor swimming baths and in 'centres of population of 50,000 to 100,000 inhabitants every city or town ... had bathing facilities' prior to the First World War.⁶⁵ The London and India Docks Swimming Club, established in the mid-1890s, held its first annual gala on the Thames in 1895, showcasing a number of races and life-saving displays, whilst accompanied by a military brass band. Two years later the Life Saving Society organised a swimming fete at the West India Docks, where an enthusiastic welcome was given to the Duke and Duchess of York and in honour of the occasion, 'warehouses and other buildings in the neighbourhood hung out flags, and the vessels in the dock made a liberal display of bunting'.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Brad Beaven. *Leisure, Citizenship and Working-Class Men in Britain, 1850 – 1945*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005, pp. 1, 8; H. Meller (ed.), *The Ideal City*, Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1999, p. 58

⁶⁵ Christopher Love, *A Social History of Swimming in England 1800 -1918: Splashing in the Serpentine*. London and New York: Routledge, 2008, p. 59

⁶⁶ St. James's Gazette, Monday 5th July 1897

The navy had played an important part in the manufacture of the maritime culture of the East End; however, its significance as a national signifier and precursor of social change was taking on a new dimension by the 1890s. The sinking of the HMS Victoria in 1887 caused a public sensation when it was reported that a great number of those sailors who perished in the collision drowned because they did not know how to swim. At a House of Lords debate in 1893 The Earl of Meath called on the First Lord of the Admiralty, Earl Spencer, to ensure that it was the 'duty of the government to see that every man in the army and navy knew how to swim'.⁶⁷ Following the sinking renewed efforts were made to inculcate a culture of civic responsibility through life preservation as well as to improve the physical and sanitary standards of the inhabitants of London's East End. At the annual competition of the Poplar School Girl's Swimming Club in 1895, held at the Poplar Baths in front of a 'numerous and enthusiastic crowd', a feature of the evening was an exhibition given by the lifesaving team of the London and India Docks. At the close of the evening the chairman remarked as to the 'progress and usefulness of the club, congratulating the parents and children upon the fact that so much trouble was taken by teachers and others to encourage this useful art'.⁶⁸ There was a concerted effort to raise swimming beyond that of a competitive sport and the fact swimming was less gendered and more inclusive than other sports highlights the desire to connect the maritime culture of the East End within a broader sense of civic identity. On Trafalgar Day in 1896, a local paper reported on the strong representation of the East End by the People's Palace Swimming Club, when passing 'Nelson's column in their brake, 'England expects that every man shall do this duty' was given with good effect, much to surprise ... of the numerous crowd in Trafalgar-Square'.⁶⁹ The scene painted in this account would appear to contradict Porter's observation that 'turnouts for other patriotic

⁶⁷ Hansard, HL Deb, 31st July 1893, Vol. 15, cc826 - 4

⁶⁸ East London Observer, Saturday 19th October 1895, P. 6

⁶⁹ East London Observer, Saturday 31st October 1896, P. 3

celebrations in peacetime ... tended to be disappointing' and stress that national crises were not a prerequisite for civic celebration.⁷⁰ Actions such as those of the People's Palace Swimming Club highlight not only the militaristic and national strands of identity woven into the makeup of East Londoners, but more tellingly, their performance of such rituals in public spaces emphasise their desire to showcase their patriotism and strong naval connection. Swimming events increasingly came to symbolise the localities' accomplishments and patriotic links to the state, evidenced through the patronage of royalty, patriotic anthems and extravagant celebrations that drew large crowds. For local politicians the growth of swimming clubs went hand in hand with the rhetoric of new imperialism. Emphasis on improving the physical and sanitary conditions of Britain's 'stock' whilst simultaneously encouraging a humanitarian element through the promotion of life saving clubs, set against the background of national and civic responsibility to improve the navy and safeguard dockworkers. Samuel in Whitechapel commented that in his younger days the working classes were 'contemptuously called the "great unwashed"', however as the number of swimming clubs grew in East London 'greater attention was paid to bathing and swimming' than in other parts of London.⁷¹

Whilst leisure and sporting societies were successful in fostering social citizenship and national identity, Beaven has argued that the attempts to use libraries and museums as a way to enact social reforms to inculcate a civilised culture in the heart of East End communities, did not prove to be a success. The failure of combining recreation and learning is portrayed through the demise of the People's Palace, which had been reduced to a 'polytechnic with an emphasis on dry academic learning' by the mid-1890s.⁷² On the

⁷⁰ Porter. *Absent Minded*, P. 195

⁷¹ East London Observer, Saturday 29th September 1894, P. 6

⁷² Beaven. *Leisure*, P. 31

other hand, locally organised exhibitions that showcased the localities industry, accomplishments and links to empire were a popular attraction and often an occasion of celebration and excitement. The East End Trades, Industries and Arts Exhibition of 1896, inaugurated by the Prince and Princess of Wales at the very same People's Palace, was one such occasion. The central façade of the London Hospital had been 'draped in crimson and gold, and from the top of the building floated the royal standard' and 'the Trinity Almshouses fittingly fluttered with the signal flags of the Mercantile Marine'.⁷³ Local elites such as Members of Parliament for Tower Hamlets, including Buxton, Isaacson and Charrington, as well as members of the LCC such as Steadman, and religious leaders like Chief Rabbi Dr Adler and Cardinal Vaughan, Bishop of Stepney were present. The Prince of Wales was particularly popular at the time, fresh from victory at the Epsom Derby, and the largest cheers of the day came when the victory of his horse Persimmon was referenced, as the Palace's chairman noted of the 'spontaneous outburst of loyal enthusiasm which sprung from the deep-rooted affection of an united people'.⁷⁴ When the Prince addressed the crowd he acknowledged that the industries of the East End had 'of late had a hard struggle to hold on to their own in the march of industrial enterprise, a notable instance being the silk industry'.⁷⁵ This was not the first time royalty had publicly lamented the fall of the Silk industry, with Queen Victoria noting that weaving had become another term for starvation in 1861, however the industry was represented in the exhibition, indicating a continuation of it in areas like Bethnal Green and Spitalfields.⁷⁶ Perhaps the most popular exhibit on display was that of the Thames Iron and Ship Building Company and the Prince received

⁷³ East London Observer, Saturday 13th June 1896, P. 5

⁷⁴ Ibid, P. 5

⁷⁵ Ibid, P. 5

⁷⁶ H. Kean and Bruce Wheeler, "Making History in Bethnal Green: Different Stories of Nineteenth Century Silk Weavers".

History Workshop Journal, Issue 56, 2003, PP. 217 – 230, p. 218

loud cheers when he referenced the importance of work being given in this connection in a thickly populated district, a reference to naval contracts.

Consumption patterns in Tower Hamlets

The exhibition showcased the more conspicuous forms of consumption in the East End and a review of the stalls and exhibits paint a picture of an imperial-commercial nexus. The firms of Messer's Warner and Sons, and J. H. Buckingham and Co. exhibited creative silks, imported from Kashmir and India and in the cookery group the local press reported that 'there is only one local firm, the others being foreign'.⁷⁷ Whilst a distinction between local exhibitions that showcased commercial links to empire and larger imperially themed exhibits, such as the Empire of India Exhibitions in 1895 can be drawn, The East End Exhibition similarly created what Andrew Thacker has labelled a 'visual contact zone' which 'mediated the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical conjunctures'.⁷⁸ The exhibiting of exotic foods and fashionable silks, along with the teleological narrative that denotes the technical superiority of Tower Hamlets' ship builders and the royal and sporting fetishism displayed by the thousands of spectators all point towards a civic ethos weaved with patriotic and imperial thread. This exhibition was also a trade fair, the exotic goods were not simply there to be viewed but consumed and as such the exhibits funnelled visitor's curiosity of places of imperial pilgrimage to 'the commodity fetish', merging perceptions of empire, with the pleasures of purchasing.⁷⁹ Nupur Chaudhuri has advocated a centripetal reading of the role of imperialism in British social history and stressed the importance of a closer look at the role

⁷⁷ East London Observer, Saturday 13th June 1896, P. 5

⁷⁸ Andrew Thacker. "Mad after Foreign Notions": Ezra Pound, Imagism and the Geography of the Orient" P. 31-42. In P. Brooker and A. Thacker (ed.) *Geographies of Modernism: Literature, Cultures, Spaces*. London and New York: Routledge, 2005

⁷⁹ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*. H. Eiland and K. McLaughlin (Trans). 1999. Quoted in G. Phillips, "Structures of Irony: Curiosity and Fetishism in Late Imperial London", *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, Vol. 44, No. 3, 2011, PP. 424 – 443, P. 426

women played in creating an imperial world view.⁸⁰ The allocation of house hold budgets in working-class families was typically the responsibility of women; through this agency we can detect the domestication of exotic foodways, into the family diet. Whilst the 'memsahib' rejected orientalism in the colonies, Indian fashion and cuisine was assimilated into British home culture. As early as 1857, in a poem called the 'poetical cookery-book' in Punch, localised and working-class tastes for curry were apparent:

'Beef, mutton, rabbit, if you wish
Lobsters, or prawns, or any kind of fish,
are fine to make a curry. Tis, when done
A dish for emperors to feed upon'⁸¹

Although in the 1890s recipes for Indian cuisine were more common in female magazines, a number of local and regional papers would regularly print Indian recipes, due to the ingredients being both inexpensive and diverse it made it an ideal dish for working-class families.

Whilst the people of Tower Hamlets came into contact with empire in their everyday lives through patterns of employment, political discourses and through leisure time, it is apparent that the most conspicuous means in which empire was perceived was through consumption. Exhibitions emphasise the assimilation of colonial products into British culture but they also shine light on the patterns of consumption at the fin de siècle. The late nineteenth century saw the cultural balance of power shifting, as commercialism transformed recreational habits, and a rise in disposable income led to higher purchasing power, therefore changing the ways in which consumers spent their free time. On the contrary, it has proven difficult to ascertain to what extent the working classes of Tower

⁸⁰ Nupur Chaudhuri. "Shawls, Jewellery, Curry, and Rice in Victorian Britain". PP. 231 – 246, P. 231, in Chaudhuri and Strobel (Ed) *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance*, Indiana University Press, 1992.

⁸¹ Quoted in, Susan Zlotnick, "Domesticating Imperialism: Curry and Cookbooks in Victorian England". *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 2/3, 1996, PP. 51 - 68

Hamlets shared in the newly acquired autonomy and influence of the middle and lower middle classes. The Bank Holiday Act 1871 and subsequent Holidays Extension Act 1875 helped to give rise to a commercial leisure market that targeted the lower-middle and working-classes.⁸² Nonetheless, popular day excursions to seaside resorts were beyond the means of the average Tower Hamlets' family budget and were mainly the reserve of the middle class. Despite this, establishments offering what became known as 'low culture' sprung up all over the East End, in particular the popular music halls. Venues like the Paragon, on Mile End Road, would charge for admission from 6d in 1897, consistent to the venues costing in 1878, which maintains Penny Summerfield's observation about the socially heterogeneous make up of East End clientele.⁸³

Furthermore, whilst analysis of the content of music halls emphasises the 'spectacle of empire to a generation for whom leisure and entertainment were becoming more widely available... what the empire meant cannot simply be read from the words of a music hall song...'.⁸⁴ The music halls generally reflected popular and local trends and owing to the diversity of acts on any given play bill it is questionable how accurate any claim to imperial partiality can be, considering the lack of other outlets for recreation available. On the other hand, the architecture of music halls not only helps us to visualise appealing popular aesthetics and design trends of the period, but also how an imperial themed visage was perceived to both conform to standards and aid the cultural construction of identity. The Paragon was designed by renowned theatre architect Frank Matcham, who redecorated the venue in 1893 with the intention of 'bringing the Paragon up to date'. Through this

⁸² Stipulating that should Christmas fall on a Sunday, the Monday and Tuesday following shall be a bank holiday.

⁸³ London and Provincial Ent'acte, Saturday 26th June 1897, P. 3; Penny Summerfield, "Patriotism and Empire" P. 23, in Mackenzie (ed), *Imperialism and Popular Culture*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986

⁸⁴ Thompson. *Empire*, P. 83

process the auditorium was given a distinct oriental appearance, with the large domed ceiling 'cleverly treated with by the introduction of dancing Moorish figures holding aloft rich Indian draperies'.⁸⁵ At the end of the nineteenth century, contemporary metropolitan architecture was heavily influenced by the likes of William Emerson, president of the Royal Institute of British Architects, who called for architecture to 'reflect Britain's imperial grandeur', an appeal which found support in reformers who observed that the human geography of London was inadequate to its 'role as an imperial city'.⁸⁶ It appears that by the turn of the century, Ruskin's notion of surrounding men with happy influences and beautiful things was replaced with a neo-baroque style, symbolising status and authority over pleasure and beauty.

Signifiers of colonial commerce and empire were abundant in late Victorian culture, as can be seen through advertising, which Anandi Ramamurthy has labelled the 'cultural representation of imperialism'.⁸⁷ As with music halls, historians have invested time and energy, into analysing how conspicuous articles within consumer culture have helped to argue for an imperialist character, which was inherent within late Victorian working-class culture. Articles such as sugar, coffee and cocoa became ubiquitous in working-class diets, with sugar contributing on average 'nearly one-sixth of per-capita caloric intake' by 1900.⁸⁸ Similarly, Steven Topik has noted that by 1900 coffee had become a vital component of

⁸⁵ ERA, 5th August 1893

⁸⁶ Schneer. *London 1900*. P. 24; Tori Smith, "A Grand Work of Noble Conception: The Victoria Memorial and Imperial London" PP. 21 – 40, P. 21 in Driver and Gilbert (ed.), *Imperial Cities*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999.

⁸⁷ Anandi Ramamurthy, *Imperial Persuaders: Images of Africa and Asia in British Advertising*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003, P. 11

⁸⁸ Sidney W. Mintz. *Sweetness and Power*. New York: Penguin Books, 1985, P. 149

daily routines, so much so that it became 'income inelastic', as coffee purchases grew proportionally faster than income.⁸⁹

Working-class recollections, such as Grace Foakes *My part of the river* showcase a cultural kinaesthesia, as she notes, 'children ran quickly past the spice warehouse, because the air made them sneeze'.⁹⁰ The lasting impact of sensory perception on the construction of cultural knowledge of empire can also be seen through the growth of advertising in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. The need to distinguish ones brand from a range of similar manufactures led to a rise in product racialisation and imperial imagery. However, caution should be applied to reading too much into imperial presentation through brand advertisement. The social utility of items, such as soap, were variable, as can be evidenced from Margaret Harkness's *Out of work* when Jos comes across an East End advertisement for Pears Soap and other hygienic products, 'warranted to cure diarrhea, as well as other infant ailments'.⁹¹ Images of whitewashing subaltern children symbolized racial purity and a process of metamorphosing colonial subjects into imperial consumers, however it is unlikely that the working classes of Tower Hamlets went out of their way to purchase soap owing to its imperial connection.⁹² Nevertheless, the exposure to such images, be it Cadbury's cocoa, Lipton's tea or Pears Soap, would have activated the working class consumers semantic network. F. C. Bartlett's theory of schematised perception shows that people do not need to read the full information from a visual display, relying more heavily on prior knowledge and its activation of semantic networks. In this sense, the consumer does not need the full information of the advertisement to associate the product within an

⁸⁹ Steven Topik. "The World Coffee Market in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century, From Colonial to National Regime".

Irvine: University of California, working paper No. 04/04, 2004, P. 26

⁹⁰ Grace Foakes. *My Part of the River*. London: Futura Publications, 1974, P. 45

⁹¹ Margaret Harkness. *Out of Work*. London: Merlin Press, 1888 [1991] P. 116 - 7

⁹² Juliana Mansvelt, *Geographies of Consumption*. New York: Sage Publications, 2005, P. 39

imperial context; having already been exposed to images and discourses of empire, consumers will interpret ambiguous products as imperial.⁹³

Summation

John Berger has stated that it is no longer possible to tell a straight story sequentially unfolding in time because we are too aware of what is traversing the storyline laterally.⁹⁴ With the growth of new imperial histories, a new critical perspective has emerged that has sought to change the mode of narration, typically through the prism of cultural analysis. This chapter has aimed at taking a nuanced approach to analysing the various ways working-class people in Tower Hamlets interacted with, and perceived, empire in their daily lives. Whilst drawing on the work of new imperial historians, it has attempted to insert political economy and consumption into the study to afford a more lateral canvas of how the everyday citizen perceived empire. In conclusion, it is apparent that through consumption and discourses of empire, the working classes assimilated imperial messages into domestic and employment, consumption and leisure patterns. Through the continuity of imperial and cultural construction, the working classes utilised local links to empire to press for naval contracts and improved working conditions. Whilst leisure activities demonstrated the ability to manipulate, challenge and reject interference in working-class culture, the adoption of swimming and life-saving clubs engendered, and built upon, notions of citizenship that were intrinsically linked to ideas of patriotism and national identity. Finally, the saturation of imperial consumption and commerce in the Borough of

⁹³ Claus-Christian Carbon, "Understanding Human Perception by Human-made Illusions". *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, Vol.8, 2014,

⁹⁴ John Berger, *The Look of Things*. New York: Viking 1975, quoted in Edward S. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*, London: Verso, 1989, P. 22

Tower Hamlets meant that its inhabitants perceived empire to be a corner stone of their economy and thus a vital component for their welfare.

Chapter Two: Local vs. National politics

The importance of place

Whilst patterns of consumption and occupational trends brought the citizens of Tower Hamlets into daily proximity to empire, it remains to be established how the politicians used these themes as building blocks to build relationships with the working classes. At the beginning of the period covered in this thesis, national politics had taken on municipal dimensions and ‘embraced the questions of urban poverty and unemployment, the rights of organised labour and the role of government in alleviating social distresses’.⁹⁵ Dialogue between different polarities of society intersected, as political organisation awoke to the rising aspirations of a consumer conscious working-class; citizenship may well have come hand in hand with social responsibility, but it also promised the benefits of metropolitan modernity. Rising urbanisation needed to be matched with a continual supply of clean water, sanitary and comfortable living conditions, as well as more space for recreational purposes. Through the development of party organisation and a renewed emphasis on politics of place in the late nineteenth century, metropolitan politicians combined municipal socialism and imperialism to create a broad popular appeal. This can be seen through the election addresses of both municipal and parliamentary candidates, where political discourses were not only aimed at registered voters, ‘but the wider community, including women’.⁹⁶ Campaigns became tailored to specific local issues and characteristics, with prospective candidates nursing constituencies and often purchasing property in the locale in order to ascribe local connections in support of their claim to constituent’s

⁹⁵ John Davis, ‘The Progressive Council, 1889 – 1907’, pp. 27 – 49, 28, in Saint, *Politics and the People*

⁹⁶ Kathryn, Rix. *Parties, Agents and Electoral Culture in England, 1880 – 1910*. Suffolk: Boydell Press. *Studies in History New Series*, 2016, P. 155

suffrage. As noted in the previous chapter, the ubiquitous maritime culture that pervaded dockside districts ensured that local issues such as naval contracts and compensation for Watermen and Lightermen were at the forefront of electoral interface in these areas. However, each district had its own idiosyncrasies and local issues with perceived political remedies, such as the restriction of pauper aliens, to improve the political economy as well as to safeguard against the degeneration of racial stock. This chapter will focus on how electoral language helped to construct relationships between local politicians and their constituents. The dichotomy between the election results of the LCC and parliamentary contests, calls for a revision of certain idioms, such as the perceived apathy or deference of working-class voters in London's East End and the popularity of the Conservative Party in Tower Hamlets. Furthermore, the adoption of politics of place highlights the incursion by the state into the arena of working-class culture and the manner in which both parties sought to capture votes, through a mixture of imperial and social measures. Using a thematic approach to analyse the political environment through the auspices of both national and municipal elections in Tower Hamlets, it will be argued that the working classes held more agency in shaping social and imperial policy than previously thought. The changing nature of politics at the fin de siècle meant that parties, at municipal and national level, sought to win working votes by giving concessions in social welfare reform. However, as both Liberal and Conservatives offered nuanced variants of imperialism, through their vote, voice and consuming patterns the working class agentic political culture was breaking through.

Parties on either end of the political spectrum had to continually reconstruct image and local relationships, especially in the Borough of Tower Hamlets, where large scale movement of population led to both alterations in the composition of communities, but also socio-economic change. Whilst the effect of politics of place on the specific candidate

could be significant, both Lawrence and Windscheffel have argued that the local candidate's position was not unproblematic and their chances of victory not organic.⁹⁷ As in the case of Lionel Holland in Bow and Bromley, a situation typified through William Harcourt's notion of the Conservative belief that they could 'dump' a rich man anywhere 'relying on his money bags'.⁹⁸ Similarly, in the case of Samuel in Limehouse and Evans-Gordon in Stepney, the period of time taken for popular figures to nurse a constituency, even after electoral upset, could be quite short. An unexpected benefit of needing to continually reconstruct image and message was that politicians and agents were able to tailor specific party messages through the filter of local culture, and quite often act against the policy of party headquarters, which was either not in tune with the idiosyncrasies of constituency politics or outright distrusted the democracy. Whilst historians have debated what Ken Young termed 'the nationalisation of politics' and the decline in politics of place, an analysis of election addresses from Tower Hamlets would subscribe to the view that any shift in local political orientation occurred, at the earliest, after the 'khaki election' of 1900.⁹⁹ After 1895, imperial events that strongly resonated with the population, and were sensationalised in the popular press, such the Jameson Raid of 1895 – 6 and the subsequent 'Kaiser telegram' of 1896, helped to ignite a popular imperialism that resembled the anti-Russian sentiment of the 1870s. Despite this, it is revealing that election addresses and political speeches at the time were predominately focused on topics within the sphere of local issues. Whilst national matters were conspicuous in the discourses of Members of Parliament, local organisation had begun to ape municipal politics, with strong

⁹⁷ Lawrence, *Speaking for the People*, P. 156 – 7; Windscheffel, *Popular Conservatism*, P. 121 – 7; Rix, *Parties*, P. 174

⁹⁸ NLF, Annual Reports, 1897, P. 100; Quoted in Rix, P. 176

⁹⁹ Ken Young. *Local Politics and the Rise of Party*. Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1975, quoted in Windscheffel, *Popular*, P. 26. See, Mike Savage, "Understanding Political Alignment in Contemporary Britain: Do Localities Matter?" *Political Geography Quarterly*, Vol. 6, Issue. 1. 1987, PP. 53 – 76; P. 60; Martin Pugh, *Making of Modern British Politics*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2nd edn, 1993. P. 10

emphasis on politics of place, as well as developing close communal networks. Conversely, 'imperial' politics made headways into local political discourses, with nationalist and racist views on national efficiency and alien immigration, to the management of municipal utilities, docks and the imperial police force. The working classes of Tower Hamlets were not only aware of the growing influence of imperialism on the late Victorian society, but also influenced its direction, as political currents were negotiated at local level. The rise of politics of place ran concurrently with the polarisation of London's municipal politics, as Progressive and Radical hegemony of the LCC, and their move from 'philanthropic reformism towards policies aimed at the working class vote', bifurcated the bipartisan support on the council.¹⁰⁰ This in turn led to the elections in Tower Hamlets being fought along party lines and by 1900 increasingly imperial in nature. By 1900, two distinct, yet similar, forms of imperialism were offered to the public, with the perhaps unfairly commandeered patriotic type of the Conservatives and the social imperialism of the Liberal and Progressive parties. Yet, neither was exclusive to any party and an analysis of the election material for Tower Hamlet, is required to illuminate the importance the working classes ascribed to each election and the similarities and differences in political discourse.

Through shared social practice and institutions, dialectical exchanges give the citizen agency in altering the environment they inhabit.¹⁰¹ The first significant attempt to reassert working-class agency into the historiography of British history came from E. P. Thompson, in 1963. Thompson saw working-class agency as historical construction, evidenced when he said, 'the working class did not rise like the sun at an appointed time. It was present at its own making'.¹⁰² In this sense, agency can be described as the citizens, or collectives,

¹⁰⁰ Saint. *Politics*, P. 36

¹⁰¹ Jeffrey Stout. *Democracy and Tradition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004, P. 138

¹⁰² E. P. Thompson, '*The Making of the English Working Class*'. London: Penguin Books, 1963, P. 9

capacity to both shape and self-regulate their own identities and social structures, whilst navigating the dialectics of political machinery. As has already been shown, the working classes of Tower Hamlets were particularly effective in shaping their cultural landscape and warding off unwanted interference from middle-class philanthropists. Having established how this dissertation will define agency, it is now important to ascertain who had it.

The casual, low wage and diaspora nature of employment and settlement among large pockets of the population of Tower Hamlets would automatically have excluded a significant percent of adult males from the franchise. However, the historiography of the working class vote, pre-1918, is contentious. Brodie has highlighted the discrepancy in the size of voter registers in Tower Hamlets, noting that areas such as Whitechapel and Stepney had large numbers 'of non-naturalised Jewish immigrants', in comparison to areas like Bethnal Green, where the voter registration stood at 'around 50 per cent of adult males', marginally less than the national average.¹⁰³ Furthermore, both Davis and Tanner have drawn attention to Charles Dilke's amended Parliamentary and Registration Act, 1878, which led to a ten per-cent increase in metropolitan voters through the incorporation of 'single room tenement dwellers' under the definition of a separate household.¹⁰⁴ Alex Windscheffel has supported Blewett's dictum regarding the post-1885 electoral system as 'democracy tempered by registration', by highlighting 'the caprices of the revising barristers' in registering lodgers.¹⁰⁵ Fears concerning enfranchising the working classes were epitomised by the outlook of Lord Salisbury, who saw classes as political collectivities,

¹⁰³ Marc Brodie. "Voting in the Victorian and Edwardian East End of London". *Parliamentary History*, Vol. 23, pt. 2, 2004, PP. 225 – 248, p.227

¹⁰⁴ John Davis, "Slums and the Vote, 1867 – 90". *Historical Research*, Vol. 64. PP. 375 – 388. P. 383 - 7; See, John Davis and Duncan Tanner, "Borough Franchise after 1867", P. 315-19; Windscheffel, *Popular Conservatism*, P.65

¹⁰⁵ Neal Blewett, "The Franchise in the United Kingdom, 1885 – 1918". *Past & Present* xxxii, 1965, PP. 27 – 56, quoted in Rix, *Agents*, P. 43; Windscheffel, *Popular Politics*, P. 66

acting to secure their own interests and the vote would turn economic interest into political power. The perception of the Conservatives, as the disfranchising party, was heavily drawn upon in the 'Khaki election' of 1900, where the Unionist Government dissolved parliament and were accused, in this case by J. W. Benn, of attempting to 'snatch an unfair advantage by appealing to the country on an old register, a dodge which will prevent thousands of working men using their votes'.¹⁰⁶ Even if thousands of workers were disallowed the vote in this manner, under section 5a of the Representation of the People's Act, 1884, the minimum rent threshold for the vote was £10 annually. On a select committee on the sweating system in 1888, Ben Tillet described the amount of rent dock labourers would be able to pay as no more than '3s or 3s 6d a week', which would have fallen below the £10 net threshold for lodger registration.¹⁰⁷ It would thus appear that the majority living in Tower Hamlets were disfranchised over the period covered in this dissertation. This can be evidenced using figures from any Tower Hamlets election during the time, as in the case of St. George-in-the-East, that in the 1891 census had a population of 47,918 people, yet in the 1895 general election the winner and runner up pulled a combined total of 3,162 votes.¹⁰⁸

The choice to use local and general elections to establish localised agency, when on face value a large proportion of the working-class were disfranchised, is vindicated by the late Victorian trend of appealing to a broad spectrum of voters as well as targeting the working classes specifically. In the lead up to the Boer War, liberal and socialist rhetoric, although certainly not unanimously, began to unite imperialism with social reform. In a revealing address, Bernard Shaw noted that 'for good or evil, it is the working classes who have made

¹⁰⁶ BUL, Election Address, Bermondsey, 1900

¹⁰⁷ P.P. 1888 XXI, select committee on the sweating system, q. 12832, quoted in Brodie. "Voting in the Victorian", P. 231

¹⁰⁸ Figures taken from *McCalmont's Parliamentary Poll Book of all Elections 1832 – 1918*, Hertford: The Harvester Press, 1971

England imperialist. Now that imperialism had led to war it was no time for socialists to desert it'.¹⁰⁹ Linked to developing notions of eugenics and Darwinism, Shaw defended the war by attacking small nations, like the Boers, as 'anachronistic' and that great nations must 'govern in the interests of civilization'.¹¹⁰ In the struggle for national efficiency all members of the working classes had to be targeted and subsequent analysis of election materials emphasises how campaigns were tailored to target working-class support, as well as how the working classes themselves exercised agency.

Municipal and national elections

In Bethnal Green North East, Mancherjee Bhownagree 'both visibly and visually identified late-Victorian Conservatism with empire'.¹¹¹ In his inaugural election address in 1895, Bhownagree foreshadowed the influence of the themes of empire and locality when he said, 'I place at your disposal the opportunities I possess of serving our common empire in a more important sphere of life'.¹¹² In his 1900 election address Bhownagree again uses dyadic pairing when he links the districts imperial history with the new imperial rhetoric of betterment and efficiency, speaking about the enhancement of Bethnal Green museum, 'relating to such staple industries of this locality as silk, furniture and leather'.¹¹³ In utilising nostalgia by referencing the moribund silk industry of Bethnal Green, Bhownagree taps into local themes whilst asserting his connection to the area. In the 1898 LCC election, Moderates John A. Nix and Edward Sassoon advocated the self-destructive policy of 'separate municipalities in the metropolis', which was similarly echoed in Bhownagree's

¹⁰⁹ Fabian News, ix, No: 1, March 190, P. 2-3, quoted in Semmel. *Imperialism and Social Reform*, P. 59

¹¹⁰ Ibid, P. 61

¹¹¹ Windscheffel, *Popular Politics*, P. 175

¹¹² BUL, Election address, Bethnal Green North-East, 1895

¹¹³ BUL, Election address, Bethnal Green North-East, 1900

1900 address.¹¹⁴ At a Bethnal Green Conservative and Unionist Association excursion in 1899, Bhowmagree addressed the question of rehousing the working classes affected by compulsory acquisition, which was reciprocated in the 1901 Moderate address of Messrs Bruce and Collins.¹¹⁵

Similarly, Bhowmagree's Liberal opponent in the 1900 election, Harry Levy-Lawson, distanced himself with the unpopular criticism of elements of the Liberal Party by stating unequivocally 'I am not a little Englander' and further suggesting 'allowances for volunteers' and the reorganisation of the military and navy on an imperial basis. However, the majority of Lawson's address is aimed at local matters and is more closely comparable to the districts LCC councillor's addresses, referencing the need to acquire public utilities, especially of the water supply and Spitalfields Market, and anomalies in the registration law. This attention is not surprising owing to the fact the Lawson had been on the LCC for seven years prior to the election, but his allusion to imperial politics highlights the division between sections of party leadership and local organisation. Whilst the progressives and liberals' affiliation with betterment was so entrenched, that Conservative overtures in this direction seemed disingenuous, Liberals offered little leadership in terms of imperial policy from 1895 to the Boer War. Even the Turkish massacre of Armenians in 1896 did not stir the liberal benches into action. Furthermore, during the Sudan Expedition in 1896 - 8, the only vociferous Liberal opposition came from Labouchere and Dilke, whilst the country witnessed little in terms of agitation.¹¹⁶ It is then not surprising that Liberals - like Lawson - needed to dissociate themselves from labels such as 'Little Englander'.

¹¹⁴ BUL, LCC address, Bethnal Green North-East, 1898.

¹¹⁵ East London Observer, Saturday 5th August 1899; BUL, LCC address, Bethnal Green North-East, 1901

¹¹⁶ Hansard, HC Deb, 24th Feb 1899, Vol 67, cc456-559;

On the other hand, the progressive candidates, Cornwall and Smith, campaigned on an aggressive platform in 1901, accusing the moderate party of, 'espousing the cause of every monopoly, and defending every vested interest...'¹¹⁷ Their address goes on to mention the clearing of the 'old Nichol' slum and building on the Boundary Street area. By the time of completion the council had given up on redeveloping slums and focused instead on building model housing in the suburbs, yet these early endeavours highlight the late-Victorian trend of promoting higher forms of civilization through control of the urban environment. The estate was 'dry' and featured twelve baths in the laundry and in its epicentre an open space, complete with a band stand. This sense of communal visibility and cultural discipline created by the LCC typifies a sort of panopticism, where strict control was maintained to encourage responsible citizenship. On the other hand, the council wanted a 'fair percentage of outlay, or three percent profits to cover the cost of debt' and as such rents were set at too high a charge and the poor 'got little benefit from municipal housing'.¹¹⁸ Regardless, Smith and Cornwall won the election with 3,030 and 2,963 votes respectively to the Moderates Bruce and Collins combined 2,987 votes, emphasising John Davis's claim that 'Progressivism's controversy was the basis of its popularity'.¹¹⁹ Bethnal green is typical of the interaction between national and local politics, whilst also highlighting the growth of imperial ideology prevalent in the rhetoric of both parties. The similarities in election addresses and patterns of outcome argue for a rebuttal of widespread Conservative dominance, on grounds of patriotic fervour as voter's exercised agency through their choice of municipal representatives. On the other hand, it also points to the success and duality of Conservatism within Tower Hamlets, due to - in some part -

¹¹⁷ BUL, LLC address Bethnal Green North-East, 1900

¹¹⁸ R. Vladimir Steffel. "The Boundary Street Estate: An Example of Urban Redevelopment by the London County Council, 1889 – 1914". *The Town Planning Review*, Vol. 47, No. 2, 1976, PP. 161 - 173; See also Michael Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*. London: Penguin Books, 1991

¹¹⁹ John Davis. "The Progressive Council, 1889 – 1907", P. 47 in A. Saint. *Politics and the People*.

the popularity of the Progressive LCC, as they offered an outlet for municipal socialism which ran alongside notions of national and civic responsibility that were expressed on the Conservative platform.

In Harry S. Samuel's 1900 Limehouse election address, a mixture of local and imperial issues can be seen through the repetition of reoccurring themes from his 1895 address. Samuel outlines his work in securing orders for the building of ships on the Thames and supporting grievances of Watermen and Lightermen. This indigenous typology is inherent within the discourses of Tower Hamlets' political networks and further emphasises Windscheffel's assertion that the 'leitmotif of late-Victorian political culture was the politics of place'.¹²⁰ There existed between the varying districts of Tower Hamlets a certain esprit de corps in the political network of the borough. The lateral support of Thames dock workers and the appearance of politicians at public events, particularly in support of local association members, indicate a close knit network of politicians. One of the most pressing local issues, that particularly affected poorer areas such as Limehouse, was the question of water supply. At the annual meeting under the auspices of the Limehouse, Ratcliff and Wapping Conservative Association in 1900, Samuel attacks the water companies, noting that during the 'summer months of 1896, 1897 and 1898 East Enders had received a two hours instead of a twenty four hours supply of water' and spoke of his work to rectify the situation, which resulted in the summer 'of 1899 Limehouse had a 24 hour supply per day'.¹²¹

Conversely, the theme of water supply leaves a lacuna in Samuel's opponent, the LCC councillor William Pearce, 1900 address. Pearce criticises the government for 'protecting

¹²⁰ Windscheffel. *Popular Conservatism*, P. 121

¹²¹ East London Observer, Saturday 20th January 1900, P. 5

water companies and their care for vested interests’, however his lack of expansion on the subject underlines the cultural assumption of its significance and the perceived success of Samuel’s endeavours.¹²² The question of water supply is pivotal in understanding the type of relationships that politicians sought to create with their constituents. The work of Trentmann has brought attention to the powerful political currents generated by organised consumer politics, as consumer activism and local politics combined to tackle the pressing issues over the supply of water. Whilst it has been highlighted that the water consumer movement was led by propertied men, the language used by politicians in working-class areas is specifically tailored to appeal to the concerns of working-class consumers, linking ‘new practices and ideals of comfort and cleanliness with thorny issues of public health and a political tradition of the citizen as ratepayer’.¹²³ This also indicates that whilst Liberals actively sought to link their campaigns to their Progressive LCC counterparts, Unionists in Tower Hamlets incorporated aspects of municipal socialism into their language, understanding that these important issues ‘transformed the emotional and physical space of the city and with it the rhythm of urban life’.¹²⁴

Hugh Hole and Dalby Williams, the Moderate candidates for the LCC failed to mention the question of municipal ownership of water, which the ‘moderate leadership ‘disliked ... more than any other Progressive ambition, except police control’.¹²⁵ A Moderate manifesto published in 1895 sums up the Moderate adherence to retrenchment and middle-class interest, by stating in reference to the municipalisation of water, that their aim was to ‘obtain clear evidence that acquisition...will not involve the rate payers in serious additional

¹²² BUL Election address, Limehouse, 1900

¹²³ Trentmann, *Empire of Things*. London: Allen Lane, 2017, P. 184; Trentmann, (ed) *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012 [2013], P.542

¹²⁴ Trentmann. *Empire of Things*, P. 180

¹²⁵ Davis. “The Progressive Council” , P.41

burdens'.¹²⁶ The Progressive councillor, A. Leon, drew attention to the attempts of the Progressive council to purchase the water supply for the benefit of the consumer, only for 'Parliament, prompted by the Moderate member of the LCC, refused to hear our demands'.¹²⁷ In a memorandum by the Conservatives chief party agent, R. W. E. Middleton, the reason for resisting the councils Water Bill was that support given to the Progressives bills would be a 'reversal of the Moderate policy' that would undoubtedly hurt their chances in coming elections.¹²⁸ The relationship between local politicians and Members of Parliament could at times be problematic, as Samuel tailored his election address to capture working-class support in his constituency, rather than support Conservative policies of retrenchment and the safeguarding of middle-class interests. This election typifies the importance of politics of place and the relationship between politicians and their constituents, as Samuel used social welfare concessions to appeal to working-class consumers on an imperial as well as municipal platform. Whereas, Pearce's campaign highlights the dangers of fighting general elections on too broad a municipal campaign, whilst failing to adequately orchestrate the mixed imperial sentiment of working-class constituencies. There was little to excite constituents to vote for Pearce and in terms of social policy, nothing that could not be satisfied from voting for the Progressives on the LCC.

In Bow and Bromley, the popular Conservative Member of Parliament, Walter Guthrie, also draws upon significant cultural and economic local themes, such as the Unionist Government's carrying through of such Bills as the 'Workman's Compensation Act, the

¹²⁶ Globe, Saturday 26th January 1895, P. 5

¹²⁷ BUL, LCC address, Limehouse, 1901

¹²⁸ Memorandum by R. W. E. Middleton on the LCC Water Bill, 9th February 1897, Cadogan Papers, HOL Records Office,

Conciliation Act and measures for the improvement and efficiency of our army and navy'. Guthrie also notes that he is 'a strong supporter of any measure which gives to the people of London full and sufficient water supply' and is 'in favour of proper restrictions being placed upon the introduction of cheap foreign labour'.¹²⁹ Guthrie's popularity amongst the working classes in his constituency was noted in the local press which stated that even in the most typical working-class parts of 'the big division "vote for Guthrie" is the only card you will see in the windows'.¹³⁰

On the other hand, Guthrie's labour opponent, the socialist Henry Lansbury alienated any possible cross party support from the Liberals and did more 'harm than good to the Liberal electoral record'.¹³¹ Guthrie succeeded Lionel Holland in an 1899 by-election, when Holland was appointed to the position of Steward of the Manor of Northstead, on grounds of ill health. In 1897, Holland met with his constituencies at the Bromley Vestry Hall, where, on the matter of local issues, such as the water question and employers liability, he announced that 'If in the future it became necessary for him to vote against his party he hoped the electors would not withdraw their confidence' as he believed his actions would 'promote their interests'.¹³² Holland had already diverged from the party line in 1895, when he wrote a letter acknowledging a vestry resolution concerning the water supply; he attacked the water monopolies and argued that supply 'should be taken out of private hands and placed under the control of the County Council'.¹³³

¹²⁹ BUL. Election address, Bow and Bromley, 1900

¹³⁰ East London Observer, Tuesday 2nd October 1900, P. 2

¹³¹ Henry Pelling. *Social Geography of British Elections*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1967, p. 47

¹³² East London Observer, Saturday 16th January 1897, P. 5

¹³³ East London Observer, Saturday 14th September 1895, P. 2

The constituency had sent two progressive councillors to the LCC in 1892, Ben Cooper and W. Wallace Bruce, however since 1895 Conservative organisation undoubtedly improved as the Progressive majority was reduced to 447 in 1895, and Holland won a crushing victory. In 1898 there were 10,845 electors in the borough, with 1,116 of that number being made up of females; Bruce and Cooper topped the poll with a combined total of 6,100 votes, whereas their moderate counterparts, Walsh and Terrell, secured 2,112 and 1,992 votes respectively. All in all, 641 voters abstained or deferred from voting. From these figures it seems reasonable to revise Stedman Jones assumption that 'Political apathy among the unskilled and the poor' existed in the East End, and if anything it supports the notion that Conservatives were either less likely to turn out for municipal elections, or not support Moderate candidates.¹³⁴ This was picked up on in the contemporary local presses, with the *Islington Gazette* noting how it appeared strange that 'the Conservative party cannot rise to the occasion and produce a spirited and intelligent programme of up-to-date progressive parochial reform'. The same article goes on to say, 'whereas a large number of electors who vote for Unionists in Imperial elections support progressive London County Council candidates, there are but a very small number of Liberals and Radicals who support Moderate candidates'.¹³⁵

Part of the reason for this reluctance to vote Moderates in this constituency would have been down to the platform in which Walsh and Terrell campaigned. A chief point of attack came at the expense of the Council's Work Department, which they feared would create an 'army of working class men in the direct employment of the LCC...exercising a great,

¹³⁴ Stedman Jones, *Working Class Culture*, P. 214. Quoted in Brodie, *The Politics of the Poor*, P. 75; Brodie, 'Politics of the Poor', P. 10

¹³⁵ *Islington Gazette*, Thursday 7th March 1901, P. 3

perhaps an overwhelming influence over the election'.¹³⁶ Whilst Conservatives attacked the department for its extravagance, through the rhetoric of notable celebrities like John Burns and members of the Fabian Party, the department came to symbolise fair wages and direct labour, which was attractive bait to lure working-class votes.

The death of W. Isaacson in 1899 led to a by-election in Stepney, which was contested by the East London Liberal W. Steadman and the Conservative Major Evans-Gordon. Despite being an unknown quantity, Evans-Gordon lost out to Steadman by twenty votes and, attributing his defeat to the 'disadvantage of being an outsider', set about feverishly nursing the community.¹³⁷ In his 1900 address Gordon draws on the importance of place by acknowledging that the previous year he was a 'stranger among you', but having subsequently moved into the area and joined the committee of the London Hospital, he fought the 1900 election with a more concrete local base. Gordon spent considerably less than half of his address focusing on events in South Africa, stating that whilst he believed that the 'future peace and prosperity of the empire' depended on the return of Salisbury's administration; he reserved the 'right of impartial criticism', which joins a pattern on East End Conservatives who exhibited a willingness to put local interests above party line. The remainder of Gordon's address targets local and social reform issues, such as 'the extension of trams and cheap railway communication', old age pensions and a demand for 'adequate provision' for the widows and children of fallen soldiers.¹³⁸

It has been argued that Gordon was elected on an anti-alien platform, which chronologically and thematically carries some weight. Fears and anxieties surrounding what

¹³⁶ Devonshire, quoted in *Local Government Journal*, 19th February 1898

¹³⁷ Windscheffel. *Popular Conservatism*, P. 124

¹³⁸ BUL, General Election Address, Stepney, 1900

Stephan Arata has coined 'narratives of reverse colonisation', in which the civilised sphere is overrun with primitive elements from outside the metropole, were common in late-Victorian society.¹³⁹ By the close of the nineteenth century non-Spencerian views of social-Darwinism, like those of Kidd and Pearson, had made their way into the vernacular of popular literature and resonated at a time when a popular belief was that 'the struggle between nations was the most important biological mechanism to ensure progress'.¹⁴⁰ It is no coincidence that Bram Stoker's 'Dracula' was published in 1897, featuring an undesirable alien who drains the purity out of the civilised indigenes of London.¹⁴¹ Furthermore, this gothic narrative was used to great effect by Dadabhai Naoroji in his pioneering work on Indian economics, when he stated 'the English with their scientific scalpel cut to the very heart, with the result that the wounds are kept perpetually open and widening, by draining away the life blood in a continuous stream'.¹⁴² Evans-Gordon was not alone in picking up on local anti-immigration sentiment: Alfred Lafone in Bermondsey, Guthrie in Bow and Bromley and even the Progressive LCC candidates in Whitechapel, Colonel Hobart and E. C. Carter, who stated, 'while being kind to the stranger, let us not be unjust to our own people'.¹⁴³ Looking at the make-up of Stepney more closely, Brodie has identified the 'tory hotbed' of Stepney West Ward Conservative Club as being dominated by Jewish members and acknowledges that the politics of place were 'more consequential' than the role of 'race or religion'.¹⁴⁴ In his process of nursing the constituency in 1899,

¹³⁹ S. Arata, "The Occidental Tourist: Dracula and the anxiety of Reverse Colonialism". *Victorian Studies* 33, 1990, P. 623

¹⁴⁰ Semmel, *Imperialism and Social Reform*, 1968, P. 29

¹⁴¹ Arata. *The Occidental Tourist*, P. 626

¹⁴² Naoroji. *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India*. London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co, 1901, P. 211. Quoted in Sukanya Banerjee, "Political Economy, Gothic and the Question of Imperial Citizenship", *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 74, No: 2, (Winter, 2005), P. 260 - 271

¹⁴³ BUL, LCC address, Whitechapel, 1898

¹⁴⁴ Brodie. *Politics of the Poor*, P. 187

Gordon presided over a concert in aid of the City of London Jewish Tailors Benefit Society and the political organisation of Stepney's Conservative campaign was greatly supplemented by the support and publication of a letter written by Lord Rothschild.¹⁴⁵ In the letter, local issues such as the control of the water supply, the provision of open spaces and even the possibility of a 'special tax on town lands' were put forward as election pledges targeting working-class voters.¹⁴⁶ It seems that the evidence does not fully support the notion that an anti-alien platform was particularly efficacious, even in 1900, as a large portion of enfranchised 'aliens' voted Conservative, whilst anti-immigration was an election trope, it was no more significant in election addresses than any other imperial or municipal policies.

Steadman showcases the polyvocality of politics of place, differentiating modes of narrative between imperial and municipal politics depending on the platform. Similar to his socialist colleague Lansbury, Steadman's 1900 address is primarily a jeremiad about the government's imperial policy; however a nuanced reading into his call on the Government to tackle high rents, which were 'causing overcrowding, disease and death' could be read as an impugn to Tories' stance on the immigration question. Steadman also draws upon his East End heritage and references his local and LCC work; however the remainder of his address is light on actual progressive policies, which he expressed in his LCC address in 1898. In this address Steadman and W. B. Yates campaign on the common Progressive platform, pressing for local concerns such as water supply, cheap workman's trains and taxation of ground values. Their opponents, H. T. A. Chidgey and Evans-Gordon typified the criticism labelled at the Moderate party, as illustrated by Lord Tweedmouth at a meeting at the Edinburgh Castle in Stepney when he said, 'they had no policy of their own, and were

¹⁴⁵ East London Observer, Saturday 28th January 1899, P. 5

¹⁴⁶ London Evening Standard, Saturday 12 February 1898, P. 4

therefore obliged to appeal for votes as supporters of the Unionist party'.¹⁴⁷ On the other hand, Moderate organisation was strong in the area and had support from 'ladies belonging to the Primrose League', Gordon's wife the Marchioness of Tweeddale and a number of influential persons who contributed vehicles 'for the conveyance of voters to the poll, and their colours were conspicuous all over the division'.¹⁴⁸ Whilst Gordon won the seat in the 1900 general election, the Moderates failed to win the LCC contest, which fits in with the overall pattern of contemporary politics in East London. Whilst Gordon's electoral campaign in 1900 addressed issues of place and social reform alongside imperial policy, Steadman predominately ignored social policies in his election address, instead relying on his LCC platform to get across policies of social reform.

Conservative candidates who did not prescribe to the same pattern of behaviour in their campaign as their successful Tower Hamlet colleagues, and fought the 1900 election on a purely imperial basis with no attempt to distance themselves from unpopular party policies, made little inroads in working-class communities. In the safe Liberal seat of Poplar, Sydney Buxton's Conservative opponent, Bullivant, campaigned on what was the most one sided platform of imperial policy in the entire Borough of Tower Hamlets. Bullivant's campaign seemingly vindicates Price's assertion about the 'natural correlation between working-class constituencies and social reform as an issue'.¹⁴⁹ However, it is apparent that his campaign was an exception to the overall trend of Conservative organisation in the working class districts of Tower Hamlets. Bullivant's exordium sets the tone for his entire campaign when he states, 'The one subject of paramount importance now occupying the thoughts of the nation is the future of South Africa', and unlike his more successful

¹⁴⁷ London Daily News, Thursday 17th Feb 1898, P. 6

¹⁴⁸ London Evening Standard, Thursday 10th March 1898, P. 3

¹⁴⁹ Price. *An Imperial War*, P. 97

colleagues, fails to bridge his connection to the community, or his work on social issues, to the electors.¹⁵⁰ In comparison, the Liberal Imperialist Buxton sets off by stating his long history within the community and reiterates his action towards ameliorating social problems. We can see the importance of cultural systems, or politics of place, through the repetition of popular local themes, as Buxton notes, 'he has never ceased to urge the admiralty of the day the claims of London for a share of shipping contracts'. The reoccurrence of local themes, and the repetition of them in political discourse, emphasises the continuity of cultural networks and how receptive the electorate were to idiosyncratic local issues. Bullivant's failure to successfully merge his imperial oriented campaign with municipal reform proved to be a disaster, whereas Buxton's address showcases a balanced platform of social reform and imperial policy. Buxton also used to his advantage his connection to and support of the Progressive policy of the LCC, noting that 'on national and party grounds I confidently point to my political record in claiming the support of all sections of Progressive voters'.¹⁵¹

The Moderate candidate for the LCC, J. B. Atley, similarly failed to differentiate his policies significantly enough from those of the, generally, unpopular policy of retrenchment. In an attempt to rebrand the Moderate image and syphon some of the perceived popular enthusiasm for Conservatism, Atley discarded 'the appellation "Moderate"' and stood as 'a Conservative and Unionist', which was not uncommon throughout the metropolis.¹⁵² However, in his election address, whilst Atley supports equitable measures for acquisition of municipal utilities he does so only 'providing it does not involve the direct working or management of such stupendous concerns'. Furthermore, Atley advocates the transfer of

¹⁵⁰ BUL, General election address, Poplar, 1900

¹⁵¹ BUL, General election address, Poplar, 1900

¹⁵² London Evening Standard, Saturday 12th February 1898, P.4

power from the 'council to the vestry and district boards', which was inchoate as an idea and held negative connotations due to Salisbury's threat to weaken the Council by 'introducing a lower tier of elected borough councils'.¹⁵³ Salisbury's attitude towards the importance of municipal politics was ambiguous; his perceived attitude towards the LCC was parodied by Lord Carrington in the style of Shakespeare's Julius Caesar:

'Friends, voters, Londoners, lend me your ears
They come to kill the council, we to save it
the harm it has done will live after it,
The good, they hope, 'll be interned with its bones
They say, 'tis best for London. The Noble Salisbury
Has told you the council was ambitious'¹⁵⁴

Yet, it was his rejection of the idea that Conservatives could afford to run local elections on non-party lines that led to the deployment of party machinery behind LCC elections.¹⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the large scale landslide success of the Progressive faction on the LCC indicates a strong pan-metropolitan reaction to Salisbury and the Moderates municipal aspirations, or lack thereof. The standing Progressive councillors, J. McDougal and W. Crooks were both long standing and popular local representatives in the division, with the local press reporting that 'both sitting councillors had attended to their duties in an indefatigable manner'.¹⁵⁶ Both Liberal and Progressive platforms incorporated elements of politics of place, social reform and imperial policy, whilst Buxton sought to strengthen the political links between national and municipal politics. Conversely, whilst Bullivant's failure to disassociate himself with the unpopular local policies of the Moderates and imbed social reform within the imperial fabric of his address, led to a failure to connect with working-

¹⁵³ Ibid, P. 4; Martin Pugh, *State and Society: A Social and Political History of Britain since 1870*. London and New York:

Bloomsbury Academic, 1999, P. 67

¹⁵⁴ London Daily News, Monday 21st February 1898, P. 3

¹⁵⁵ Young, *Local Politics*, P. 64 - 5

¹⁵⁶ East London Observer, Saturday 26th February 1898, P.6

class votes; his campaign should not be taken as typical of the Conservative electoral efforts up to 1900.

The constituency of Mile End was the seat of the long standing and popular Conservative, Spencer Charrington, who as chairman of Anchors Brewery in Mile End was also a large employer of labour in the district. Charrington's election address is uncommonly brief, which is partly explained by its opening, which states, 'having been honoured by your confidence for a period of nearly 15 years...my politics are well known to you'.¹⁵⁷ Windscheffel has questioned Price's claim that 'Conservatives who did not pay sufficient attention to local and national domestic issues tended to be worsted in the London Election' by drawing allusion to Charrington's lack of attention to issues of social reform.¹⁵⁸ In his 1900 election address, Charrington's only mention of municipal politics is in relation to the prospects of the London Government Municipalities Bill, which has been shown, through the dominance of the Progressives on the LCC, to have been largely unpopular with the working classes. On the other hand, Windscheffel bases his counter-argument on a close reading of election material, failing to acknowledge the role of local elites in alleviating social distress outside of election periods. A clear example can be seen in June 1900 when a local deputation of prominent East London leaders pleaded for a reduction in price from the Commercial Gas Company, who had recently raised the price of gas from '2s 6d to 3s per 1,000 feet'. The deputation included Harry Marks, Dalby Williams and W. C. Steadman; however Charrington took the lead in criticising the company's actions, arguing that they had, 'raised the price disproportionately high'.¹⁵⁹ Two other variables worth

¹⁵⁷ BUL, General Election address, Mile End, 1900

¹⁵⁸ Windscheffel, *Popular Conservatism*, P. 192-3; See also, Price, *Imperial War*, P. 158 -72

¹⁵⁹ East London Observer, Saturday 16th June 1900, P. 3

noting in this case are the munificent actions of Charrington, who had a long history of local public generosity and the publicised accounts of his son's actions in the Chinese War.¹⁶⁰

The Liberal candidate, Charles Goddard Clarke, had the misfortune of being adopted by the Liberal Association on the 22nd September, four days prior to the start of the election period. Asserting that the previous government's decision to dissolve parliament has been of the 'shortest possible notice' Charles went on to profess he would be unable to become 'personally known to many of you'. Despite this, he adheres to an emphasis of place by drawing attention to the peripatetic nature of his municipal career: through his business premises in Whitechapel, as a member of the LCC for Peckham and representative on the Camberwell vestry and guardians for many years.¹⁶¹ On matters of municipal reform Charles draws heavily on his time at the LLC, condemning 'the policy of the government in constantly thwarting the wishes of the masses of workers of London', in particular consistently opposing 'proposals to supply London with ample and pure water'.¹⁶² Charles further states that he is 'Strongly opposed to the enforcement of the Vaccination Act', an act that may very well have weakened Liberal electoral success, which can be deduced from working-class recollections concerning issues of vaccination. By the 1898 Vaccination Act, the duty of the Public Vaccinator was to call at the child's home, after giving the parents at least 24 hours' notice; however, on inspection of working-class autobiographies, it was not uncommon for families mistrusting medical science and vaccinations to move out of districts controlled by the same local officer of health from child to child.¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ See, East London Observer, Saturday 29th December 1900, P. 5; 6th July 1895, P. 6 for local generosity and East London Observer, Saturday 10th November 1900, P. 8 for Lieutenant Eric Charrington

¹⁶¹ East London Observer, Saturday 29th September 1900, P. 6

¹⁶² Ibid, P. 6

¹⁶³ See, Frank Goss, *My Boyhood at the turn of the Century*. Burnett Archive of Working Class Autobiography, Brunel University, Vol no. 2:331

The Moderate candidates, Gerrard Bicker-Caarten and Leonard Darwin, son of Charles Darwin, were not alluded to in Charrington's address, and ran on a platform of retrenchment, with very little policy in terms of social reform. They argue in support of the division of London into 28 municipal boroughs, stating that 'Steps should be taken to strengthen and dignify local self-government, and that matters of a suitable nature should be handed over to the popularly elected local authorities'.¹⁶⁴ With regards to local issues, they could not support the acquisition of water until they were convinced that the 'change would be beneficial to the inhabitants of London', however as noted in the local press at the time, Tower Hamlets was not 'inhabited by people who like being deprived on water as an antidote to socialism'.¹⁶⁵ It should be noted that a Royal Commission on Water Supply stated that the 'present supply would be ample until 1931', which is a reason many Moderates did not think the water question was as pressing as Progressives made out.¹⁶⁶ Similar to patterns seen across East London, the Progressive runners, John Renwick Seager and Bertram Strauss, campaigned on a platform of betterment and focused on vote-winning local issues through the repetition of perceived progressive verities across East London. Adherents to shibboleths such as 'good wages means good work' and giving their hearty sympathy to measures such as acquisition and management of utilities for public benefit, extension of open spaces and getting rid of slums, the meliorism inherent within progressivism became as much a campaign theme as the social issues they advocated.¹⁶⁷ As the LCC sat at the heart of the capital of empire, Pennybacker has argued that what

¹⁶⁴ East London Observer, Saturday 26th February 1898, P.5

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, P. 5; Daily News, 5th March 1898. Quoted in John Davis, "The Progressive Council", P. 41

¹⁶⁶ Morning Post, Thursday 3rd November 1898, p.8

¹⁶⁷ East London Observer, Saturday 26th February 1898, P.5

could not be contemplated at the national level seemed to prop up hopes at the local level, as can be seen in Mile End as the Progressives won by a majority of 353 votes.¹⁶⁸

The importance of distinct local appeals in politics, made by Liberal Unionists during the 1895 and 1900 general elections, can be seen through a quantitative analysis of particular social issues mentioned by candidates in their addresses and by comparing these with national samples. Paul Readman's analysis of Unionists election addresses from 1895 and 1900 showed a huge decline in the mention of social issues in candidate addresses, he attributed this omission to both party leadership, and 'individual candidates'.¹⁶⁹ It can be seen from table one, that whilst the mention of old age pensions as an election issue followed the national pattern and was relegated to the background, overall social issues played a strong part in local Unionist discourses.

Table 1 - Social issues mentioned in Tower Hamlet's Unionist addresses, 1895 and 1900

Issues	Addresses in which issue mentioned					
	1895			1900		
	Local %	Number	National %	Local %	Number	National %
Housing	55.55	5	46	66.66	6	13
Workers Compensation	55.55	5	36	44.44	4	9
Old Age Pensions	77.77	7	52	22.22	2	20
Public Ownership	22.22	2	...	33.33	3	...
Registration Law	55.55	5	...	0	0	...
Tax Reform	33.33	3	...	0	0	0
Poor Law Reform	44.44	4	26	44.44	4	5

Data pertaining to the nine East End constituencies focused upon in this thesis was acquired from the British Political Party General Election Addresses: From the National Liberal Club, Bristol University Library.

¹⁶⁸ Susan D. Pennybacker, *A Vision For London, 1889 – 1914*. London: Routledge, 1995, P. 19

¹⁶⁹ Paul Readman. "The Conservative Party, Patriotism and British Politics: The Case of the General Election of 1900". *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 40, No.1 (Jan 2001), PP. 107-145, P. 112

Table one shows that in 1895, social issues were more prominent in the election addresses of Tower Hamlet’s Unionist candidates than the national average, with issues such as housing, workers compensation and old age pensions mentioned in the majority of addresses. This trend continues into 1900, with housing, workers compensation and reform of the poor law mentioned significantly more than the national average.

An assessment of five Unionist election addresses from London constituencies outside of Tower Hamlets appears to support Readman’s argument that the Unionist campaign of 1900 was based primarily on patriotic rhetoric, keeping the war in the foreground and in so doing capturing the nationalistic mood of the nation, and in particular that of the working classes. However, the Unionist candidates of Tower Hamlets’ campaign was based on a much broader spread of issues, comprising local issues of naval contracts, workmen’s liability and improved communication over the Thames, to the more usual progressive themes like housing questions, old age pensions and even, in some instances, public ownership of water and gas companies. Table two highlights the discrepancies in the number of election issues mentioned across London’s Unionist addresses at the 1900 election, indicating a higher level of importance placed on tailoring social issues to appeal to a broader base of support in Tower Hamlets.

Table 2 - Number of issues mentioned across ten London Unionist Addresses, 1900

Tower Hamlets		London	
Constituencies	Number of election issues	Constituencies	Number of election issues
Stepney	13	Fulham	4
Bow and Bromley	10	South St. Pancras	4
Limehouse	9	St. George Hannover Square	3
St. Georges	8	South Kensington	3
Whitechapel	8	Walworth	1

Data pertaining to the ten constituencies above was acquired from the British Political Party General Election Addresses: From the National Liberal Club, Bristol University Library.

Tables one and two highlight the continuing importance of distinct local appeals in politics throughout this period, as well as the continuity of social issues from 1895 to 1900 in Unionist addresses where they reiterate their adherence to politics of place. Whilst historians of local politics and the new political history have argued, convincingly, that contrary to Price's assertion, that the 1900 general election was fought as much over social issues, Unionist electioneering rhetoric instead monopolised the language of patriotism and relegated social reform to marginal status.¹⁷⁰ This chapter has emphasised the importance that candidates in Tower Hamlets, especially Liberal Unionists up to 1900, placed on locality, with campaigns tailored to specific constituency issues. Alex Windscheffel has argued that 'there can be little doubt that most Unionists...downplayed domestic questions', however tables one and two portray Tower Hamlets as an anomaly to this pattern.¹⁷¹ Far from downplaying domestic issues, candidates mentioning improvements to working class dwellings, working class house purchase and even acquisition of public utilities increased in 1900. Furthermore, comparisons between Tower Hamlet's Unionists and Unionists in other constituencies across London emphasise the adherence to progressive policies alongside imperial and party obligations. This analysis would not suggest the 'ditching of "positive conservatism"', as one historian put it, occurred in Tower Hamlets.¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ Readman, "The Conservative Party, Patriotism and British Politics", P112; Lawrence, *Speaking for the People*, P. 109;

Windscheffel, *Popular Conservatism*, PP. 182-193

¹⁷¹ Windscheffel, *Popular Conservatism*, P. 189

¹⁷² Readman, "The Conservative Party, Patriotism and British Politics", P112

Summation

This chapter has sought to establish the dichotomy between municipal and imperial politics in Tower Hamlets as a basis for understanding working-class agentic culture at the fin de siècle. A general pattern can be ascribed to the political organisation, and electoral outcomes of East End elections, from 1895 to 1900, which drew heavily upon an emphasis on politics of place and the combination of municipal socialism and imperialism to target the wider community. Conservative candidates in Tower Hamlets were not only far more likely to distance themselves from the policies of their LCC counterparts, evidenced through the actions of Samuel, Marks, Charrington and Guthrie. These progressive Unionists were prepared to publicly contravene party headquarters and criticise locally unpopular policies that had inverse effects on their constituents. Whilst Liberal candidates predominately fought on platforms of social reform, their need to dissociate themselves from labels of 'Little Englander' led to certain liberal, and socialist, election addresses being more imperially oriented than their Unionist opponents, as in the case of Clarke in Mile End and Lansbury in Bow and Bromley. Furthermore, there was little to differentiate between Liberal and Progressive platforms; with some Liberal candidates neglecting to emphasise social reform, as in the case of Steadman, because they separated municipal and imperial policies between general and local elections. On the other hand, the pattern that has emerged in the Borough of Tower Hamlets was not absolute, as can be evidenced through the impact of longevity on Charrington's constituency results and other variables that effect voter allegiance, such as local acts of generosity. The dichotomy in results highlights the problematic nature of municipal politics and the divergence from traditional discourse to the national mimesis of local politics, with the realisation that imperial policies needed to be mediated from the ground up. Significantly this highlights working-class role in determining the type of imperial and social policy that campaigns were fought along, as politicians tailored their campaigns to win working class votes, further signifying their

innate political agent culture. Furthermore, the large scale adoption by local organisation of politics of place emphasises the shift towards obtaining working class votes by offering concessions in the form of social reform and issues of local economy.

Chapter three: Case Study One – The Boer War

The Second Boer War, 1899 – 1902, has traditionally been seen as a litmus test for gauging popular imperial sentiment in late Victorian society. This chapter aims to add a fresh perspective to the study of the Boer War's impact on the everyday interactions between politicians and working-class citizens in Tower Hamlets. It will do this by reasserting the importance of locality in animating political and imperial dialogue from the ground up, whilst simultaneously contextualising the historical background of the Boer War with the working class journey towards assertive citizenship. This chapter will also begin to challenge the orthodoxy of Green's *Crisis of Conservatism* hypothesis, which argues that the Edwardian period witnessed a profound crisis of identity within the Conservative Party, which was unable to reconstruct its image and language to attract the popular vote. It will be argued, in the ensuing paragraphs and the succeeding chapter, that the situation was more complicated than Green's argument allows. This chapter will reposition the idea of a crisis of identity, arguing that both the Liberal and Conservative witnessed periods of discernible tension and conflict within their party ranks, coming to the boil over each party's policy concerning the Boer War.¹⁷³

Building on the previous chapter, Tower Hamlets Progressive Unionist clique of politicians made strides to reduce their dependency on imperialism in their constituencies; however they were moored to Salisburyian Conservatism that acted as a bulwark to popular democracy and threatened to place them on the back foot of electoral politics. On the other hand, local Liberal politicians faced internal questions over how to use Empire as a vehicle for change rather than a rod for their own backs. Deep divisions within the Liberal

¹⁷³ See E. H. H. Green. *The Crisis of Conservatism*, 1996

Party led to a disconnect from the citizens of Tower Hamlets, as opponents as well as local and national press agency converged to capitalise on the popular mood of the constituencies. Simultaneously, the Boer War occurred at a time when the working classes of Tower Hamlets were taking bolder steps into the traditionally exclusive spheres of middle class local politics, taking an active participation in shaping and participating in the discourses of what it meant to be an imperial citizen. This chapter will then aim to analyse how local politicians bridged the connection between citizens and Empire, and set the scene for the outcomes of this give and take after 1902, which will be discussed in the last chapter. Analysing the impact of the Boer War on working class employment and consumption trends will highlight the continuities of Empire in the East End and further emphasise the importance of political economy on the local level. Finally, this chapter will add to the historiography by analysing how popular imperial figures were both created and perceived from ground level; arguing that local politicians used imperial characters as signifiers for their imperial message.

A crisis of politics

During the late 1890s, multiple streams of discourse coalesced that would influence wider political developments, both in the metropole and abroad. Socio-economic factors, along with working-class aspirations, collided with the language of patriotism, which was echoed through the local press, to stir up nationalistic discourses that gave both sides of the political spectrum their chance to put forward their imperial vision. When addressing the historical analysis of popular politics, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg has stressed that discourses are the 'product of past conflicts over meaning, past struggle to define and order the social world'.¹⁷⁴ This section will aim to give the reader a deeper historical background on the

¹⁷⁴ Carol Smith-Rosenberg, "The Body Politic", in Elizabeth Weed (ed.) *Coming to Terms: Feminism, Theory, Politics*. New York: Routledge, 1989, P. 102

origins of the Boer War and establish the parameters of political activity in Tower Hamlets in order to understand the role of discourses and agency in shaping popular politics.

The South African War, 1899 – 1902, whose origins can be traced to the ministries of Disraeli, 1874 – 1880, and Gladstone, 1880 – 1885, presents a study of both working-class popular imperial sentiment, as well as the ideological crises that threatened to tear political orthodoxy apart. Pursuits of imperial importance, not the ‘parochial business of social amelioration’, characterised Disraeli’s administration towards the end of the 1870s; a notion supported by Lord Salisbury, who once wrote of Disraeli that, ‘questions of internal policy occupied a secondary rank’.¹⁷⁵ Economic down turn and costly wars in Afghanistan and Africa, 1878 – 79, led to a rise in income tax beginning in 1878 and fierce denouncement from the Liberals over the perceived extravagance of the Conservatives foreign policy, foreshadowing the Conservatives reciprocating call of Progressive extravagance at the fin de siècle. Furthermore, these circumstances restricted social reform, which was in a state of privation under Disraeli’s ministry in the late 1870s, and led to unpopular attacks on education and local authorities. The British Government had annexed the Transvaal in 1877, which immediately exacerbated agricultural problems in South Africa, as the newly acquired diamond mines required a high demand for labour. At the same time, these mines proved insufficient in generating enough revenues to sustain a policy of federation in South Africa. Whilst popular consensus of Disraeli’s final ministry is that of decline after 1877, his legacy of imperialism became a centrepiece of Salisburyian Conservatism, which also added unionism and ‘villa Toryism’ to the pillars of Conservative dogma, namely small government, small tax base. Salisbury’s adherence to maintaining their standing as the party of property, as well as Empire, was problematic for local

¹⁷⁵ Paul Smith. *Disraelian Conservatism and Social Reform*. London: Routledge, 1967, P. 267; Salisbury to Queen Victoria, 25th April 1881, in *Letters of Queen Victoria*. London: John Murray, 2nd Series, iii, P. 216

Conservative politicians who relied on a healthy platform of social reforms to animate local support. Simultaneously, this reliance was also problematic for Liberal politicians, in areas like Tower Hamlets, who were forced to engage with the imperial discourse, at a time of profound 'tension between the Moderate and Radical wings of London Liberalism'.¹⁷⁶

On Gladstone's return to office in 1880, the 'Dutch Trekkers' in the Transvaal had grown impatient and rebelled against British rule. Paul Knaplund has suggested that even before this uprising, Gladstone's administration had come to the conclusion that 'the annexation of the Transvaal was an error'.¹⁷⁷ However, before this error could be rectified, the British suffered a defeat in which the subsequent din would only be silenced in 1902. Whilst the retrocession of the Transvaal in 1881 was unquestionably magnanimous, the fallout from the defeat at Majuba Hill, not to mention the subsequent discovery of gold on the Rand in 1886, made the Second Boer War unavoidable and the Conservatives were quick to turn this into political gain.¹⁷⁸ In Stepney, Evans-Gordon's election address supports this when he said, 'The cowardly surrender of the Liberal Government after Majuba in 1881, made the war inevitable'.¹⁷⁹ Evans-Gordon was not alone on this front, as the Conservative candidate for Whitechapel in 1900, David Hope Kyd, also hit upon this theme when he stated that, 'In 1877 the Conservative Government of Lord Beaconsfield annexed the Transvaal. In 1881 Mr. Gladstone gave it back to the Boers'.¹⁸⁰ Furthermore, both the Conservative candidate for Poplar, Bullivant, and the standing Member of Parliament for

¹⁷⁶ Lawrence, *Speaking for the People*, P. 169

¹⁷⁷ Paul Knaplund, *Gladstone and Britain's Imperial Policy*, P. 153

¹⁷⁸ Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism*, P. 321

¹⁷⁹ BUL, Election address, Stepney, 1900

¹⁸⁰ BUL, Election address, Whitechapel, 1900

Bethnal Green North-East, Bhowmagree, referenced Majuba Hill and attacked the perceived notion that the Liberals would throw away 'the fruits of labour'.¹⁸¹

Alternatively, whilst Liberals would not openly attack their 'Grand Old Man', factions within the party had been making imperial overtones more boldly after Rosebery's speech at Epsom in 1898, where he associated himself, and by proxy the Liberal Party, with a more bellicose imperialism.¹⁸² Rosebery's observance to the 'new Liberalism' - prominent among their numbers being Haldane, Grey and Asquith - believed that the Liberal Party needed to capitalise on the growth of the imperial spirit that had developed in the years leading up to the outbreak of the Boer War. At a meeting at the London Liberal Association in St. James's Hall, a circular was distributed to those in attendance, which warned Liberals and Radicals that 'a conspiracy is on foot to supplant Sir H. Campbell-Bannerman...by Lord Rosebery, who forsook the butchered Armenians, opposed Cretan freedom, deserted the Grand Old Man, supported the South African War, condoned concentration camps...'¹⁸³ The circular concluded by suggesting a Rosebery-Rhodes clique. It is evident that the Boer War bifurcated the Liberal Party; however, the act of disassociating oneself with the unpatriotic image of being anti-war, in Tower Hamlets, speaks both to the organisation of local politics, as well as the widespread acceptance of imperial enthusiasm. Among the Liberal members who made a point to stress their opposition to 'little Englanders' in 1900 were Bertrand S. Straus (St. Georges), William Pearce (Limehouse) and Harry Levy-Lawson (Bethnal Green North East).

¹⁸¹ East London Observer, 29th September 1900, P.6

¹⁸² Ibid, P.6

¹⁸³ Globe, Tuesday 14th January 1902, P. 8

A similar pattern was also exhibited through the contemporary press, with the Sudan Expedition and subsequent Fashoda Incident, 1896 – 8, highlighting both the sense of anxiety and acceptance of a more militant and patriotic form of citizenship. The British victory at Omdurman in 1898 was, typically, reported jubilantly in the right-wing press, with the header of the Daily Mail reading plainly ‘To honour Gordon’. The Pall Mall Gazette took a similarly requiting tact in declaring that ‘one thought has leapt to the expression of everybody from the man in Trafalgar Square to the German Emperor...Gordon is avenged’.¹⁸⁴ What is more surprising is the participation of radical newspapers, such as Reynolds, in stirring the hornets’ nest of public opinion, as can be seen on multiple occasions in the lead up to the Boer War. In the aftermath of the infamous ‘German Telegram’, Reynold’s wrote, ‘If there be a nation so ignorant as to think that England will lie down under any insult or outrage, it is grievously mistaken’, and during the Fashoda Incident followed with more flag waving when it pronounced, ‘If it comes to blows our country first’.¹⁸⁵ The contemporary press was also quick to locate the root cause of the Boer War in the actions of previous Liberal administrations. A correspondent for the East End Observer wrote in 1899 that ‘the whole of the present trouble is the direct result of a weak and vacillating policy, adopted under the guise of a so-called magnanimity, after the disastrous reverse at Majuba Hill’.¹⁸⁶ Even traditional Liberal papers, such as Lloyd’s Weekly, gave doubt to the political rationality of Gladstone’s decision in 1881, however with an anti-Boer emphasis, stating that ‘a peace was signed which Mr. Gladstone trusted would be taken by the Boers as a magnanimous act... but they did not so recognise it’. Going one step further, Reynolds proclaimed that Dr. Jameson would ‘become one of our

¹⁸⁴ Daily Mail, 10th September 1898; Pall Mall Gazette, 5th September 1898

¹⁸⁵ Reynolds News, 5th January 1896; Ibid, 23rd October 1898. Paradoxically, Reynolds followed a pattern of reverting back to form and criticising the governments foreign and domestic policy after every venture into jingo territory.

¹⁸⁶ East London Observer, Saturday 30th December 1899, P. 7

national heroes' and ostracised the Outlanders for failing to support him.¹⁸⁷ These temporary nationalistic forays, in such publications as Reynolds, show how contemporary discourses were mirroring public attitudes and traditional cultural and political fault lines were intersecting.

This attack on the ideological foundations of party politics was not, however, localised to matters of Empire alone, and the Conservative hierarchy's gamble that the lower orders would put loyalty to country and Empire above loyalty to class proved problematic for local organisation. As was highlighted in the previous chapter, in spite of party mandate, local politicians put their faith into a politics of place and campaigned on a platform that accentuated social reform, in as much as it did imperial or union points of attack. The great irony of Salisburyian Conservatism was not lost on Salisbury, who saw his role as that of slowing the inevitable drift to democracy, all the while some local associations sought to attract lower class votes through social reforms. Whilst Gladstone and the Liberal Party were unable to get their teeth into the Newcastle Programme due to the ongoing Irish Question, the continuities from Disraeli's declining ministry and Salisburyian politics were all too evident. Of the few major social reforms passed, the Workmen's Compensation Act 1897 emphasised Salisburyian commitment to practical politics; essentially excluding the possibility of wide reaching reform programmes in preference for individual legislation that did not incur any additional expenditure on the part of the government. Those politicians belonging to the Salisburyian orthodoxy had little faith in attracting working-class votes, being more comfortable with using organisation to restrict the franchise and maintain a limited number of voters. However, during a time of rising working-class aspiration, consumption and civic consciousness, an internal disconnect appears between party leadership and local branches, which can be seen in parts of Lancashire and Liverpool, but

¹⁸⁷ Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper, Sunday 22nd April 1900, P. 11; Reynolds's Newspaper, Sunday 12th January 1896, P. 1

especially in Tower Hamlets. As previously evinced, what can be termed a Progressive Unionist clique emerged from 1895 which sought to engage with a wider community, emphasising strong communal ties and giving preference to local issues. In this sense internal party questions as to the very nature of Conservatism and Liberalism were being debated and answered at the local level, independent of party hierarchy, between local politicians and their constituents.

The people's Empire

When re-establishing the role of local politician's agency in grappling with the challenges of late Victorian politics, it is important to give attention to the fact that this developed in tandem with the working class insertion of their culture into the political and imperial public sphere. The Boer War shines a light on the multifaceted ways in which the working classes of Tower Hamlets understood what it meant to be an imperial citizen, and how they negotiated the increasingly organic relationship between notions of citizenship and empire. The spontaneity of local celebration and the phenomenological study of the shared consciousness of those involved have been used as a major case study for analysing popular opinion at a watershed for imperial sentiment. The Relief of Mafeking on the 17th May 1900 gave rise to seemingly sporadic and spontaneous eruptions of mass celebrations, with jubilant crowds taking to the streets from luncheon hour and throughout the night, particularly on the 18th and 19th. Traditional hermeneutic studies have tended to situate the epicentre of this outbreak in the heart of London - on the streets outside Mansion House - whilst the work of Price and Porter has simultaneously observed that the middle class composition of the crowd has become somewhat tautological.¹⁸⁸ However, more recent research has challenged this school of thought, expanding the spatial demarcations

¹⁸⁸ Price, *An Imperial War*, pp.132 – 178; Porter, *Absent Minded*, p. 196

of imperial celebrations to local, regional and colonial centres. Simon J. Potter has argued that Britain and her white settler colonies were 'increasingly drawn together by an imperial press system' and notes the wild scenes demonstrated in Montreal in March 1900, where English speaking students 'followed London's example' and 'went wild' over the relief of Ladysmith. A cursory glance at contemporary news during the time supports this notion, as well as emphasises the coterminous implications of imperial news, with the London Evening Standard noting that the news of The Relief of Mafeking was 'received with the wildest enthusiasm' in Sydney, Wellington and even in New York.¹⁸⁹ These popular imperial celebrations also transcended the multilateral relationships between the four nations of Great Britain; whilst each constituted a different imperial identity and experience, all witnessed scenes of imperial enthusiasm.

A doubt over the composition of the Mafeking and Ladysmith crowds has proven to be problematic; both Price and Porter contradict contemporary accounts of working-class involvement, instead arguing that 'clerks, medical students and public school-boys featured more prominently in the detailed accounts we have than the working classes'.¹⁹⁰ Whilst it has been accepted that these occupational groups largely constituted the more jingoistic crowd element, historians like Paul Redman have asserted that 'if the working class did not actively promote the jingoism, there can be no doubt that it acquiesced to it'.¹⁹¹ Whilst Redman puts working class involvement in imperial celebrations down to apathy, political

¹⁸⁹ Simon J. Potter. *News and the British Word: The Emergence of an Imperial Press System*. Oxford Clarendon Press, 2003, P.36; Gary B. Magee and Andrew S. Thompson, *Empire and Globalisation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, P. 28; London Evening Standard, Monday 21st May 1900, P. 7

¹⁹⁰ Porter, *Absent Minded*, P. 196; For accounts of working class jingoism see, Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History 1832-1983*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983 [2008], P. 460; H. M. Hyndman, *Further Reminiscence.*, London: Macmillan, 1912, Ch. 7; Hobson, *The Psychology of Jingoism*. London: Grant Richards, 1901

¹⁹¹ Paul Readman, "The Conservative Party". P. 461

estrangement and absence of effective Radical leadership, other historians have similarly noted working-class participation.¹⁹² Research into working class autobiographical accounts shed light on the presence of working-class citizens in the war celebrations. One recollection vividly recalls the Relief of Ladysmith and describes the crowd as becoming a solid and compact mass during the luncheon break, with some 'singing "Soldiers of the Queen" and others "The Absent Minded Beggar" and the residue cheering and shouting'. Another recollection recalls being on Brixton Road when men came home from work, 'there was great rejoicing. Bunting and flags were hanging from every available corner...London went nearly mad'.¹⁹³ It can then be argued that civic ritual, such as the sending off and receiving home of soldiers from war, and participation in public celebration were universally endemic, in keeping with the rest of the metropole. Any perceived paucity in patriotic saturnalia or paraphernalia should be viewed within the socio-economic context of Tower Hamlets, suggesting that any perceived absence in flags and bunting should be of more interest to studies in house hold budgets, rather than working-class imperialism.

A prime opportunity for local politicians to utilise working class participation and perceived imperial enthusiasm came during London's Boer War Carnivals. These carnivals, held in the East End on the 27th – 28th of June 1900, and in Bow and Bromley on 5th – 6th July, emphasise how locality was instrumental in the ways in which the working classes perceived their role in the imperial matrix. The spatial boundaries of Tower Hamlets were utilised and redefined to incorporate the wider community into a civic carnival that

¹⁹² See, John Benson. *The Working Class in Britain 1850 – 1939*. London and New York: Longman, 1989, P. 161; Thompson. *The Making of the English Working Class*, P. 916. Benson has illustrated how the 'poor shared in the growing enjoyment of national and royal occasions by quoting an article in The Times Newspaper, which observed that, 'Whitechapel and Bow Roads were a mass of flags...A large body of working men with flags and banners perambulated the Bow Road...' P. 161

¹⁹³ Leonard Ellisodn. *Starting from Victoria*. 1:229; Jefferis, Ada Marion. *The Memories of A. M. Jefferis; Written by her Daughter*. 1:379. Burnett Archive of Working Class Autobiographies, Brunel University

showcased the areas cultural and economic ties to empire, as well as the servicemen it had sacrificed on its alter. In a recent article examining the London Boer War Carnivals, it was noted that the predominant themes exhibited were ‘overwhelmingly military, national and imperial’ with a heavy presence of ‘men marching in khaki, model warships and tableaux of Britannia...’ The carnivals were held to raise funds for the widows and orphans of fallen soldiers, most typically through the auspices of the Daily Telegraph fund, which in the East End raised ‘£1,400 ... for the innocent sufferers in the war’.¹⁹⁴ Contributions and donations towards the funds were collected from the local community. In addition to contributions from the citizens of Tower Hamlets, working-class organisations such as trade unions and friendly societies paraded in the procession and helped to organise the event. In local papers, societies appealed for support and gave advice on how to contribute to the carnival by ‘taking collecting cards or boxes’, ‘joining in the procession of foot or on bicycle in fancy costume’ and ‘decorating and illuminating your house if in line of route’.¹⁹⁵ The significance of the Boer War Carnivals were that they garnered significant local support, and showcased how the working classes of Tower Hamlets took an active part in reshaping their communities around their identity as citizens of the imperial metropole.

To further emphasise the significance of locality in civic displays, the chosen carnival routes often denoted the most significant streets in the borough. Using the contemporary press to track the East End route and overlaying them with Charles Booth’s maps of the districts comprising Tower Hamlets, it is evident that the majority of the procession took place in so called mixed to well-to-do streets, such as the East India Dock Road. Richard Price has argued that the route omitted many working-class streets, however this assertion is worthy

¹⁹⁴ Dion Georgiou. “‘Only a Local Affair’? Imagining and Enacting Locality Through London’s Boer War Carnivals”. *Urban History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017, PP. 1 – 28, P. 10

¹⁹⁵ Islington Gazette, Thursday 5th July 1900, P. 1; East London Observer, Saturday 19th May 1900, P. 7

of reappraisal after close analysis of the route against Booths poverty maps. Whitehorse Street was classified as a 'Mixed street'; however it runs adjacent to Maroon Street, which was classified as 'Very poor, casual. Chronic want'. Whilst both Rhodeswell Road and Cable Street were described as 'Mixed', they had significant sections of 'Very poor, casual, chronic want' along the way. The West India Dock Road was characterised as a 'Middle class, well to do', though it similarly ran adjacent to Rich Street, which was described as 'The lowest class, vicious semi-criminal'; upon inspection of Booths maps, most well-to-do and middle class streets cordoned off and hid from sight the slums behind them, yet the route of the carnival brought this imperial pageant within a stone's throw of their front doors. On top of this the route also passed down Ashton Street and past the Boundary Estate, which were both in the very poor to criminal categories.¹⁹⁶ What is significant for this study is that despite the overt imperial tones and cross class participation, there appears to have been a lack of political party involvement. Research into the members of the organising committee for the East End Carnival indicates the absence of local politicians and the prevalence of local commercial enterprise and working-class associations. Of the members who sat on the East End committee, only two politicians of note, Bertram Straus and Harry Levy-Lawson, stand out and both come from Liberal backgrounds.¹⁹⁷ A simpler explanation for the absence of East End Members of Parliament can be found in the criticism for the government's handling of widows and orphans. In Bow and Bromley, Lansbury drove this criticism home, arguing that the wives and children of those killed had been "left to private charity, the government refusing to vote for their maintenance".¹⁹⁸ In 1901, a Joint Select Committee on charitable agencies for the relief of widows and orphans

¹⁹⁶ Price, *An Imperial War*, pp. 168 – 70; C. Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London*. London: Macmillan, 17 vols, 1902-3

¹⁹⁷ Lawson joined the Liberal Unionist Party in the late 1890s

¹⁹⁸ BUL, Election address, Bow and Bromley, 1900

of soldiers and sailors killed in action found that the state made no provision for the payment of pensions to widows. Whilst a state pension for widows was introduced in 1901, the government's perceived mismanagement of the Empire was a persistent criticism.

The political response

The war in South Africa redirected imperial and political thought in numerous ways, not least in bringing notions of what it meant to be an imperial citizen to the front of local politics.¹⁹⁹ Whilst Conservatives in Tower Hamlets had been renegotiating their image to reach wider audiences since 1895, the Boer War threatened to expose deeper internal arguments over the direction of Conservatism. Two prime examples of this can be seen through the actions of Lionel Holland in Bow and Bromley and Samuel in Limehouse. As one of the Progressive Unionists elected at the 1895 elections, Lionel Holland stood on a, almost radical, platform of social reform, advocating 'pensions by right for aged workers', 'Municipal aid to working men to purchase their own homes' and 'a cheap breakfast table'.²⁰⁰ Before the election of 1900, however, Bow and Bromley was thrown into a state of excitement over the announcement of the resignation of Holland, who had chosen to make his decision public knowledge during a commons debate on the South African crisis. Originally, the reason assigned to Holland's decision was that of ill-health, however whispers were abound that it was not 'entirely due to ill-health'.²⁰¹ These rumours were proven correct when in 1900 Holland crossed the floor and joined the Liberal Party, contesting the Romford Division. According to one local paper the reason Holland 'verted from conservatism' was because he considered that 'Under the current government social

¹⁹⁹ Duncan Bell. *The Idea of Greater Britain*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007, P. 3

²⁰⁰ East London Observer, Saturday 13th July 1895, P. 5

²⁰¹ Ibid, P. 5

progress has been too slow'.²⁰² Whilst not quite such an indictment of Salisburyian Conservatism, Samuel appears to have altered his stance, this time on the government's handling of the war. In a speech given in January 1900, Samuel stated that 'if his constituents asked him to censure and criticise the government, in his own interests and in the interests of the people at the present time he must refuse to do so'.²⁰³ The fact that Samuel made a point to stress that it was in his own interest not to criticise the government, coupled with the fact that Holland had so recently joined the Liberals, paints a picture of the strained relationship between the party hierarchy and rank and file conservatives in working-class districts. However, on the 10th March, Samuel seems to have found his courage and this time announced, at a public meeting, that 'he had never regarded it [the war] as one great statesman had done, as a life-and-death struggle'. Samuel concluded that the 'checks' the British army had met had 'lowered our prestige in the eyes of other nations'.²⁰⁴ This series of events is quite remarkable, especially considering that in June of the same year Burdett-Coutts, Conservative Member of Parliament for Westminster, would lay serious charges against the administration on account of the unsanitary conditions of military hospitals. Whilst Green has argued that the Edwardian period witnessed a 'Crisis of Conservatism', where a controversial policy alienated the electorate, it can be argued that internal divisions were alienating conservative politicians who, in working-class constituencies, were closer the eye of the storm, in the late 1890s.²⁰⁵

²⁰² Chelmsford Chronicle, Friday 5th October 1900, P. 5

²⁰³ East London Observer, Sat 20th January 1900, P. 5

²⁰⁴ East London Observer, Saturday 10th March, 1900, P.5

²⁰⁵ Green, *Crisis of Conservatism*, PP. 1 - 2

On way in which local politicians could mediate these internal tensions was through listening to popular public expression at the confluence of national and local politics, public meetings and the passing of resolutions. Historians have convincingly argued that Conservative agents manipulated jingoistic sentiment and engineered disturbances at anti-war and Liberal meetings; the production of handbills certainly indicates an element of organisation in this regard. The largest instances of crowd 'rowdiness' occurred at rallies in public spaces, such as Trafalgar Square and Hyde Park. The Western Daily Press covered one such demonstration against the war in Trafalgar Square in 1899, stating that 'it was an enormous gathering; but the vast majority of the crowd had come not to bless the Boers'.²⁰⁶ It was estimated that some 40,000 spectators attended the demonstration and that the crowd sentiment was overwhelmingly against the object of the platform. Similar, albeit more hostile, scenes were witnessed at an anti-war demonstration at Victoria Park, Bow, where the platform of Miss Hobhouse, of the South African Conciliation Committee, was stormed and police called upon to fight back an angry mob.²⁰⁷ Emily Hobhouse's criticism of the British use of concentration camps and the unsanitary conditions of the camps and hospitals was the cause of much controversy in Britain. As a result the War Office sent a deputation of women to South Africa in 1901, however as Hobhouse was deemed too outspoken, Millicent Fawcett, who supported the use of force in the empire, was chosen to lead the government enquiry.²⁰⁸ Whether it was her association with pro-Boers or her encroachment into the male sphere of politics, Hobhouse aroused a vehement backlash for her outspokenness on the issue, which seems to have been particularly felt in working-class boroughs, like Tower Hamlets. On this ground it seems that Pelling was on

²⁰⁶ Western Daily Press, Monday 25th September 1899, P.3

²⁰⁷ East London Observer, Saturday, 16th of June 1900, P. 2

²⁰⁸ Heloise Brown. *The Truest Form of Patriotism: Pacifist Feminism in Britain, 1870 – 1902*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003, PP. 165 – 80

the mark when he said 'the breaking up of anti-war meetings may suggest a much more active 'popular acclaim' for imperialism'.²⁰⁹ Liberal opposition to disturbances were also muted, with one notable exception coming from Campbell-Bannerman when he asked his counterpart, Balfour, if the government would call an inquiry into the disturbances, at a sitting in the commons in 1900. This lack of opposition is systematic of the Liberal paralysis concerning imperial matters in the late Victorian era.

The passing of resolutions mirrored the response of political parties to the currents of national sentiment, as can be seen through the negative correlation between pro-government resolutions and the failure of the Liberal Party to mount an effective public campaign against the war. The lion's share of pro-government resolutions in the East End came via Conservative Associations and fringe groups, such as the Primrose League. On the 7th October 1899 the St. George's Conservative Association gathered at their headquarters in Cable Street and moved a resolution of confidence in her majesty's government, as well as recorded their 'complete confidence in Sir Alfred Milner'. Similarly, on Saturday 28th October 1899, a meeting of the Liberal Unionists of the Bow and Bromley division met to call for members to 'support the government in securing justice and equality for our fellow subjects in the Transvaal'.²¹⁰

The peace movement was strongest up until October 1899, with the bulk of anti-war resolutions coming from Lancashire, Yorkshire, and parts of Wales and working-class areas of London. However, the majority of these came from Nonconformist Churches, rather than Liberal Associations. On Sunday 3rd September 1899 a meeting was held in Finsbury

²⁰⁹ Price, *An Imperial War*, P. 149; Henry Pelling, *Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain*. London: Macmillan, 1968, P. 90

²¹⁰ East End Observer, 7th October 1899, P.5; East End Observer, Saturday 28th October 1899, P.5

Park where the speakers 'endeavoured to show not only England's interest but England's obligations in the perseverance of peace, and the terrible cost in blood and treasure which a war with the Boer sharp-shooters must involve'.²¹¹ Despite some minor disturbances, the meeting was relatively uneventful and a resolution was passed in favour of conciliation. One of the last resolutions received at the Colonial Office in September 1899 was from the London United Workmen's Committee, who whilst wanting to maintain 'the trade of the empire', hoped that the war would be 'pursued until the power of the British Empire reigns paramount in South Africa...'.²¹² From 11th October, one hundred and sixty eight resolutions were sent to the Colonial Office, 'all except seven pro-government...the opposition had been effectively silenced by the fait accompli of the war'.²¹³ It can be argued that local politicians listened to popular trends voiced at public engagements, and mirrored the language and actions they had seen expressed.

Notable pockets of resistance remained prominent; amongst them was W. T. Stead, but even his 'War Against War' programme, which called for an immediate stop to the war probably alienated more supporters than it won over. Despite the fact that Stead discouraged overt displays of peace principles in public, as he feared this would lead to violent jingoism, his policy was too much for most Liberals to follow. Nonetheless, Stead was a heavyweight in political and social circles and his endorsement of the peace movement was problematic to imperialists, as seen through a letter written to Edmund

²¹¹ Islington Gazette, Thursday 7th September 1899, P. 2

²¹² Colonial Office, resolution sent 30th September 1899

²¹³ Patricia Knight. *British Public Opinion and the Rise of Imperialist Sentiment in Relation to Expansion in Africa, 1880 – 1900*.

Thesis for the Degree of PH.D. University of Warwick, November 1968. P. 473; With the breakdown in negotiations at the Bloemfontein Conference, held in late May 1899 between Kruger, Steyn and Milner, and Kruger's subsequent ultimatum in late September, war with the Transvaal seemed all but inevitable by early October and this trajectory was mirrored by the collapse of the peace movement in Britain

Garrett by Milner, who said 'It is rather a serious matter that Stead has taken the line he has. Of course he is not the power he once was – still he touches a large public'.²¹⁴ The significance ascribed to public opinion influenced the political response of the Unionists, as can be seen through the animadversions that were directed towards Miss Hobhouse, Steadman and Stead. Outspoken liberal and socialist commentators were publically discredited, as can be seen through Arnold White's description of Stead as 'a Russophile humanitarian whose sole claim to authority in South African affairs seems to rest exclusively on his alleged commerce with the spirit world...'.²¹⁵

Unionist criticism and the realisation of the perils that British soldiers faced, crystallised through the local press in the victories of Boer Soldiers and growing list of casualties, made involvement in peace activities seem increasingly unpatriotic. These factors fundamentally shaped the Liberal response, which in Tower Hamlets lacked uniformity and cohesion. Local Liberal imperialists, such as Poplar's Sydney Buxton, presided over a largely attended public meeting in Poplar Town Hall and strongly claimed that 'the opposition had given a patriotic and ungrudging support to the Secretary for the Colonies' and that he 'fully endorsed the principle that England must be the paramount power in South Africa'.²¹⁶ Conversely, Candidates like George Lansbury, in Bow and Bromley, steadfastly declined to accept that the election must be 'fought on the right or wrong of the South African war'.²¹⁷

However, the Liberal response to the Boer War in Tower Hamlets was best surmised in the election address of William Pearce in Limehouse, who stated 'It is too late to discuss events

²¹⁴ Paula M. Krebs, *Gender, Race, and the Writing of Empire: Public Discourse and the Boer War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. P. 84

²¹⁵ Knight, *British Public Opinion*, P. 673.

²¹⁶ East London observer, Saturday, 13 April, 1897, P. 6

²¹⁷ BUL, Election address, Bow and Bromley, 1900

which led up to the war in South Africa. When war begins party is forgotten'.²¹⁸ Whilst Patricia Knight has argued that Liberals, for the most part, failed to 'rise to the challenge provided by imperialist expansion in South Africa' because of 'earlier compromises over Uganda and Fashoda', it is clear that the Boer War represented a crisis of identity for Liberal politicians in working-class constituencies, as party divisions were becoming visible through bifurcation of electoral message.²¹⁹

The Boer war's impact on daily life

The impact of the Boer War on the working classes of Tower Hamlets was not only felt through abstract notions of moral and political identity, but also tangible and visible constructions such as the medium of legal system, patterns of occupation and consumption. In the lead up to, and during, the Boer War, traditional working-class antagonisms and perceived social-economic cleavages subsided and, through notions of citizenship, gave way to visions of respectability and patriotism. This was reflected through the East End courts, where the polarisation of imperial sentiment reached a level of monochrome. In one instance, Henry Wilson, a twenty seven year old waiter from Poplar, was charged with stealing a Transvaal War contribution box containing 5s.6d from a local public house. Whilst admitting his crime and asking for clemency on account of his wife and child, the presiding judge was not moved, stating any "man who would stoop to rob the widows and orphans was a disgraceful person". Wilson was given three months hard labour for this failed larceny and contemporaneous newspapers are filled with similar examples of unusually harsh punishments for those who fell short of the public spirit of patriotism and imperial altruism.²²⁰ On the other hand, the spirit of the day was not lost on the legal

²¹⁸ BUL, Election address, Limehouse, 1900

²¹⁹ Knight, *British Public Opinion*, P. 474

²²⁰ East London Observer, Saturday 3rd February 1900, P. 6

system, as the case of William Borley, a thirty-eight year old bricklayer from Holloway, showcases. Charged with desertion from the 18th Company of Royal Engineers, stationed at Chatham, since July 1891, Borley stated that his 'regiment has gone to South Africa' and he wanted 'to go too'. On this occasion the presiding judge told him that was a very proper and patriotic feeling and he 'would not delay the aspirations of the accused one hour longer than was necessary in that direction'. The judge's closing remarks go some way in portraying the current of civic responsibility when he said, 'the prisoner had shown himself a patriot and, what was better, an Englishman'; Borley faced no legal action and was remanded awaiting his reunion in South Africa.²²¹

The Boer War enabled local politicians to link patterns of occupation and consumption to an imperial platform in order to both augment their standing within society and party hierarchy, as well as to reach out to a wider audience. The significance of volunteering or belonging to the citizen soldiery, during times of national crisis has developed ambiguous connotations for historians in recent times. One school of thought posits the notion that volunteering was not an effect of popular patriotism, rather a result of poverty. Stedman Jones has pointed to evidence suggesting that the low standard of recruits was a direct consequence of the trade boom that accompanied the war, which would support the idea that working class patriotism stemmed from structural factors, such as the competitiveness of the labour market.²²² On the other hand, it has been calculated that over 14 per cent of the adult male population were 'in uniform for part of the war' and over one hundred

²²¹ East London Observer, Saturday 30th December 1899, P. 5

²²² See, Price, *An Imperial War*, P. 207-13, 216; Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*, P. 78; Benson, *The Working Class*, PP. 150,

thousand civilians served voluntarily, through militias, yeomanry and voluntary corps.²²³ Whilst the part of the 'yellow press' has been called out for whipping up levels of hysteria, and fanning the flames of jingoistic fervour, the part played by ordinary volunteers was not lost on the contemporary local press, eager to stress their communities show of patriotism. One local paper described the movement in the City of London as a 'remarkable response to the call for help from our citizen soldiers. All this goes to show that the national characteristics of courage and devotion to duty know no falling off in these modern days'.²²⁴

Whilst these studies stress an imperial connection, recent trends in the historiography of British imperialism have demonstrated how a sense of locality played a vital role in the way working-class citizens perceived their role in the empire at home in the metropole. This has recently been shown through the work of Schneer, who noted the intensity of celebrations in Tower Hamlets, especially within proximity of the docklands. Schneer notes that the docks 'kept up an unceasing round of hooting and tooting' and barges were 'decked out in the national colours' and the big ships moored in the river 'flew streamers of flags from the topmast to deck'. The East End of London had played host to similar scenes of patriotic and civic display throughout the 1890s, as shown previously through the opening of exhibitions, royal visits and launching of naval ships on the Thames. As such there was already a precedent for the citizens of Tower Hamlets to participate in patriotic displays of a militaristic nature. Schneer alludes to the spectacle of troop embarkation as 'designed to play upon the patriotism of onlookers'. However, similar acts can be illustrated from 1879,

²²³ Eliza Riedi, "Assisting Mrs Tommy Atkins: Gender, Class, Philanthropy and the Domestic Impact of the South African War, 1899 – 1902". *Historical Journal*, Volume 60, Issue 3, 2017 PP. 745 – 769; M. D. Blanch, "British Society and the war" in Warwick and Spies (ed.) *The South African War: Anglo-Boer War, 1899 – 1902*. Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1980, P. 229

²²⁴ Shoreditch Observer, Saturday 6th January 1900, P. 2; See also, Simon J. Potter, "Jingoism, Public Opinion, and the New Imperialism: Newspapers and Imperial rivalries at the fin de siècle". *Media History*, 20 (1), 2014, P. 34 - 50

where, despite adverse weather, 'the streets in the vicinity of the docks were crowded, not only by men, but also women and children, who also peopled the house tops, eager to catch a glimpse of the departing soldiers'.²²⁵ Furthermore, on returning home from the bombardment of Alexandria in 1892, one recipient of Victoria Cross reminisced over the unforgettable scenes on arrival at the London docks. Once again despite adverse weather, the troops came out of the gates to a hearty cheer from the people 'who crowded around in thousands'.²²⁶ Outbursts of popular enthusiasm for imperial endeavours should not then be viewed in isolation; moreover, in localities such as Tower Hamlets, they should be viewed in the wider context of working-class culture, as communities stressed their idiosyncratic connections to empire at a time of heightened emphasis on citizenship.

This can also be viewed as further evidence against Price's assertion that 'such concepts as flag and empire' were unimportant in working-class life. Price was drawing on the work of Walter Besant, who noted that the 'Union Jack is never seen in East London' to stress the insignificance of empire in the everyday lives of citizens of Tower Hamlets. However, as illustrated above this is not a wholly accurate, neither fair, assessment of working-class attitudes to empire nor their involvement in its civic pageantry. The idea of the East End of London being less loyal and patriotic than its neighbouring boroughs was an issue that provoked some consternation from the local press of Tower Hamlets. The East London Observer, writing in 1896, used the opening of the East London Exhibition as a means of refuting any idea that the people of Tower Hamlets were wanting in loyalty. The extract admits that 'the decorations were not on a lavish scale, and that there were very few striking displays', however it goes on to castigate those inclined to 'level a reproach against East London for its paucity of decoration' and reminds them of 'the comparative poverty of

²²⁵ East London Observer, Saturday 1st March 1879, P. 6

²²⁶ East London Observer, Saturday 30th April 1892, P. 7

its people, and also that, as the clothes do not make the man, neither, as has been before suggested, do the flags necessarily make the welcome'.²²⁷

Local political agency was also attuned to the sentiment local communities attached to volunteering. Of Tower Hamlet's Unionist Members of Parliament and candidates, as well as Moderate members of the LCC, notable local characters served, or offered their services, during the South African War. In Stepney, future Member Evans-Gordon gave an evocative speech at Beaumont Hall, where he personally sympathised with both anxious and grieving relatives of sons and fathers in the Transvaal, stating he 'had a brother in South Africa in command of a regiment, and they could imagine the anxiety with which he awaited the daily telegram'. In January 1900 it was understood in the local press that Gordon's petition to serve had been accepted by the War Office and it was reported that he was to join the Intelligence Department in February. Similarly, Guthrie in Bow and Bromley accepted an offer from the War Office to manage Mr. Van Alan's American Field Hospital and was later attached to the Army Service Corps, whilst Samuel in Limehouse had a son serving in South Africa.²²⁸ At local levels too, LCC clerks sought progression through colonial and military participation, no case being more pronounced than that of Lionel Curtis, who left the LCC to serve in the war and became a 'leading architect of British South African labour policy and apartheid'. Others returned to the LCC and many had their career progression expedited as a 'reward for patriotic sacrifice'. An earlier example can be seen through the career of Robert Foskett, who during the 1890s travelled to South Africa; met President

²²⁷ East London Observer, Saturday 13th June 1896, P. 5

²²⁸ For Evans-Gordon see, East London Observer, Saturday 11th November 1899, P. 5, East London Observer, Saturday 27th January 1900, P. 5. For Guthrie see, Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser, Tuesday 25th April 1911, P. 6

Kruger, later took part in the Jameson Raid and on return to London was promoted to the office of assistant clerk.²²⁹

Whilst this chapter has shown that Conservatives in London's East End were not unanimous in their position on the grounds of Britain's involvement in the war, they did present a united front and resolve to see it through. This clarity undoubtedly strengthened their electoral standing. Conversely, the Liberals' vagueness across the board encapsulates the division in party leadership. On top of the East End Liberal politicians, mentioned previously, who rejected the epithet 'little Englander', Liberal imperialists like Sydney Buxton stated in public that with regards to the war "there is no real issue. Whatever may be thought of the causes of war, an election could not alter the present position."²³⁰ Further contrast can be noted between municipal and national politics in the distinction between sitting members of parliament and Radical members of the LCC. After the 1901 municipal elections, the Radical leadership expressed their opinion of the victory, with Mr. Dickinson, Chairman of the LCC, arguing that the result highlighted the resentment felt by Londoners against the 'attempt to secure their support upon a perfectly false issue', Lord Carrington stated, 'electors strongly object to being treated as fools who do not know the difference between a question of imperial politics and a matter of municipal administration'. J. W. Benn bluntly put it as, 'No Khaki in municipal matters'.²³¹ Whilst the Conservative candidates who put politics of place ahead of party organisation in London's East End were rewarded for their foresight, Liberals who distanced themselves from the progressive standpoint, through the rejection of pro-Boer tags and support of the war, left themselves in a political no man's land. Politicians who capitalised on the war effort by

²²⁹ Pennybacker, *A Vision For London*, P. 20; East London Observer, Saturday 30th September 1899, P. 2

²³⁰ BUL, election address, Poplar, 1900

²³¹ London Daily News, Monday 4th March 1901, P. 5

submitting themselves to voluntary service tapped in to local sentiment and advanced their positions, whereas Liberals, having been outmanoeuvred like with naval contracts, were left to bridge the juxtaposed elements of their party's position on the war.

On the other hand, whilst some historians have weighed the importance of imperial sentiment against structural matters, finding the latter to be predominant factors, it can be argued that the Boer War tapped into local anxieties regarding local economies. One such incident that threatened to have wide-reaching implications for one of the largest industries in Tower Hamlets – tailoring – was the military tailor's dispute in 1900. Disputes arose between Messers Poole and their employees, with reference to the wages which should be paid for the making of the khaki uniforms. Poole refused to pay the union rate of wage, at 7d. Per hour, whereas Sandon outsourced the order to a business in Whitechapel, that similarly did not pay union rates. Whilst only 280 employees went on strike, there was a genuine fear that should the matter not be resolved, a general lockout of the trade would result in some 5,000 – 6,000 men being put on strike.²³² After discussions an arrangement was come to and the men returned to work, however this event highlights how the early trade boom that accompanied the war led to tension between master and worker, as both sought to maximise pecuniary gain from artificial orders.

Imperial figures in local discourse

Imperial figures, often quoted in papers and mentioned around the family dinner table, occupied a unique position within national politics. Characters such as the Boer president Paul Kruger and former Prime Minister of the Cape Colony Cecil Rhodes were popular

²³² Reynolds's Newspaper, Sunday 14th January 1900, P. 8; The East London observer, Saturday, 13th January, 1900, P 5;

London Evening Standard, Tuesday 9th January 1900, P. 9

interests for the working classes of Tower Hamlets. From stories of extraordinary wealth - and greed - to the ethics of empire and statesmanship, these characters embodied both the spirit of imperialism, as well as its spectre. Whilst the Boer War polarised British politics, these imperial figures typify the importance of local agency in constructing ground level support. Against a backdrop of civic pageantry, local politician's channelled working-class sentiment through the embodiment of national, and local, characteristics via these figures; neatly constructing figureheads to detach themselves from controversy and rally around in victory. On the other hand, the placing of imperial figures within the framework of political discourse was problematic for local politicians, as was the case with Rhodes, who is referenced sparingly within the setting of the election period, despite public interest remaining high.

In the Tower Hamlets, much like elsewhere across the metropole and white settler colonies, the antagonist of the war was President Kruger. The Conservative members for Tower Hamlets were unanimous in their nomination for culpability, with five election addresses making a direct indictment of Kruger's administration. Drawing upon his time spent serving in the war, Guthrie stated that, 'I am more convinced than ever after my personal experiences in South Africa, that the war was inevitably thrust upon us by the actions of ex-president Kruger and his advisers'. The idea of the war being thrust upon Britain was similarly taken up by Evans-Gordon, in Stepney, who reiterated the sentiment; saying that, the war 'was forced upon us by President Kruger's ultimatum and the invasion of our territory by his armed forces'. Samuel in Limehouse echoed this line, arguing that the he supports all that the 'Government ... has done to uphold the imperial dignity of this country and in its conduct of the war forced upon us by the Transvaal Republic and the Orange Free State'. Charrington, in his short address, is thankful that the 'war is approaching a successful termination, and President Kruger has fled the country'.

Bhownagree, in Bethnal Green, strikes a more celebratory chord when he said ‘the glorious triumph of our arms in South Africa is an achievement which today appeals to our patriotism and finally assures the suzerainty of the British Crown and the safety of British interests in that region, both of which were seriously threatened by Kruger and Steyn’.²³³ The uniformity of message across the borough indicates the strong organisational stance within the Unionist camp and reflects popular working-class feeling on the ground. Kruger was rebranded as a liar, who backtracked over pledges made at the Pretoria Convention, 1881, where he promised equal political rights to ‘everybody – to newcomers on the same terms as those who by a few years preceded them’. As one local paper bravely wrote in 1899, ‘President Kruger is already between the devil and deep blue sea. If he yields all that is asked by our government we are told that in ten years the English will rule in the Transvaal...If Kruger is obstinate, and then he and his people will simply be crushed by superior military force’.²³⁴ Whilst this may have had the rub of it, the wisdom inherent was ultimately lost on a public, largely, acquiesced to the prospect of war, and with a determined Unionist Party and disorganised Liberal Party there would be no reappraisals. The theme of Kruger ‘spoofing’ the country became such a theme in discourses of the war that in 1896 the term ‘Kruger-spoof’ entered the East London lexicon, connoting the telling of a lie.²³⁵ The impact of Kruger on working class culture can be seen through one working-class recollection that recalled peace night in London, where ‘hawkers were out in plenty selling ... Kruger ticklers and Kruger bongers’.²³⁶

²³³ BUL, Election addresses: Stepney; Limehouse; Mile End; Bethnal Green North-East, 1900

²³⁴ London Daily News, Wednesday 21st March 1900, P. 4; Shoreditch Observer, Saturday 16th September 1899, P. 2

²³⁵ J. Redding Ware, *Passing English of the Victorian Era*. London: George Routledge & Sons, 1909, P. 164 - Defined as “Lying. From the promises of fair dealing forwarded in January 1896, made by the President of the Transvaal Republic, and not kept”

²³⁶ Elizabeth Rignall, *The Memories of a Rolling Stone: Time and Incidents Remembered*. Brunel University, Burnett Archive of Working Class Autobiographies, 2:661 – the tickler was simply a peacock tail which was wagged at faces and the bongers were small animal bladders secured to the end of string to a stick, used to strike someone.

The deep seated animosity felt towards the Boers, and Kruger especially, reached fever pitch from 1900 onwards, with local papers noting the continuous disruption of meetings and the developing trend toward violence. On paper covering a Social Democratic Federation meeting, in which Hyndman presided, detailed how a man bearing some likeness to President Kruger was 'badly assaulted, and the united efforts of the stewards were utterly unable to quell the disturbance which followed'.²³⁷ Yet again, however, efforts to sow seeds of hostility towards the Boers had been going on since the Jameson Raid, with the Conservatives and semi-political fringe groups putting on lectures and public meetings to disseminate South African news. The Imperial South African Association, established in 1896 to 'propagate the need for a united British South Africa' and win over the working classes, held a meeting at Beaumont Hall in 1897, with Isaacson, MP, presiding. Whilst the names of both Jameson and Chamberlain were cheered by those in attendance, the main theme of the evening was to discuss the 'horrible ways in which the English people were treated by President Kruger'.²³⁸ The major point of attack on this front was the often noted idea that the English Language was relegated to a lower standing than Dutch, or often forbidden entirely, particularly in schools and the Transvaal parliament. Whilst there was a significant amount of hyperbole weighted to these claims, the prolonged exposure of the public to anti-Boer propaganda and the willingness of local politicians to stand on pro-war platforms, created a powerful symbol of injustice personified through Kruger.

Rhodes occupied an altogether different position in political and cultural discourses in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Of all local politicians in Tower Hamlets, only the Labour candidate from Bow and Bromley, George Lansbury, made an indirect reference to Rhodes in his election address. Lansbury, true to form, made it clear that he felt the war

²³⁷ Islington Gazette, Wednesday 11th April 1900, P. 2

²³⁸ Price, *An Imperial War*, P. 77; East London Observer, Saturday 8th May 1897, P. 5

was unjust and fought “in the interests solely of gold and diamond mine owners and millionaires”.²³⁹ Radical criticism of Rhodes was particularly felt in the left wing press, with one publication attacking the ‘mammon worshipers of the City of London’ for glorifying the ‘vulgar ... pseudo-philanthropist’.²⁴⁰ Recent historiography of Rhodes has sought to re-establish his relationship with the City of London, whose preference for indubitable credit insured mining, initially, remained outside the category of safe business. Rhodes’s relationship with Rothschild was difficult, predominately because on the one hand Rothschild, whilst not opposed to Rhodes’s imperial policy, observed the canons of banking and business orthodoxy; whilst on the other hand, Rhodes was seen as an adventurer who wanted to diversify De Beers portfolio. The Kaffir Boom of 1894 – 5, however, served to grant Rhodes, and his partner Beit, a greater level of financial autonomy from the London faction. Capital issues in African mining rose dramatically from ‘£0.4 million in 1880 to £40 million in 1891 to £140 million in 1901’, however this capital was not raised through London banks, moreover through Rand syndicates, who filtered shares through the London offices of Beit and the Barnato Brothers. As such, Rhodes increasingly had less need for external support and it has been argued that ‘London financiers were in no position to dictate colonial policy’.²⁴¹

There was a certain mystique surrounding Rhodes that elevated him above the unknown colonial administrators of the British Empire to the position of a household name. Local and regional papers covered his movements and trips abroad with great enthusiasm, often describing the large crowds that gathered. One regional paper noted, despite the public not knowing of his visit, upon docking at Tilbury Docks, some forty journalists and large crowds

²³⁹ BUL, Election address, Bow and Bromley, 1900

²⁴⁰ Reynolds’s Newspaper, Saturday 7th May 1899, P. 1

²⁴¹ S. D. Chapman, “Rhodes and the City of London: Another view of Imperialism”. *Historical Journal*, Vol 28, No: 3 (1985), PP.

647 – 666, PP. 662 – 666

gathered and cheered as Rhodes descended the gangway. Rhode's was accompanied by Rutherford Harris, of Jameson Raid fame and future MP for Dulwich, business partner Beit, and left the docks to meet with Dr. Jameson, for the first time in a year, and later Chamberlain. One working-class recollection even recalls remembering 'the older members' of her family 'talking about Cecil Rhodes and the diamond digging at Kimberley'.²⁴² It can be argued that the lack of direct criticism from Liberal candidates stems from the fact that there was enough ground level interest in Rhodes to leave doubts as to his level of popularity among the citizens of Tower Hamlet, and as a symbol of Empire, outright attacks on Rhodes could be construed as anti-war sentiment.

What is more, the majority of praise for Rhodes came from church associations, missionary groups and Conservative fringe societies, rather than from local Conservative politicians themselves. The popular rector of Bow, the Rev. M. Hare, who was a former chaplain to Her Majesty's Forces in South Africa, gave a lecture entitled "Our South African Colonies and the Goldfields" to a large audience in 1895. Hare contrasted the Matabele as a fierce warlike race against the more lamblike Mashonas, arguing that Rhodes had a decision to either protect the Mashonas, or allow the Matabele to exterminate them. He goes on to argue that the British South African Company was forced to act in self-defence; as no man could pass through the country with safety, a sentiment that painted a picture of South Africa as a natural part of Greater Britain and afforded safety to anyone who could proclaim *civis britannicus sum*. In the same year Rhodes was admitted to the Queens Council and one year later, along with President Kruger, was given a lifelike wax representation in Madame Tussauds.²⁴³

²⁴² Bexhill-on-Sea Observer. Saturday 30th January 1897, p. 6; Ada M. Jefferis, *The Memories of A. M. Jeffries: Written by her daughter*. Brunel University, Burnett Archive of Working Class Autobiographies, 1:379

²⁴³ East London Observer, Saturday 23rd March 1895, P. 7; Globe, 5th March 1897, P. 4

During the Boer War Rhodes naturally attracted much attention, particularly his involvement in the Siege of Kimberley. A sensational story, from the 'Corriere' of Milan, was picked up by the press in Britain, detailing Rhodes's escape from the besieged town as 'worthy of the pantomime season'. The report states that Rhodes 'covered himself with the skin of a monkey, and in charge of a Kaffir woman passed unmolested through the lines of his brother Boers'.²⁴⁴ Although a misrepresentation of facts, as Rhodes was present at Kimberley when the siege was lifted by Major-General French, this chapter in the war further emphasises the significance of imperial figures on the contemporary imagination. Local press agency, along with church groups and semi-political organisations, made it possible for the Conservative Party to avoid playing into the narrative of radical and Liberal commentators, who sought to attach the blame for the war on the government for obeying rand millionaires. Through attaching blame to Kruger and the Boers alone, the Conservatives channelled the popular currents of imperial working-class sentiment, once again pushing Liberals to the periphery.

Summation

The Boer War exposed elements of both change and continuity in local political, cultural and imperial thought, in the borough of Tower Hamlets. Whilst the South African War demonstrated a spike in overtly jingoistic, politics of disruption, it can be argued that working-class patriotic and civic displays were not anything new in Tower Hamlets. Moreover, the Boer War presented the working classes in these districts with both pecuniary opportunities as well the opportunity to reshape their surroundings and extenuate their respectable civic status. What has become more problematic is analysing how local politicians navigated the currents of party discourse and bridged political

²⁴⁴ Globe, Tuesday 2nd January 1900, P. 1

ideology with working-class sentiment and expectations. Salisburyian Conservatism, which was in essence a continuation of Disraelian ideology which incorporated a wider appeal to the middle classes, was increasingly seen as a stumbling block to the reforms that the Progressive Unionists of Tower Hamlets campaigned on. Tension within the party ranks became visible towards the close of the century, as can be seen from the defection of Holland and the public criticism from Conservative politicians like Samuel and Burdett-Coutts. Signs of an inchoate crisis of identity were apparent within the Liberal Party as well, with the Boer War deeply dividing the party. Local Liberal politicians were slow, if not reluctant, to tap into the popular sentiment of the wider community, evident through even the traditional left-wing press. However, there were signs of change. Every Liberal address supported seeing the war to a conclusion advantageous to Britain's welfare and through members like Buxton, the party showcased a future willingness to use imperialism as a vehicle for change. This departure from Midlothian principle contrasted with the situation of the Conservative Party. Although progressive advances had been made in Tower Hamlets, since 1895, the Boer War rooted local organisation to Salisburyian Conservatism, at a time when the sacrifices of the Boer War and the growing sense of national identity were calling for progressive reform. The Boer War exposed national deficiencies and the perceived neglect of the Empire; from the very party that professed to be that empire's guardian, as a result, the Conservative Party found itself heading into the twentieth century in a precarious situation.

Chapter four: Case Study Two – Tariff Reform

The Conservative victory in 1900 allowed party leadership to override tension within the rank and file of party membership. However, any hope that the internal divisions would be remedied were dashed soon after. Disquiet amongst rank and file members was exasperated by Salisbury's cabinet reshuffle in 1900, where Tories and Liberals alike sarcastically named the new ministry 'the Hotel Cecil', on account of the nepotistic nature of appointments to high office. Those progressive Unionists who had fought the last campaign on a platform of both imperialism and social reform, were left red faced when the government announced, during the Queen's Speech of 1900, that the time was not 'propitious for any domestic reforms which involve large expenditure'.²⁴⁵

Whilst the Boer War had highlighted Conservatives' neglect of Empire, the consequence of the Chinese labour question became even more problematic for the Conservatives, as safeguarding white labour in South Africa was a key theme in election addresses by Unionist candidates in 1900. Unionists in Tower Hamlets had a tough time maintaining that the Boer War was fought over democratic reasons, while Liberals addressed numerous local demonstrations and meetings condemning the introduction of Chinese labour. One such meeting took place at the Bow and Bromley Baths, where Stopford Brooke moved a resolution calling upon the government "to organise the emigration of Englishmen and women to South Africa for the purpose, not merely of working in the gold mines, but for agricultural and such like work". The issue of imported Chinese labour then stood in stark contrast to the collective organisation of the working classes of Tower Hamlets, who, whilst

²⁴⁵ Shannon, *Crisis of Imperialism*, P. 308; Hansard HL Deb 30th January 1900 Vol 78, cc1 - 4

opposed to notions of slavery, believed that the last government was elected on a platform of protecting British, or 'their', interests in South Africa.²⁴⁶

Furthermore, when Salisbury retired from office in 1902, his nephew, Arthur Balfour, ascended to the leadership and almost immediately resuscitated Liberal prospects through the 1902 Education Act, which also alienated many Liberal Unionists in his own party.²⁴⁷ It was against this back drop that on 15th May 1903, Chamberlain delivered a speech to his West Birmingham constituents that revived the fiscal questions of the 1880s and reshaped the landscape of British politics. In some ways, the tariff crusade was a last roll of the dice for a party who had refused to adapt to the changing role of the electorate and wider community in general.

However, by analysing election addresses and campaigns, historians have drawn our attention to the vibrancy of local politics in the late-Victorian and Edwardian period. Far from alienating rank and file Conservatives and Liberals, tariff reform had a unifying, and revitalising, effect on local discourses, in particular with Progressive Unionists, like Samuel, for whom the debate offered an imperial programme alongside their progressive policies.²⁴⁸ Popular appeal in Tower Hamlets was based upon local relationships and a mixed platform that targeted a broad base of support, and in 1906 the Unionists fought the campaign on a more progressive platform, advocating fiscal, educational and military reform as well as targeting specific local issues. In a further revision to Green's *Crisis of Conservatism*, the effect of the tariff reform debate was not as polarising on the relationships between

²⁴⁶ East London Observer, 5th March 1905, PP. 5, 8; See also E. F. Biagini. "British democracy and Irish nationalism, 1867 – 1906". Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, PP. 343 – 4; David Thackeray. "Rethinking", P. 196

²⁴⁷ David Thackeray, "Rethinking", PP. 191 – 213, P. 196; Shannon, *The Crisis of Imperialism*, P. 305

²⁴⁸ Thackeray, "Rethinking", P. 191

politicians and their constituencies as has been made out. Politicians were actively listening to their constituents and local discourses reflect the agility and uncertainty of constituency politics.

The serendipitous circumstances in which the Liberal Party found themselves in was certainly advantageous to their chances of a real shot at office for the first time in nearly twenty years. After walking in the wilderness for ten years, from 1895 – 1905, Liberal organisation, particularly in London's East End, had been overhauled by the work of Herbert Gladstone. What is more, free trade gave the Liberals the opportunity they had been waiting for to express a 'profoundly different philosophy of empire' and sought to 'turn the Conservative flank by enlisting tradition, history and even patriotism in the service of free trade'.²⁴⁹ This chapter will argue that the tariff reform episode had a revitalising effect on both parties; each side was emerging from the shadow of past traditions and changing to meet the demands of the consuming public.

Chamberlain and the origins of the Tariff debate in Tower Hamlets

By the time of Salisbury's death and the launching of the tariff reform campaign, Chamberlain was arguably the most recognisable and popular statesman in the country, attracting huge crowds in the metropole and elsewhere in the empire. Despite the affection and admiration, even from his staunchest opponents, Chamberlain was on a long descent from the apex of his career by 1903. The Boer War, widely referred to as 'Joe's War', had left the country heavily indebted to the tune of £250,000,000 and cost the lives of around 20,000 soldiers and volunteers. The result was that Chamberlain increasingly cut a lonely figure in the cabinet, with few strong allies - though it can be argued that allies

²⁴⁹ A. K. Russell. *Liberal Landslide: The General Election of 1906*. Newton Abbot: David and Charles Publishing, 1973, P. 68

were few and far between for anyone in Balfour's cabinet. Morant and Balfour's Education Bill of 1902 aroused Nonconformist dissent and gravely weakened Liberal Unionism as a political force. Chamberlain was only able to solicit the concession of local option, which fell short of placating Nonconformist agitation.²⁵⁰ Neither on matters of social reform or imperial union did Chamberlain make much headway. In 1896 Chamberlain proposed his Zollverein idea, that of creating a free-trade empire with a common tariff against foreign countries. But it became clear at the 1897 Colonial Conference that there was no appetite for such a fiscal change from the colonies, even if he did obtain concessions from Canada to reduce duties on some British manufacturers. When colonial ministers gathered in London for the coronation of Edward VII in 1902, another Colonial Conference was held where Chamberlain hoped to develop imperial defence and consolidate closer union. His hopes were once again dashed. The self-governing colonies had no interest in playing the agrarian sidekick and sacrificing their budding industries to prop up British manufacturing.²⁵¹

One fortuitous effect of the late war in South Africa came in the form of Hicks Beach budget estimates in 1902, which proposed a registration duty on imported corn of 2s per quarter. Before the Colonial Secretary departed for a tour of South Africa he was able to convince the cabinet to agree to Hicks Beach's proposal and the duty was imposed. Amid the tumultuous period from 1900 – 1902, this short-lived episode arguably went some way in revitalising Chamberlain. The Cabinet had agreed to abandon the total commitment to free trade and place a tax on food, whilst Chamberlain's tour of South Africa reaffirmed the bonds of Empire. Whilst in South Africa, Hicks Beach retired from parliament, paving the

²⁵⁰ Russell, *Liberal Landslide*, P. 24; Shannon, *Crisis of Imperialism*, P. 311

²⁵¹ See, Shannon, *Crisis of Imperialism*, P. 310, 308, 330; Cole and Postgate. *The Common People*. London: Methuen & Co, 1961, P. 457; Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism*, P. 191; Martin Daunton, *Wealth and Welfare: An Economic and Social History of Britain 1851 – 1951*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, P. 208; Duncan Bell, *Greater Britain*, P. 58

way for the free trader, Ritchie, to succeed him as Chancellor of the Exchequer, who then quickly abolished the corn duty. Chamberlain subsequently resigned from office, and on the 15th May 1903 gave his Birmingham speech that effectively kicked off the tariff reform debate.

In 1904, Chamberlain gave a speech at the Edinburgh Castle, under the auspices of the TRL, to explain 'specially to "working men" the proposals which he had been so assiduously putting before this great Empire'. Chamberlain's arrival to the castle was nothing short of an exhibition, staged for a presumptive party leader. Greeted by large crowds the ex-minister made his way to the stage followed by local Conservative member. Among their ranks were Dewar, Hey, Samuel, Maconda, and H. H. Wells. Other notable attendees were the sportsman F. C. Fry, Dr. Barnardo, ship owner Alfred Jones; Rupert Guinness and W. J. Hasted, a large local employer. On initiating the proceedings Arthur Pearson, the newspaper magnate, stated that Chamberlain, 'in the exposition of this policy' had risen to heights which have not been touched by any statesman in our generation'. The speech fell short of informing the working men what the actual incidences of a wheat duty would be. However, Chamberlain, by his own admission not an economic expert, did address an elephant in the room when he admitted that his policy 'might result in increased prices'.²⁵² Imperial preference was a policy of tariff reciprocity on imports, particularly foodstuffs and raw materials, from the colonies. As such, trade barriers would have to be raised against imports on foreign made foodstuffs, which meant that taxation on food was necessary for Chamberlain's social reform policies. Chamberlain had made this expressively clear during a commons debate in 1903, when responding to Lloyd George's attempt to bait him into the

²⁵² East London Observer, Saturday 17th December 1904, P. 5; W. Coats, "Political Economy and Tariff reform Campaign of 1903", *Journal of Law and Economics*, Vol 11, No. 1, 1968, PP. 181 – 229, P. 188 for Chamberlains relationship with W. A. S. Hewins.

open on incidences of imperial preference, he said if 'you are to give a preference to the colonies...you must put a tax on food. I make the hon. Gentleman opposite a gift of that'.²⁵³ Chamberlain had now linked imperial preference with a far-reaching package of social reform, effectively breaking from the traditions of Disraelian and Salisburyian Conservatism, in that he had not only involved his party in a frontal attack on the doctrine of free trade but had also specifically targeted the working classes on a platform of Empire and radical reform. The crisis of identity that afflicted the Conservative Party in the late Victorian era was well on the way to being resolved in the early Edwardian period, contrary to Green's assertion that Chamberlain's Bingley Hall speech precipitated a deepening of the crisis of Conservatism.²⁵⁴ The tariff reform gave the party of 'quieter politics' a modern cry and signified that they were prepared to challenge the status quo in order to bring about effective reform. Chamberlain's challenge to party orthodoxy complimented the movement of progressive local politics, giving local politicians a platform of reform and imperialism to engage with their constituencies and challenge a revitalised Liberal Party.

In Tower Hamlets, local Conservative politicians appear to have flocked to Chamberlain's cause early on, with Samuel and Guthrie; Claude Hey in Hoxton and Ridley in Bethnal Green South-West initiating vocal support. At a crowded and enthusiastic meeting held at the Conservative Club Hall, Ridley stated that 'during the past fifty years a great change had come over the trade of this country' and it was 'reasonable that an inquiry should be made into the matter to see whether any alteration in the fiscal policy of the nation was needed'.²⁵⁵ At the Limehouse, Ratcliff and Shadwell Constitutional Club, Samuel announced that 'No party had a better cause than they had – the protection of their native industries

²⁵³ Hansard debate, quoted in Martin Pugh, 'Lloyd George', 1988, P. 30; Shannon, *Crisis of Imperialism*, P. 350

²⁵⁴ Green, *Crisis of Conservatism*, P.1, 268; Thackeray, "Rethinking", P. 192

²⁵⁵ East London Observer, Saturday 27th June 1903, P. 6

and the taxing of foreigners'.²⁵⁶ A prevalent theme in the contemporary local press was to assert the revitalising effect on local party politics that the tariff debate had stimulated. Entire columns were taken up with interpreting the actions of local politicians at this inchoate stage, trying to ascertain individual member's stance of the fiscal question. In this manner, Guthrie was purported to be a protectionist when one local paper noticed that he was not among the signatories to the petition to the City Corporation for the use of the Guildhall for a Free Trade League meeting. Equally, the increasingly active organisation of the Tariff Reform League in Bow and Bromley was taken as proof of his support for Chamberlain's policies. After a resolution was passed in Hoxton, Chamberlain sent a public acknowledgment to Claude Hey, which was printed in the local press, stating 'the East End of London has suffered as much as and perhaps more, than any other district by the dumping both of men and goods. The remedy is in the hands of the working class, and I hope they will not hesitate to take it'.²⁵⁷ Chamberlain was adept at tapping into local issues and prejudices to appeal to the working classes, as he had demonstrated during the Boer War, where victory had, to his mind, ultimately demonstrated the electoral potential of popular imperialism. Chamberlain saw the empire as the solution to the fiscal question; tariff reform meant 'work for all', wages would rise due to an increase in demand for labour and the income from tariffs would finance long awaited reforms, like old age pensions.²⁵⁸

Whilst the period from 1900-1902 witnessed a number of self-inflicted injuries to Conservative electoral fortunes, as seen through a series of disastrous by-elections in the lead up to 1906, it should not be taken for granted that the Liberals were handed victory on

²⁵⁶ East London Observer, Saturday 5th December 1903, P. 7

²⁵⁷ East London Observer, Saturday 5th December 1903, P. 7; 12th December, P. 5; Saturday 19th December, P. 5

²⁵⁸ Green, *Crisis of Conservatism*, P. 74; Daunton, *Wealth and Welfare*, P. 208

a plate. The same uniformity of party opinion that had so characterised the Conservative successes in working-class communities in the 1890s was evident in early Edwardian Liberal organisation. A popular motif was a universal criticism of Chamberlain, with the 1906 election addresses of Buxton, Benn (St. George) and Brooke (Bow and Bromley) making direct reference. Benn argued that Chamberlain's scheme of protection was the worst form of 'such class legislation... It means a tax on food and higher prices for everything used by the working classes' and it 'would make the rich richer and the poor poorer'. Brooke chastised Chamberlain and the late government for having 'played fast and loose' with promises of social reforms, while Buxton appealed to his constituents to affirm the general principles of free trade. Buxton went on to say that Chamberlain has explicitly declared 'you would have to submit to the taxation on your food – bread, meat, butter, eggs, cheese, etc. Thus, while everyone would have to pay more for his food, there would be less trade and less profit, less work and less wages, fewer purchases and fewer sales'.²⁵⁹ At a general meeting of the Whitechapel Liberal and Radical Association, held at the Aldgate Baths, Herbert Samuel Montagu seconded a resolution condemning the 'reactionary fiscal proposals of Mr. Chamberlain and of the Government', believing them to be 'both hurtful to the public of the United Kingdom and injurious to the unity of Empire'.²⁶⁰ The challenge to fiscal orthodoxy provoked strong and unified reactions from both popular parties in Tower Hamlets. However, Chamberlain's direct appeal to working-class consumers tapped into party anxieties relating to questions over the nature of local politics. By asking for a debate on Britain's fiscal policy, Chamberlain had taken the first step towards answering the contemporary problems that faced party organisation, such as developing a wide-ranging appeal to the working classes.

²⁵⁹ BUL, Election addresses: St. Georges; Bow and Bromley; Poplar, 1906.

²⁶⁰ East London Observer, Saturday 5th December 1903, P. 6

Local organisation

The period in-between 1903 - 06 witnessed a renewed vibrancy in local politics, as Liberals, sensing blood in the water, directed popular currents of discourse to press their Unionist counterparts on issues of working-class concern, such as Chinese labour and education. Progressive Unionists were, however, also listening to their constituents and attempted to shape local discourses around the progressive policies they attached to tariff reform. This section will explore how developments within party organisation impacted on the interactions of politicians and the working class, and how national policies were mediated through the work of party agents and local associations.

James Cornford's influential article on the Conservative Party's success in the late nineteenth century highlighted the importance of party organisation in ensuring involuntary abstentions in constituencies. It was further argued that Liberals did not lose the 'Khaki' election because of the Conservative's 'patriotic cry', but due to the fact that 'Liberals failed to put forward candidates or to get out their vote'. Whilst Cornford's analysis has come under scrutiny, the Conservative's principal agent from 1895 – 1903, Middleton, credited the Unionist victory in 1895 to the opposition's 'utter unpreparedness', as Liberal organisation 'for lack of candidates, has been very much neglected'.²⁶¹ Both Middleton and Cornford support the assumption that a lack of enthusiasm at local level was a dominant factor in the Liberals twenty year exile from office. After Middleton's retirement in 1903, and the appointment of Lionel Wells to

²⁶¹ James Cornford, "The Transformation of Conservatism in the Late Nineteenth Century". *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 1963, pp. 35 -66, P. 55 – 56; For opposing interpretations see Lawrence and Elliot, "Parliamentary Election Results Reconsidered: An Analysis of Borough Elections, 1885 – 1910" in E. H. H. Green, *Age of Transition: British Politic, 1880 – 1914*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997, PP. 22 – 28; Paul Readman, "The 1895 General Election and Political Change in Late Victorian Britain". *Historical Journal* xlii, 1999, PP. 487 – 9; Windscheffel, *Popular Conservatism*, P. 220 – 2; For Middleton quote see Shannon, *The Age of Salisbury, 1881 – 1902: Unionism and Empire*, London: Longman, 1996, P. 415

principal agent, the Conservative Central Office came under heavy internal criticism for 'failing to consult with the National Union of Conservative Associations and losing touch with local constituency branches'. Furthermore, a memorandum on London organisation 'noted that the party lacked a practical organisation in twenty-five seats'.²⁶² Reports in the contemporary press emphasise the disarray of organisation in Tower Hamlets, with one local paper stating that, in Bow and Bromley, 'Party organisation is at sixes and sevens' with members being 'hopelessly divided on various matters'. Similarly, in Limehouse there was division between the TRL and the local Conservative agents of Tower Hamlets over the allocation of tickets for Chamberlain's Edinburgh Castle speech. Harry Samuel's long running election agent, A. White, Secretary of the Limehouse Conservative Association, came under heavy criticism for his role as the organising agent for the event.²⁶³ The claim that apathy had set in amongst local Conservative organisations was reinforced by J. Forrest, the Conservative agent in Mile End. Discussing organisation in the borough during the stewardship of Charrington, Forrest stated that 'Charrington's popularity was so great that strict organisation was not really necessary'. Charrington died in 1904, leading to a by-election where Harry Levy-Lawson, an ex-Liberal who crossed the floor owing to his support for Chamberlain's policy, won the seat for the Unionists. Lawson won by 78 votes in 1905 but lost in 1906 by 126 votes to the Liberal Bertram Strauss, which suggests a higher level of absenteeism due to deference within the community for Charrington's legacy in 1905 than in the following year.²⁶⁴

²⁶² David Thackeray, *Conservatism for the Democratic Age: Conservative cultures and the challenge of Mass Politics in Early Twentieth Century England*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013, P.22; Bodleian Library, Oxford, Sandars MSS, c. 753, fol. 189, Memorandum on London Parliamentary Representation, n.d, 1906

²⁶³ East London Observer, Saturday 9th July 1904, P. 5; Saturday 19th November 1904, P. 5

²⁶⁴ East London Observer, Saturday 26th August 1905, P. 7

Starting in 1899, Herbert Gladstone's tenure as Chief Whip of the Liberal Party oversaw a period of conjunction between local associations and popular organisations, such as the London Liberal Federation. Gladstone 'set up a separate sub-committee to examine the special problems of the metropolis' and through the 'judicious use of central funds to place agents in key areas' effected the reorganisation of constituency politics.²⁶⁵ The new organisation saw the concentration of professional agents in constituencies where a favourable outcome was more probable to Liberal candidates. Liberal associations across Tower Hamlets benefited from this scheme, as in the case of Stepney, who saw five additional agents allocated to support with registration and canvassing. The principal responsibility of party agents in the run up to the general election was concerned with registration work. The Liberal and Radical agent for Stepney, R. D. Forrester, noted in 1905 that, whilst there were a high number of removals, which he attributed to high rents and improved transportation, people seemed to be taking a 'greater interest in getting on the register than ever before'. Further cause for Liberal optimism came from the revision of voters in St. George's, where the Liberal agent, C. Gover, reported a Liberal gain of 88 voters, going on to state that '150 of the new voters had applied for membership of the Liberal Association.'²⁶⁶ The importance attached to registration work can be viewed through an aphorism in the local press, which read 'elections are won not so much on the day of the poll as in the registration courts', continuing on, 'It is here that the party agent strains every nerve to get the vote for householders and lodgers'. Furthermore, the sheer number of columns devoted to registration notices, as early as 1904, speaks for the significance placed

²⁶⁵ Russell, *Liberal Landslide*, P. 37; Robert C. Self, *Evolution of the British Party System: 1885 – 1940*. London and New York: Routledge 2000 [2014], P. 27

²⁶⁶ East London Observer, Sat 19th August 1905, P. 7; Saturday 30th September 1905, P. 7

on ensuring potential supporters were on the register and the broader appeal of local politics.²⁶⁷

Educational literature, party propaganda and ancillary organisations played a larger role in the election of 1906 than hitherto witnessed in metropolitan politics. The annual reports of the National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations and the National Liberal Federation illuminate the gigantic increase in election materials supplied by both organisations. At the 1906 election, the NUCCA supplied 34,000,000 leaflets and pamphlets, 250,000 posters and 150,000 cartoons compared to 19,000,000 leaflets, 250,000 posters and no cartoons in 1900. Similarly, the NLF supplied 26,140,000 leaflets and pamphlets, 700,000 coloured posters and 2,613,000 cartoons, as well as 420,000 Liberal election song sheets. This signifies an increase in Liberal election literature from 1900 - 1906, of 6,140,000 leaflets and pamphlets, 525,000 posters and 3,033,000 cartoons and song sheets.²⁶⁸ There was also a noticeable change in the formatting and style of election materials, with posters, leaflets and even election addresses adopting a more populist approach. The introduction of colour, more diverse typography and the candidate's picture on their election addresses, with condensed information, divided into sub sections with important pieces highlighted in bold, point towards a more accessible approach aimed at wider audience. Similarly, colourful and humorous election posters and cartoons were widespread in Tower Hamlets and attest to local organisation's attempt to appeal to citizens visual senses, rather than attempt to explain the complex fiscal matters before them. Cadbury urged Herbert Gladstone that 'elections are not won by public

²⁶⁷ Tower Hamlets Independent and East End Local Advertiser, Saturday 11 August 1906, P. 8; East London Observer, Saturday 13th August 1904, P. 4

²⁶⁸ Figures quoted in Rix. *Parties, Agents*. P. 218; See, Andrew S. Thompson, "Tariff Reform: An Imperial Strategy, 1903 - 1913". *Historical Journal*, Vol. 40, No. 4, 1997, PP. 1033 - 1054, P. 1036, for discussion on Porter's research into the TRL

meetings, but by canvassing and leaving leaflets from house to house, so that the lukewarm electors may be reached who will never take the trouble to attend public meetings, and these form the vast majority'.²⁶⁹

An issue that both Liberals and Conservative politicians faced, during the period from 1903 – 06, was how to elucidate complex economic questions to working-class audiences; instead of tables of data and graphs, party propaganda permeated the lecture halls and printed materials of organisations claiming to be beyond party politics. An example of this occurred at a TRL lantern lecture in St. George's and Wapping in 1905, where the prospective Conservative candidate, H. H. Wells, presided. Despite declaring a hope that members of the audience would forget about 'whether they were Liberals or Conservatives' and remember that they were simply 'Englishmen', the first picture displayed was a portrait of Mr. Chamberlain, and proceeded to discuss the 'unfair competition which our manufacturers met with from foreigners'.²⁷⁰ Whilst there are no exact figures on the amount of propaganda material that the TRL printed during this period, it stands to reason that 'Chamberlain's supporters printed literally millions of pamphlets and other publications'. Examples of popular local posters emphasise the importance of local themes and the place of popular characters over statistics and figures. Figures one and two illustrate how Chamberlain was both an instrument and a problem to both sides of the debate. Figure one depicts a portrait of Chamberlain against an orange background with the words 'Tariff Reform League' at the top. This is perhaps the most recognisable TRL poster exhibited, however the contemporary press note how posters were tailored to specific audiences and in Tower Hamlets, TRL posters dealt with topics

²⁶⁹ Rix, *Parties, Agents*, P. 216; Cadbury to Gladstone, 27th December 1905. H. Gladstone papers, MS Add. 46063, fo. 240.

²⁷⁰ East London Observer, Saturday 8th April 1905, P. 5

such as ‘the alien question’ and was based on ‘Mr. Chamberlain’s Limehouse speech’.²⁷¹ Simultaneously, the LPD capitalised on the TRL’s symmetrical nature of representation between Chamberlain and tariff reform to associate Chamberlain’s new policy to his past failures. Figure two depicts a humorous parody of Chamberlain, frustrated because his creations remain unfulfilled, and asks whether protection will go the same way. These figures illustrate the nature of the local campaigns, as populist modes of narration, party politics and new methods of production, specifically targeting mass audiences, took precedence over intellectual debates regarding the fiscal question.



Figure 1: ‘Tariff Reform League: Each for all and all for each’ Published by the Tariff Reform League, 7 Victoria Street.

Figure 2: ‘Will it burst too?’ Published by the Liberal Publication Department, 42 Parliament Street S.W

The role of party organisation and local agents also faced the issue of ensuring continuity of candidates in local elections, as well parliamentary. Middleton’s message to metropolitan

²⁷¹ Coats, *Political Economy and Tariff reform*, P. 197; East London Observer, Saturday 07th January 1905, P. 7

agents in 1894, that future 'local elections must be fought on political lines', led to partisan involvement at all levels of municipal government, from county council and borough elections to School Boards and Boards of Guardians.²⁷² However, the 1904 LCC election emphasises the difficulty Conservative agents in Tower Hamlets faced in maintaining municipal representative continuity, as a contrast between candidates demonstrates. The Moderates gained only one seat in the East End in the 1904 election, with Lord Malmesbury coming in second in Stepney to replace the Progressive Alfred Thomas Williams; although Malmesbury did not fight the 1901 election. Between 1901 and 1904 there was no continuity from Moderate candidates in: Whitechapel, Stepney, St. George's, Poplar, Mile End, Limehouse, Bow and Bromley and Bethnal Green South-West. Only in Bethnal Green North East did the Moderate runners up, Bruce and Collins, contest, albeit unsuccessfully, the same seat. Whereas, in every constituency that returned Progressive candidates, there was at least one returning councillor, with Poplar, Limehouse, Bow and Bromley, Bethnal Green North-East and South-West returning both previous councillors.

Similar issues arose for Conservative Party organisation during the parliamentary elections in 1906, which saw a widespread reshuffle of candidates due to resignations and even nine instances of members crossing the floor, as in the case of Winston Churchill in 1904. Tower Hamlets was no exception to this trend and two resignations and one death left local party organisation with little option but to put forward inexperienced nominees for candidacy, or at any rate candidates with little time to nurse the constituency. In St. George's, Thomas Dewar resigned in 1905, citing 'attendance at the House of Commons, in addition to the cares of business enterprises' amounting to more than he could undertake. In a similar situation to his predecessor, Lionel Holland, Walter Guthrie in Bow and Bromley resigned his seat in 1904, stating ill health as his reason for doing so. Guthrie, the 'reticent member

²⁷² MCAA, minute book, 9th March. 1894. Quoted in Windscheffel, *Popular Conservatism*, P. 38

for Bow and Bromley', certainly left the Conservatives in a weaker position than the one he inherited, with local papers accusing him of being 'singularly neglectful' and stating that he has never 'taken those he represented into his confidence on the Education Question, the Fiscal Question, or Chinese Labour'. An equally plausible reason for his resignation is presented in the same column, which notes that 'he certainly by letter announced himself a free trader'.²⁷³ The heaviest blow to Conservative hegemony in East London came with the death of the long standing and popular Member of Parliament for Mile End, Spencer Charrington in 1904. Bertram Strauss, the Progressive councillor for Mile End narrowly lost the resulting by-election, however Liberalism was buoyed by its resurgence in this constituency following the passing of the immovable Charrington.

Local organisation from 1903 – 1906 showcases the revolving fortunes of party agency and suggests a disconnection between voters and the Conservative Party. From this perspective it can be argued that in conjuncture with Green's argument, the adoption of a problematic policy alienated their electoral base and strengthened the hand of their Liberal opponents. Conversely, Liberal's had been strengthening party organisation since the turn of the century and were in a much healthier position than they had been in 1900. Research into local organisation has shed light on alternative explanations for the Liberal Landslide, which go some way in rehabilitating the relationship between local politicians and their constituencies during this time. Whilst it is indisputable that the fiscal question was the cause of friction within the Unionist ranks, certain historians may have exaggerated the extent of its division, especially in Tower Hamlets.²⁷⁴ Out of the nine constituencies focused upon in this thesis, six were contested by the same men who fought in the 1900 election

²⁷³ East London Observer, Saturday 20th May 1905, P. 5; Saturday 14th May 1904, P. 3

²⁷⁴ See, Richard A. Rempel. *Unionists Divided; Arthur Balfour, Joseph Chamberlain and the Unionist Free Traders*. London: Archon Books, 1972.

and all gave their support to Chamberlain's policy. Regardless of whether tariff reform was a winning strategy or not, the Unionists of Tower Hamlets were united on the issue and the more positive, and less reactionary, campaign of 1906 emphasises its revitalising effect on local Conservatism. What is apparent is the role that organisation in Tower Hamlets played on party fortunes. Resignations from 1904 onwards left local organisation with limited time to place suitable candidates in constituencies, which led to inexperienced men with less of a local connection facing local Liberals and Progressive LCC members. Changes at CCO had a debilitating effect on party infrastructure whilst the often close proximity of local associations with the TRL was not always harmonious. Many of these problems were self-inflicted, as Conservative organisation had allowed itself to become lax after so long without an effective opposition. The work of Gladstone in strengthening core East End seats and increasing agents to support registration capitalised on an electorate who were critical of a party emerging from the shadow of the Salisburyian party.

Elections, 1904 – 06

The work of local agents in connecting politicians and their constituents emphasised the strength of local networks that many politicians, in both camps, had been active in constructing since 1895, some even longer. As both parties were emerging from the shadow of previous administrations by 1903, the elections of 1904 and 1906 present a good staging area to analyse how parties defined, and constructed their new messages whilst negotiating these with the electorate. Research into the election campaigns of both parties supports David Thackeray's conclusion that tariff reform was no panacea for solving the problems politicians faced at the local level.²⁷⁵ Whilst Green has argued that the problems facing Edwardian Conservatism began with the fiscal debate of 1903, politicians

²⁷⁵ Thackeray. "Rethinking", P. 212

in Tower Hamlets did not stand on a platform of fiscal reform alone. Moreover, the local candidates, Conservative and Liberal, were well attuned to community identities and culture by 1906.

Table 3 - Major issues mentioned in Tower Hamlets, 1906

Issues	Addresses in which issue mentioned					
	Liberal Unionist			Liberal		
	Local %	Number	National %	Local %	Number	National %
Tariff Reform	100	9	98	100	9	98
Tax Reform	33.33	3	27	100	9	...
Education	77.77	7	67	88.88	8	86
Home Rule	77.77	7	85	66.66	6	78
Chinese Labour	33.33	3	19	77.77	7	75
Aliens Act	77.77	7	17	22.22	2	...

Data pertaining to the ten constituencies above was acquired from the British Political Party General Election Addresses: From the National Liberal Club, Bristol University Library.

The Liberal Party witnessed a 16.3 per cent swing in Tower Hamlets in 1906, comparable to the national trend that saw a 5.4 per cent swing from the Conservative to Liberal Party. In table three, a quantitative analysis of sampled addresses indicates that both Liberal and Unionist candidates mentioned tariff reform, home rule and education comparatively consistent to one another. The deviation to this pattern can be seen in differences in approach to the issues of Chinese labour and the Alien Bill. Whereas the Alien Act was mentioned in 77.77 per cent of Conservative addresses, in comparison to 22.22 per cent of Liberals, similarly the issue of Chinese labour was mentioned in 77.77 per cent of Liberals as opposed to only 33.33 per cent of Unionists. As tariff reform was mentioned in 100 per cent of candidates address, it can safely be regarded as the most decisive issue of the election. This section will analyse the four most prominent electoral themes

between 1904 and 1906: principally the fiscal question, the 'alien' question, Chinese slavery, and the education question. It will be shown that these themes had a rejuvenating effect on local politics in Tower Hamlets and highlight the change and continuity in local interaction during this time.

The fiscal question was the most prominent issue of the 1906 election campaign. However, the discourse of fiscal systems, international competition and national efficiency were widely intertwined within municipal politics in the 1904 local elections. On opening the tariff campaign in 1903, Chamberlain gave a speech in Glasgow that was widely reprinted in the regional press and laid the foundations for the subsequent discourse on Britain's commercial position. Chamberlain likened Britain's precarious situation to that of St. Mark's Campanile in Venice, which had collapsed in 1902. Professing to his audience that he saw similar signs of decay and 'cracks and crevices in the walls', the ex-Colonial Minister stated that from 1872 to 1902, Britain's export trade had experienced a moderate increase of '20 millions', or '7½ per cent', whereas the population had increased '30 per cent'. In comparison, during the same time America's export trade had increased by 110 millions' and Germany's by '56 millions'.²⁷⁶ Chamberlain augured that under this free trade system, sustaining the population would be untenable. The basis of this speech typifies an issue facing proponents of tariff reform, as it was launched during an inopportune moment. Cyclical depressions in the 1870s, 1880s and 1890s had weakened the nations trust in the free trade doctrine. However, 1903 happened to coincide with an upward trend in the economy.²⁷⁷ Nevertheless, Chamberlain had established the parameters of the coming debate, which undoubtedly animated local politics.

²⁷⁶ London Daily News, Wednesday 7th October 1903, P. 6

²⁷⁷ D. K. Fieldhouse, *Economics and Empire, 1830 – 1914*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1984, P. 11; Shannon, *Crisis of Imperialism*, P. 360

The issue of protecting British workmen from unfair competition of foreign factories and sweated industries was a contentious issue during the municipal elections of 1904. Whilst the economic downturns of the preceding decades had induced the likes of America, Germany and France to erect prohibitive trade barriers in order to protect national industries, Britain was not alone in demurring from this line, as both the Netherlands and Belgium did not think it politically necessary to raise barriers.²⁷⁸ Within this context, the Progressive County Council purchased rails for metropolitan tramlines from Belgium in 1903 and from this action an additional nexus was established between municipal and national politics. The Moderate candidates in Limehouse, Elliot and Grey, regretted ‘that the progressive Party on the LCC should purchase articles from the foreigner which our own people are well capable of making’ and argued that ‘it is the duty of the council to encourage British and particularly metropolitan manufacturers’. Similarly, Deans and McCrea, in Bethnal Green North-East, decried that the ‘Radical council have spent £75,000 in Belgian iron for tramways – money which might have been spent in finding work and wages for British workmen’. Whilst there was not always unanimous understanding between the Moderates on the exact expenditure, with Kirkwood and Malmesbury in Stepney stating that the sum paid to Belgium firms was actually £80,000, the rhetoric of the Moderates was decidedly protectionist in nature.²⁷⁹

As a rejoinder, the sitting councillors for Bethnal Green South-West, Branch and Wiles, announced that by accepting the Belgian contract, the LCC had broken ‘a ring among English manufacturers’ and as a consequence the LCC ‘were getting rail from Yorkshire seven per cent cheaper than the Belgian rails cost, on which contract alone they saved

²⁷⁸ Fieldhouse, *Economics*, P. 11

²⁷⁹ BUL, election addresses: Limehouse; Bethnal Green North-East; Stepney, 1904

£8,000'.²⁸⁰ Arthur Leon in Limehouse reminded his constituents that 'not one-tenth of the materials was bought from foreign firms' and 'goods imported are paid for by goods exported and made in England'.²⁸¹ The Progressive stance was supported by Chiozza Money, whose repudiation of Chamberlain's Glasgow speech was reproduced in the metropolitan presses, when he noted that a protective tariff would see 'makers forming rings and putting up prices while actually selling to foreigners at cheaper prices'.²⁸²

The success of the progressive campaign in Tower Hamlets can be seen through the contrast of space devoted to the fiscal question in the election addresses of parliamentary candidates in 1906. The Liberals, by and large, devoted equal, or less, space in their addresses to matters directly concerning free trade and tariff reform, whereas the conservative candidates, again with few exceptions, made it the key note of their addresses. One aspect of the Conservative campaign was that whilst they were unanimous in their agreement that reform was needed they were split between the right fiscal systems to adopt. Lawson in Mile End stated that 'for the sake of reciprocity...we must have a free hand to beat down hostile tariffs of foreign countries which refuse our manufactured goods, whilst they flood our markets with the result of sweated labour'. The idea of beating down foreign barriers through a policy of retaliation was also echoed in Whitechapel by Kyd. Conversely, in Poplar the Conservative candidate Borwick argued that the 'present system is out of date' and that arrangements needed to be made with 'our colonies on the basis of reciprocal preference...to increase trade under the flag'.²⁸³ On the other hand, the Liberal election addresses were characterised by a uniformity of stance, with widespread repetition of pledges to vote against any form of food tax. Leon in Limehouse was 'against

²⁸⁰ East London Observer, Saturday 30th January 1904, P. 5

²⁸¹ BUL, LCC address, Limehouse, 1904

²⁸² London Daily News, Thursday 5th November 1903, P. 7

²⁸³ BUL, Election addresses: Mile End; Whitechapel; Poplar, 1906

taxing food, which can only lead to the poverty of the poor’, Strauss in Mile End was ‘uncompromisingly in favour of free trade, as it is synonymous with cheap food’ and in Bethnal Green North-East, Cornwall declared he wanted to remove ‘all taxes on food’.²⁸⁴ This uniformity of opinion was reflected in campaign cartoons and posters that were utilised throughout the borough of Tower Hamlets. Figure three is illustrative of the importance Liberals placed on the taxation of food.

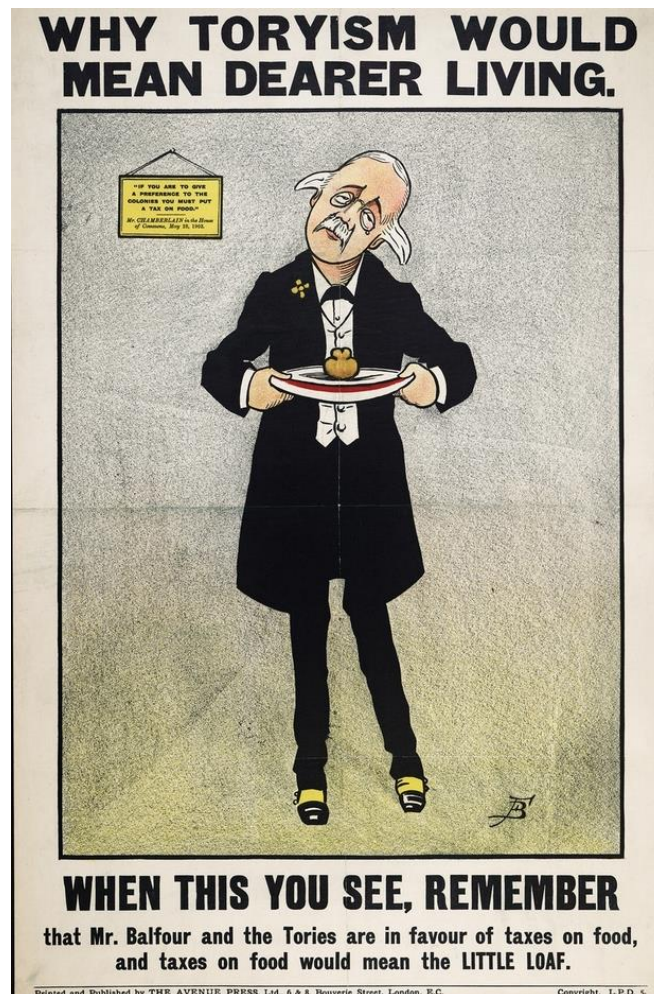


Figure 3: ‘If you are to give a preference to the colonies you must put a tax on food – Mr Chamberlain in the House of Commons, May 28th 1903’

There were notable distinctions, and similarities, in the Liberal and Conservative approaches to conveying their messages to the public. Whilst both used language to tap into local anxieties surrounding employment and taxation, incorporating reform and

²⁸⁴ BUL, Election addresses: Limehouse; Mile End; Bethnal Green North-East, 1906

empire alongside their tariff reform arguments, they also differed greatly on how they sought to tailor their addresses to their constituents. On the whole, Liberals linked their arguments to the local economy of the East End, whereas the Unionists, to a far greater extent than in 1895 and 1900, neglected the strong community connections that had proved so effective in the past. In so doing, it can be argued that the Conservatives failed to address constituents as consumers, instead placing too much emphasis on national, rather than local, identities and came across as putting vested interests of capitalists above those of the working class.²⁸⁵

The Conservatives placed great importance on the notion of unfair foreign competition in their addresses, with nine out of the eleven Unionists in Tower Hamlet stressing the need to break down foreign tariffs imposed on Britain's manufactured goods. In Limehouse, Samuel proposed a 'carefully considered system of taxation on foreign manufactured articles coming daily into this country', whilst du Cros, in Bow and Bromley, bemoaned 'the boycotting of British goods in foreign countries through the agency of hostile tariffs'. A typical solution proposed by Unionists was offered by Lawson, in Mile End, who campaigned for 'a free hand to beat down the hostile tariffs of foreign countries which refuse our manufactured goods'.²⁸⁶ Similarly, Liberals also referenced foreign nations in their addresses, although their purpose for doing so was to highlight the dangers of protectionism. In Stepney, Stokes argued that 'protected countries, such as France and Germany, where wages are lower and hours are longer, should be valuable standards by which the promises and prophecies of the food taxes can be judged'. Straus in Mile End questioned whether Britain wanted to emulate Russia and Benn, in St. Georges questioned

²⁸⁵ See David Thackeray, "Home and Politics: Women and Conservative Activism in Early Twentieth-Century Britain". *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 49, No. 4, 2010, PP. 826 – 848, for counter argument

²⁸⁶ BUL, Election addresses: Limehouse; Bow and Bromley; Mile End, 1906

why 'there were such large numbers of unemployed in protected countries like Russia and Germany, and why do so many of them flock to Free Trade England?'²⁸⁷ This line of argument led naturally to the local problem of unemployment, for which both parties claimed to have the cure. In Whitechapel, Kyd argued that to ensure continuous employment, 'we must prevent our employers of labour being ruined by unfair competition', whereas Bhownaggee championed reform as a 'practical measures for securing to you better conditions of trade and labour'.²⁸⁸ Equally, Liberals, like Samuel in Whitechapel, said 'any restriction of the freedom of trade would raise the price of food and cost of living, whilst employment would be less and wages lower'. Benn claimed that if less foreign goods entering the port 'there will be less work, and the waterside workers, shopkeepers, and others who depend on them will suffer severely'.²⁸⁹

Whilst both parties appealed to their working class constituents through language which targeted insecurities over employment and international competition, a striking difference in the way both parties got their message across can be seen through the Conservatives abandonment of politics of place. Liberals, like Buxton and Samuel, refracted their message through the language of local political cultures and traditions to shape their addresses for a working-class audience. Buxton stated that in the East End, 'protection in any form would disastrously affect the trade of the port of London, and all those innumerable industries that are dependent upon its prosperity'. Similarly, Samuel in Whitechapel, made explicit links between tariff reform and the local economy by stating 'carmen especially would suffer, as the conveyance of goods and materials would be reduced, the cost of living

²⁸⁷ BUL, Election addresses: Stepney; Mile End; St. Georges, 1906

²⁸⁸ BUL, Election addresses: Whitechapel; Bethnal Green North-East, 1906

²⁸⁹ BUL, Election addresses: Whitechapel; St. Georges, 1906

higher, and the prospects of increased wages very remote'.²⁹⁰ In contrast to this local centered approach, Unionist addresses are void of corresponding links to the constituency. Unionists put faith in nationalist discourses, from Kyd fighting for the 'prosperity of the nation', to du Cros who was concerned for British manufacturing and industry, which 'cannot compete' with unrestricted admission of foreign goods.²⁹¹ After placing such emphasis on international competition, it is surprising that Unionist addresses did not link free trade to Empire directly, although that is not to say that they did not separately put across an imperial policy, for instance on federation. In contrast to this approach, the Liberals adopted nationalist and imperial rhetoric to link free trade values to a platform to their vision of empire. In Bow and Bromley, Brooke states that 'for the United Kingdom – the champion and defender of the empire- the policy of free imports is a vital necessity' and continues 'because I love the Empire I condemn a preferential tariff with our colonies as a certain damage to the health and powers of our burdened population'. Similarly in Stepney, Stokes argued that 'our great traditions and glories need an imperial race, a race which can only be reared in healthy homes and under decent conditions', when discussing the matter of tariff reform.²⁹² The differences and similarities in the approaches of both parties, in mediating their messages to their constituents, highlights that Liberals were more successful in linking their arguments to the local economy of their constituencies and addressing structural concerns of the working classes, as evinced through Buxton's reference to the Port of London. In contrast, Unionists seldom referenced the impact of reform on their constituencies and dedicated as much space to industrialists as they did the working class consumer.

²⁹⁰ BUL, Election addresses: Poplar; Whitechapel, 1906

²⁹¹ BUL, Election addresses: Whitechapel; Bow and Bromley, 1906

²⁹² BUL, Election addresses: Bow and Bromley; Stepney, 1906

Closely associated with protecting British workmen from foreign competition, was the issue of 'alien' immigration in Tower Hamlets. Migratory discourses, the great deus ex machina of Victorian imperialism, became more imperialist in content in the 1870s, when migration to the colonies seemingly offered 'a promised escape from custom and convention, from the chains of matrimony and from respectable pieties about sex'.²⁹³ Furthermore, emigration was seen as panacea for the agricultural depression in the 1870s, redirecting rural to urban migratory patterns, thus decreasing strain on local economies and populations.²⁹⁴ Working-class organisations actively participated in encouraging migration to the colonies, with the Agricultural Worker's leader, Joseph Arch, stating in 1873, '...if they've got to go, let them go to an English colony that they may be Englishmen still'.²⁹⁵ However, the preferred destination of emigrants from the United Kingdom was to the United States, which offered 'possibilities for industrial employment, against the colonies which offered mainly agricultural work'.²⁹⁶ Cyclical trade depressions throughout late nineteenth century, particularly in the 1880s and the panic of 1893 – 97 in the United States, led to a drop in overseas migration in the 1890s, as an influx of economic migrants heightened anxieties regarding domestic labour markets. The promotion of emigration was replaced by a growing hostility towards pauper immigration, which resonated loudest in London's East End.

At the 1904 local elections, the Moderate candidates for Bethnal Green North-East, Dean and McCrea, tapped into local frustration over issues concerning the housing of the poor,

²⁹³ John Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth Century Britain: Essays on Gender, Family and Empire*. New York: Pearson Longman, P. 200; A. S. Thompson, *Imperial Britain: The Empire in British Politics, c. 1880 – 1932*. Oxford: Routledge, Ch. 6

²⁹⁴ Mackenzie. "Propaganda and Empire", P. 160

²⁹⁵ Joseph Arch, *The story of his life told by himself*. London: Hutchinson, 1898, P. 200

²⁹⁶ Knight, *British Public Opinion*, P. 16

unemployment and pauper immigration. The chosen manifestation of these anxieties was the progressive's flag ship housing project, the Boundary Street estate. In their address Dean and McCrea accuse their Progressive counterparts of having 'allowed a large number of their own tenements on the Boundary Street are to be occupied by aliens, to the crowding out of the Bethnal Green workers'. This narrative was dispelled by the Progressive candidates, Cornwall and Smith, who maintained that 'the question of high rents and overcrowding can only be effectively dealt with by the taxation of ground landlords and the complete equalisation of the rates'. Interestingly, the Moderate candidate for St. George's, George Foster, reciprocated this call when he attacked 'greedy landlords' for displacing 'our working classes'.²⁹⁷ The issue was raised in two additional constituencies, with the Whitechapel Moderate candidate, Carter, arguing that 'valuable areas adjoining the City of London' should not be given to 'foreigners who do not observe our Sunday, and who, by overcrowding, cause rents to be raised to a prohibitive figure'. In Stepney, the Moderate candidates, Kirkwood and Malmesbury, argued 'that means should be devised for regulating the inflow into certain areas and for preventing the wholesale displacement of the native population by foreigners from abroad'. The only example of a Progressive councillor advocating restriction of 'alien' immigration comes from Bawm in Limehouse, who stated, 'I will do my best to enforce the Public Health Act, and thus make it impossible for the alien to overcrowd our people out of decent conditions'.²⁹⁸ As council elections had come to reflect national political movements, the correlation between the lack of space devoted to the 'Alien' question in the 1904 addresses of Progressive candidates and their domination of the LCC, should be indicative of its impact on electoral discourses in 1906.

²⁹⁷ BUL, LCC addresses: Bethnal Green North-East; St. George, 1904

²⁹⁸ BUL, LCC addresses: Whitechapel; Stepney; Limehouse, 1904.

In contrast to both the 1900 campaign and the Progressive's 1904 election, the Conservative's placed greater emphasis on the 'alien' question, taking their lead from Evans-Gordon in Stepney. A full half page of Gordon's election pamphlet is dedicated to the 'alien' question, detailing how the new Alien Bill of 1905 will 'put a stop to the inflow of the undesirable classes of aliens, and remove many of those serious and ruinous evils from the East End'. Taking their cue from Gordon, six additional Conservatives devoted space in their election addresses to the issue of 'alien' immigration, with Lawson in Mile-End calling it the 'the main issue' of the campaign.²⁹⁹ Similarly, Kyd said of the immigration question, 'no subject of Political interest can compare in importance with the scandalous and disgraceful abuse of our hospitality to the foreigner'. In Poplar, Borwick labelled 'alien' immigration 'The great evil from which the East-End of London has so long suffered'.³⁰⁰ Figure three illustrates a typical Conservative election cartoon from the 1906 campaign, illustrating the relationship between unfair foreign competitions and diminishing living standards.

²⁹⁹ BUL, Election address: Stepney, 1906; St. James's Gazette, Monday 2nd January 1905, P. 8

³⁰⁰ BUL, election addresses: Whitechapel; Poplar, 1906.

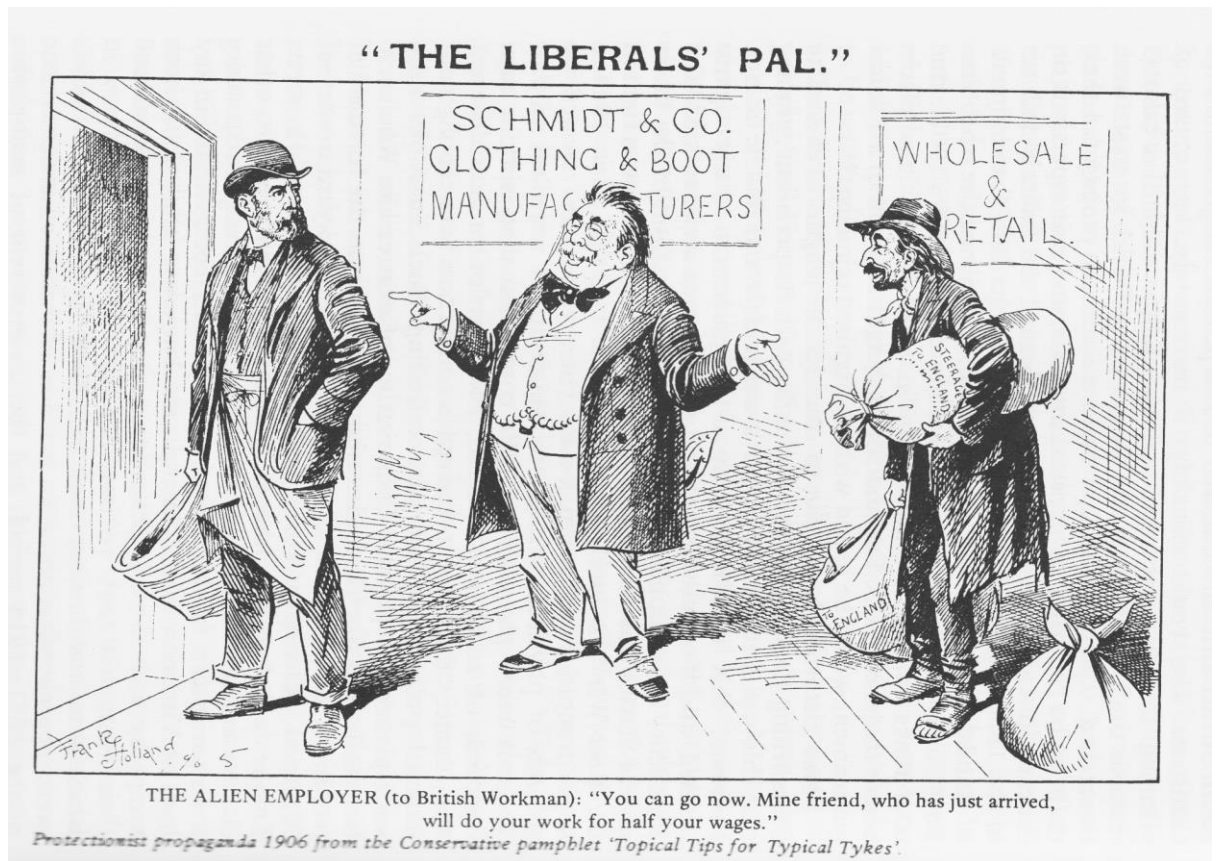


Figure 4: The Alien employer (to British workman): ‘You can go no. Mine friend, who has just arrived, will do your work for half your wages.’

Protectionist propaganda 1906 from the Conservative pamphlet ‘Topical Tips for Typical Tykes’

Yet, not every Conservative in Tower Hamlets bucked this trend, with two of the more imperially enthusiastic Members of Parliament, Bhowndegree and Samuel, relegating the issue to a mere sentence in their addresses. Bhowndegree notes that Liberal opposition to the Alien Act ‘is bound to result in depriving you of the benefits which that measure has ensured to you’. Whereas, Samuel notes that the ‘displacement of British workers from their homes and their employment by the unchecked and constant flow of pauper immigration’ is a measure that requires attention from the next administration. In comparison to Samuel, his Liberal opponent, William Pearce, argues that ‘The invasion of the destitute foreign Jew has rendered the alien question a special trouble in this district’ and further states that ‘In April I joined in a successful appeal by the East End members and

candidates to the Liberal leadership to prevent party opposition to the Aliens exclusion Bill'.³⁰¹

Pearce was an exception to the Liberal stance on the 'alien' question, with only two other Liberals mentioning it in their addresses. Cornwall in Bethnal Green North-East and Stokes in Stepney both attack the Alien Bill, with the former arguing that 'after exploiting the Alien Question for electioneering purposes they have passed an act which does not in the slightest degree afford any solution of this pressing evil in the East End of London'. Similarly, Stokes argued that the bill was not a serious legislative effort, as it 'failed to deal with either of the two great evils, namely overcrowding and sweating'.³⁰²

In 1895 and 1900 the Liberals had identified the solution for overcrowding, and the lowering standards of living, in the readjustment of taxation and rating reform. Nearly every Liberal candidate in Tower Hamlets advocated social reforms, such as taxation of land values and equalisation of the rates, as alternative remedial solutions. The little importance placed upon the Alien Bill is demonstrated through an interview with the Liberal agent for Whitechapel, G. T. Legge, who brushed aside any suggestion that the bill would impact on the campaign by stating 'It isn't worth the paper it is printed on'.³⁰³ Contemporary surveys and commissions also cast doubt on the extent to which immigration was the cause of socio-economic problems. Booth noted that the "ready-made clothing trade is not an invasion on the employment of the English tailor but an industrial recovery' and in 1903 a royal commission concluded that the 'development of the three main industries – tailoring, cabinet making and shoemaking – in which the aliens engage

³⁰¹ BUL, Election addresses: Bethnal Green North-East; Limehouse, 1906.

³⁰² BUL, Election addresses: Bethnal Green North-East; Stepney, 1906.

³⁰³ East London Observer, Saturday 19th August 1905, P. 7

has undoubtedly been beneficial in various ways; it has increased the demand for, and the manufacture of, not only goods made in this country but of the materials used in them, this indirectly giving employment to native workers'.³⁰⁴ The impact of alien immigration as an electoral theme is questionable, as the difference between Conservative and Liberal political approaches highlights a negative correlation between its utility and electoral results.

The Liberal Party went through an ideological metamorphosis after 1895; one of the most striking features of this change was the partial abandonment of Gladstonian Liberalism in favour of New Liberalism, which embraced an imperialism based on efficiency, democratic oversight and the advancement of civilization. At a meeting of the Rainbow Circle in 1898, leading Liberals, socialists and Fabians met, with some of the chief points of discussion concluding that 'imperialism advances civilization as can be proved by the record of British rule in Egypt', that imperialism 'broadens the outlook of democracy' and that Empire has been 'given to us and we cannot shirk its responsibilities'.³⁰⁵ By the 1906 election, Liberals were no longer defending themselves against attacks of 'little Englander', with Stopford Brooke in Bow and Bromley stating, 'I am a profound believer in the British Empire. I hold that it makes for the good government, higher civilisation and mutual peace of its component countries...' A similar sentiment was expressed by Durham Stokes in Stepney who said, 'I appreciate the great responsibility of Empire, the rests upon the shoulders of the British people' and Cornwall in Bethnal Green North-East who stated he was 'ambitious to see a free, great and content Empire'.³⁰⁶

³⁰⁴ William J Fishman. *East End Jewish Radicals, 1875 – 1914*. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co Ltd, 1975, pp. 85 – 6.

³⁰⁵ Michael Freedon. *Minutes of the Rainbow Circle, 1894 – 1924*. London: Butler and Tanner, 1989. P. 58

³⁰⁶ BUL, Election addresses: Bow and Bromley; Stepney; Bethnal Green North-East, 1906

Henry Pelling noted that the question of Chinese labour in the Transvaal was a secondary issue of imperial significance during the 1906 election, and contemporary opinion supports this, with one columnist in the local press stating, 'I do not hesitate in stating that the Liberals owe their decisive victory to the 'little loaf' and 'Chinese Labour'.³⁰⁷ While the Conservatives fought the 1906 election on a more positive platform than in 1900, the Liberals were quick to play upon heightened local antipathy towards the idea of importing Chinese 'coolies' to work in the gold mines of South Africa. This further alienated the working classes, and highlighted their conflicting notions of working-class identity. In Whitechapel, Samuel said, 'The country has made great sacrifice both in men and money in South Africa in the belief that it was for the benefit of the Empire, but up to the present it is apparently the Chinese Empire which will benefit'. Similarly, Stokes in Stepney reminded his constituency that the 'war which was fought to secure justice to the British miner, has been made the means of forcing Chinese labour on the inhabitants of the Transvaal'.³⁰⁸ The Chinese question was one of bread and butter politics for the working classes of Tower Hamlets, eliciting vocal reactions from constituencies due to the perceived closing of labour markets to metropolitan workers. A mass meeting in Bow and Bromley saw the Government castigated by the Mayor of Poplar, Mark Dalton, who argued that 'it was no use saying that labour could not be got for the mines of the Transvaal. There were 3,000 unemployed workmen in the borough of Poplar that day who could be employed'. Only two days earlier another mass meeting was held in Mile End to protest against the introduction of Chinese Labour into the Transvaal. Banners belonging to the Municipal Employees Society and the London Carmen's Union were visible and the meeting was presided over by Mr. Frank Brien, district secretary to the Docker's Union, who read sympathetic letters from the Rev. F. A. Speight, of the Lycett Memorial Chapel,

³⁰⁷ Henry Pelling, *Popular Politics*, P. 96; East London Observer, Saturday 24th February 1906, P. 2

³⁰⁸ BUL, Election addresses: Whitechapel; Stepney, 1906

pronouncing the action of the Government to be criminal and degrading.³⁰⁹ The issue escalated before the 1906 election when Milner, with the backing of Alfred Lyttelton, the new Colonial Secretary, authorised corporal punishment in the gold mines. This challenged working-class notions of democracy, linking back to the same issues the working classes had with Chinese slavery. This was epitomised through Balfour, who privately described the decision as an ‘amazing blunder, which seems to violate every cannon of international morality, of law, and of policy’.³¹⁰ Whilst the fiscal question was the dominant theme of the election, the Liberal’s used the machinery of party organisation and press to greatest effect over the issue of Chinese labour. Figure four is illustrative of the type of electoral material distributed by the LPD in the run up to the 1906 election, depicting Chinese labourers walking in file past a European overseer, whilst the ghost of a fallen British soldier points and questions, ‘is this what we fought for?’.



Figure 5: ‘The War’s Result: Chinese Labour’ Copyright L.P.D

³⁰⁹ East London Observer, Saturday 5th March 1904, P. 7 - 8

³¹⁰ A. M. Gollin, *Proconsul in Politics: A study of Lord Milner in Opposition and Power*. New York: Macmillan, 1964, P. 71

Whilst only two Liberals in Tower Hamlets failed to mention the Chinese question in their election addresses, its scarcity in the addresses of the Conservative members emphasises the negative public opinion against Chinese labour in the Transvaal. One of the only Unionist candidates who sought to tackle the issue was du Cross in Bow and Bromley, who acknowledged the impression that the Liberal lithograph had had on the electorate when he noted that 'many bye-elections had been won by that poster'. However, his retort to widespread criticism over the Government's position in South Africa was to deflect culpability and draw attention to the precedent set by Gladstone's administration with the signing of the Convention of Peeking in 1860, allowing Chinese labourers to seek work in the British colonies. Arthur du Cross further questioned the rationality of accusations of slavery when the Chinaman 'went to South Africa as a volunteer', being paid a 'wage six or seven times more than he had ever earned before'.³¹¹ The majority of Unionists chose to focus instead on traditional Conservative election issues such as defence and foreign policy, with Kyd claiming that during the Boer War 'the army in the field was as well fed as ever was an army in the field before'.³¹² This statement was deconstructed through the contemporary press, who published letters from the front during the war in South Africa. One such letter was received by a well-known businessman in Whitechapel from his son, serving with General French. In the letter, the soldier scrutinises the state of rations, saying, 'You know a man's rations, the four biscuits and 1lb. of bully. Well, we know what half rations, quarter rations, and no rations means'. Further research into working-class recollections signifies that the conditions of soldiers was an emotive subject, with one autobiographical account recalling stories told by returning soldiers of their privation,

³¹¹ East London Observer, Saturday 13th January 1906, P. 9

³¹² BUL, Election address, Whitechapel, 1906

describing how 'at one time they were issued with half a pound of dry flour as a day's ration and told to do what they could with it'.³¹³

Opponents jumped on accounts like these and a number of Liberals devoted significant space in their addresses to capitalising on the government's record. Cornwall was particularly grating when he said 'No government within recent times has stood so condemned by reports of royal commissions and its own appointed committees as the government which has just resigned'. Cornwall draws reference to the Remount scandal and the army stores scandal, where, contrary to Kyd's assertions, contemporary news outlets reported '50,000,000 rounds of ammunition "imperfect and doubtful" were bought back from South Africa' and that over 'a million tins, each supposed to contain one pound of jam, almost the whole number contained only twelve ounces'.³¹⁴ The Unionists generally fought the 1906 campaign on a more positive platform of reform; their failure to adequately respond to criticisms concerning their management of the Boer War and introduction of Chinese labour into South Africa damaged their standing with the working classes of Tower Hamlets.

Whilst the Chinese labour question was not a theme of the local elections, municipal discourse had become increasingly national and imperial by 1904, as the Education question highlights. The origin of the education question stems from the 1870 Elementary Education Act, which made the London School Boards responsible for elementary education. However, by 1898 there were concerns that the Technical Education Board, the brainchild of Sidney Webb and Llewellyn Smith, which administered technical training in

³¹³ East London Observer, Saturday 7th April 1900, P. 7; Elizabeth Rignall, *The Memories of a Rolling Stone*. Burnett Archive of Working Class Autobiographies, 2:661

³¹⁴ BUL, election addresses, Bethnal Green North-East, 1906; St. James's Gazette, Friday 10th March 1905, P. 8

London, was overstepping its mandate. The TEB had become a vehicle for Webb's Bismarckian state socialism, with national efficiency, competitiveness and the demand for a workforce fit to meet imperial obligations dominating both the TEB and LSC agendas.³¹⁵ Within this context the Cockerton Judgement of 1899 found that it was unlawful for the TEB to spend money raised from the rates to establish Commercial instruction, higher grade classes in Science, Art and Technical Education, evening school for adults and even university reform. Salisbury and Balfour's administrations were left with two options; the expansion of the London School Board, a stronghold of nonconformity and radicalism, or the transfer of educational control to the LCC; the latter proving the less bitter pill. Matters were further exacerbated by the governments amendment to clause 6, which compelled councils to pay for the upkeep of voluntary schools, whilst denying them overall authority, suggesting that the principle of 'no taxation without representation was at stake'.³¹⁶ By the time of the municipal and national elections, the education question had divided the Unionist party, helped to reunite the Liberal Party after the divisions over the Boer War, drew Labour and Liberals into closer unity, and strengthened the Progressive Party at the LCC, despite it signalling the demise of Webb.

In a reversal of traditional political platforms, the questions raised over Balfour's Education Act were more imperial and national in character in the municipal elections than in the national elections two years later. The significance of the question was surmised by G. B. Hobart, Moderate candidate for Whitechapel, who said 'The great feature in the work of the new council will be the carrying out of the Education Act'. Hobart expounded on this by stating his priority was to 'raise the standard of education that it will be worthy of the capital of the Empire, and will give the rising generation the intellectual equipment to

³¹⁵ Julian Amery. *Joseph Chamberlain and the Tariff Reform Campaign*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1969, P. 83

³¹⁶ Amery, *Joseph Chamberlain*, P 96

compete against the whole civilized world'. This sentiment was taken further by the Moderate candidate in Poplar, Goodrich, whose address stated that 'the children of today will be the rulers of the Empire in the next generation; let us give them a good, sound, useful and thorough education' continuing, 'Our first aim should be to make and train our children to be God fearing and God loving citizens of this great Empire'.³¹⁷ Whilst the Moderates monopolised the imperial rhetoric, the Progressives developed a distinctly patriotic resonance, with notions of national efficiency and competition energising their argument. In St. George's, John Smith argued that technical training would 'equip the rising generation with necessary knowledge and skill to meet home and foreign competition'. In Bethnal Green North-East, Cornwall and Smith argued that the question was in the interests of the nation, whilst W. C. Johnson in Whitechapel pronounced that 'to be diverted by considerations of creed or politics is to be a traitor to the future of our country'.³¹⁸

Conversely, at the 1906 general election the significance of the education question appears limited and religious aspects were more prominent in candidate's election addresses, owing in no small part to the numbers of Anglicans on the Conservative benches and Nonconformists on the Liberals.³¹⁹ Only three Liberals and three Unionists referenced education in their addresses, which can be partially explained by the prominence of the issue in 1904 and the symbiosis of national and municipal politics during this time. This can be attested through the address of Samuel in Whitechapel, who approved of the LCC programme and 'would endeavour to put forward their policy in parliament'. However, in both Stepney and St. George's, Liberal members took issue with the Act, with Stokes in the

³¹⁷ BUL, Election addresses: Whitechapel; Poplar, 1904

³¹⁸ BUL, Elections addresses: St. George; Bethnal Green North-East; Whitechapel, 1904

³¹⁹ See Noel J. Richards, "British Nonconformity and the Liberal Party, 1868 – 1906". *Journal of Religious History* Vol 9, Issue 4, 1977, P. 387.

former arguing that instead of raising the standard of education it aimed 'rather at endowing church schools with public money'. Similarly, Benn in St. George's labelled the Act a 'gross injustice to many Nonconformists'.³²⁰ On the other hand, Unionist's, like Kyd, vowed to resist 'every attempt to undermine' the Act with regards to religious instruction'. Only du Cross in Bow and Bromley echoed his Moderate counterparts by stating that 'education is the key note of the national prosperity', whilst Samuel in Limehouse argued that education should be an imperial, not a local, cost.³²¹

The battle over the education question stands to highlight the broad spectrum of issues that the 1906 election was fought upon. However, it also shows how nationalist and imperial rhetoric had become ingrained into the local discourses of constituency politics. That Liberals and Unionists, Progressives and Moderates incorporated imperialism onto traditional social reform issues, indicates a shift in how local politicians perceived working-class notions of both respectability and citizenship. However, the question of education also indicates that the confluence of national and municipal politics was not unproblematic, as national interference in local matters could cause consternation at the local level, as the government's best intentions were seen as an attack on the popular School Boards. Whilst there was some enthusiasm for the passive resistance tactics of John Clifford in the metropole, support from dominant sections of Progressivism on the LCC all but nullified organised opposition to the Act. Furthermore, the lack of space devoted to the topic, in 1906, reiterates the idea that local politicians were well attuned to community culture and identities, as the topic of religion was not a traditional working-class pull factor.

³²⁰ BUL, Elections addresses: St. George; Whitechapel; Stepney, 1906

³²¹ BUL, Election addresses: Whitechapel; Bow and Bromley, 1906

In addition to these four major issues, a quantitative analysis of only the social issues mentioned in candidate's addresses indicates a failure of progressive unionism in Tower Hamlets and an abandonment of politics of place.

Table 4 - Social issues mentioned in Tower Hamlets, 1906

Issues	Addresses in which issue mentioned					
	Liberal Unionist			Liberal		
	Local %	Number	National %	Local %	Number	National %
						...
Education	77.77	7	67	100	9	98
Aliens Act	77.77	7	17	22.22	2	...
Tax Reform	33.33	3	27	100	9	86
Poor Law	33.33	3	22	55.55	5	69
temperance	33.33	3	...	66.66	6	78
Housing	11.11	1	9	77.77	7	36

Data pertaining to the ten constituencies above was acquired from the British Political Party General Election Addresses: From the National Liberal Club, Bristol University Library.

Table four illustrates the scarcity of local issues mentioned in Unionist addresses, with housing, mentioned in 66.66 per cent of addresses in 1900, falling to a miserable 11.11 per cent, or one in nine addresses in 1906. By comparison their Liberal opponents mentioned issues like tax reform and education in 100 per cent of their addresses, housing in 77.77 per cent and poor law reform in 55.55 per cent of addresses.

Summation

The early Edwardian period witnessed the emergence of the Conservative and Liberal Parties from the malaise of late Victorian politics, as the Conservatives moved closer to becoming a party with populist appeal, whilst the Liberals embraced the electoral potential of imperialism.³²² Whereas some historians, like Green, have argued that Chamberlain's

³²² David Thackeray, "Rethinking", P. 191

tariff campaign precipitated a crisis of identity within the Unionist ranks, this chapter has highlighted the rejuvenating effect that the fiscal question had on local politics in Tower Hamlets. The late Victorian period witnessed division within the Conservative rank and file, with progressive Unionists in Tower Hamlets campaigning on mixed platforms, stressing the need for local reforms. These pledges were at often at odds with CCO and the Moderates on the LCC. However, the issue of tariff reform broke from Salisburyian Conservatism and enabled local Conservatives to campaign in 1906 on a broad platform advocating social reforms. This chapter has further demonstrated that the Unionists in Tower Hamlets were stymied in 1906 by their record in South Africa, with their management of the Boer War and later decision to import Chinese labour animating strong resentment on a local level. Similarly, the Liberal and Progressive Party also broke from Victorian traditions and incorporated Empire into their electoral campaigns, turning the tables on their opponents by forcing uncomfortable issues to the forefront of election discourses. This was powerfully demonstrated through the adoption of populist forms of propaganda and party literature, which were exhibited across the borough and played on working-class sentiment regarding past Conservative scandals and policies. In contrast, Conservative local organisation had lost ground to the Liberals under Herbert Gladstone, with difficulties in placing appropriate candidates, in-fighting and interference from auxiliary associations hindering their campaign. Despite this, both parties used popular electoral themes associated with social reforms, empire and tariff reform to attract support and win votes in their working-class constituencies, emphasising that both parties had adapted to the changing nature of mass politics, as well as consumer and civic culture.

Despite Unionist attempts to restructure the nature of their relationships with constituents, through the incorporation of new language and engagement, with pre-existing working-class beliefs and aspirations, the Liberals won landslide victories in both

municipal and national elections. Whilst the public was not unanimously opposed to a reorganisation of the free trade system, the ideas put before them were both inchoate and complex. The Liberals tactic of using electoral repetition and uniformity to stress Conservatives' proposed tax on food was uninspired, yet highly effective. Part of the success of Liberal strategy was to channel past conflict and shut off traditional Conservative safety valves. Issues of defence, a traditional Conservative comfort zone, was turned into a political quagmire as the late governments record during the Boer War was brought to the foreground of electoral interface. Published accounts of soldier's strife and privation, as well as well documented military set-backs and scandals made the party of empire look distinctly unsuited for the role of imperial custodians. The importation of Chinese labour into the Transvaal had profound implications for working-class notions of democracy and citizenship, whilst undermining the relationships between Unionists and working-class constituents, as pledges to safeguard British labour were perceived to have broken. The impact of other Unionist electoral themes, such as the 'Alien' question had a questionable impact on the electorate, with this chapter arguing that it was not an efficacious policy, only resonating in certain constituencies, and even in these not always successfully.

Conclusion

This thesis has discussed the creation of popular political, as well as economic practices and their articulation through the use of local dialogue, in order to explore interactions between working-class people, local politicians and national parties. Key points of the research conducted reinforces findings in emerging fields of analysis, such as Trentmann's observation on consumer politics, David Thackeray's and Alex Windscheffel's revisionist work on the nature of popular politics in the late-Victorian and Edwardian periods.³²³ Thackeray's revision of Green's *Crisis of Conservatism* thesis, argued that the Conservative Party underwent a crisis of identity during the early Edwardian period, however, by reappraising both popular parties this thesis concludes that the tariff reform debate had a revitalising effect on both parties. Windscheffel's analysis of the localised culture of politics, which was, at times, too narrow a scope to give a fair reflection of politician's constituency work, which is highlighted in the case of Charrington.

The relationships established between politicians and their constituents demonstrated the malleability of local politics, as patterns of consumption and employment gave rise to an agentic working-class culture that converged with national anxieties over the future of empire and national parties. Through an emphasis on politics of place and the incorporation of populist language into the everyday dialogues of constituents, local politicians were able to mediate the electoral give and take between their constituents and Westminster. Local politicians moved working-class concerns to the forefront of electoral interface, highlighting the impact they had on constructing popular politics in the late-Victorian and Edwardian period, as national policy was mediated from the ground up. Individual political agents who constructed, and reconstructed, image and language to

³²³ David Thackeray, "Rethinking", 2011; Windscheffel, *Popular Conservatism*, 2007

appeal to a wider support base, targeted working voters by speaking directly to their concerns and aspirations. This has highlighted the contingent and contested nature of constituency politics, and has established the relationships between politicians and working-class people as a crucial component in the construction of national and imperial politics.

Popular politics in the late-Victorian and Edwardian period has been shown to have been more complicated and polarising than historians, such as Green, have suggested and this thesis has illuminated how working-class agency received messages through constituency discourse, as well as transacted value from these relationships. The move towards assertive citizenship mirrored the rise in consumer culture, which progressive local Members of Parliament were receptive to and actively fought to improve the standard of living of those they sought power to represent. The tariff reform debate witnessed fundamental shifts in the manner in which popular parties addressed the wider public, tailoring language to speak directly to working-class concerns. Simultaneously, consumer movements have reappraised how we look at working-class constituents and how they played a part in shaping local and national discourse. Tower Hamlets exemplified the growing trend towards a convergence of popular politics and local aspirations during the late- Victorian and Edwardian periods.

The final chapter focused primarily on how politicians formed discourses and began the process of restructuring constituency relationships around the climacteric event that was the tariff reform debate. In so doing, it has laid the groundwork for further exploration of the give and take of political discourse from 1903 – 1906 and a more in-depth analysis of how the working classes responded to the language of tariff reform. Frank Trentmann has made great strides in this subject, incorporating economic history into cultural and political

analysis and shedding light on the ways electoral language targeted a wider audience of citizen-consumers, rather than subject.³²⁴ However, there is certainly a call for further in-depth local analysis of working-class reception of such language.

Another promising avenue of research would be to expand the scope of this thesis up to 1914, to explore change and continuity in the nature of constituency relationships during the Conservatives time in opposition. An interesting avenue of study here lies in the relationship between the beleaguered East End Conservatives, the Municipal Reform Party, the successor of the Moderate LCC party, and the working classes of Tower Hamlets.³²⁵ Whilst the rise of the ILP as an electoral threat has been extensively researched over the past five decades, insights gained from the methodologies utilised in this thesis can be applied to recharge previous historiographical concern. Analysing how the ILP's language connected with citizens of Tower Hamlets, in a metropolis whose population had so recently rejected Progressive socialism on the LCC would greatly enhance our understanding of ground level popular politics in the Edwardian period. Furthermore, a wider scope, to incorporate other identified areas of interest, like Liverpool and Manchester, would further our understanding of the interconnectedness of popular politics during this time, establishing the impact of local politics on shaping national and imperial identity.³²⁶ In addition, applying the same methodological approach to analysing how quasi-

³²⁴ Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation*, 2008 [2012]

³²⁵ See, Sue Lawrence. "Moderates, Municipal Reformers, and the Issue of Tariff Reform, 1894 – 1934" PP.93 – 103, P. 93, in Saint, *Politics and the People*. Whilst Tower Hamlets unanimously voted against tariff reform in 1906, at the 1907 LCC election, paradoxically, Municipal Reformers gained control of the council on a platform of protectionism and tariff reform.

³²⁶ Although we still know little about how national policies were mediated by local contexts, historians like Lawrence, Savage and Windscheffel have addressed these contextual concerns regarding wider urban and regional political history. In *Popular Conservatism*, Windscheffel analyses the importance of discourses and vocabularies in both urban, and suburban, metropolitan settings, concluding that the electorate was both fluid and unstable. Preceding this study, in *Speaking for the*

political groups, like the Primrose League, used language to create relationships within local constituencies, with both members of the working class and politicians alike, would further our understanding of the contested nature of popular politics from the ground up.³²⁷

This thesis has furthered our understanding of modern British political history by examining the nature and campaign outcomes of interactions between working-class people, local politicians and national parties. It has left open a number of possible avenues for future research and a methodological approach that is readily transferable from one geographical region to another. By situating this study within the context of time and space, the historical construction of local identities has shaped our understanding of how politicians used language to construct, deconstruct and reconstruct relationships. Local politicians were able to build a popular appeal through listening to their constituents and responding through ground level dialogue and actions in Westminster. Placing working-class concerns at the forefront of these discourses has highlighted the localised nature of politics as well

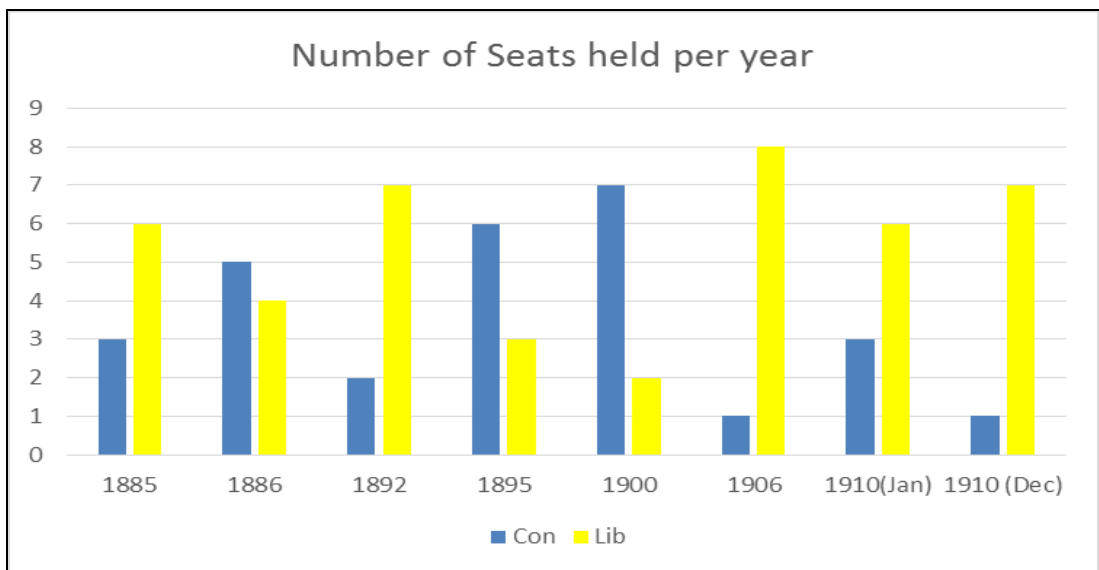
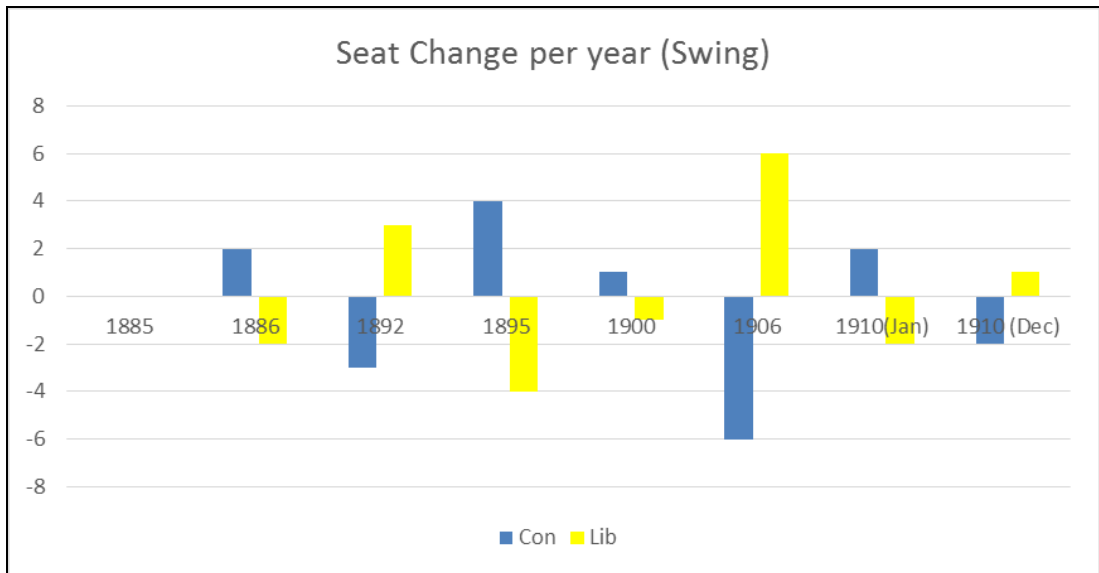
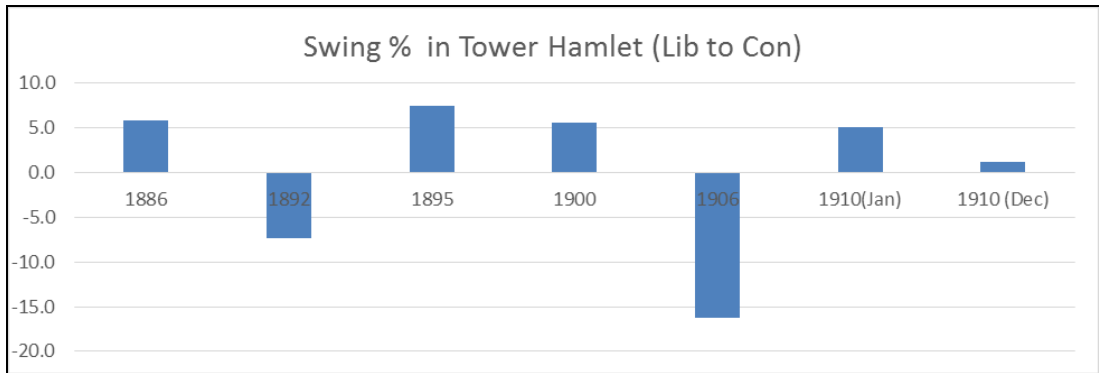
People Jon Lawrence focused his attention on Wolverhampton as an in-depth local study of urban popular politics. Similarly, in *The Dynamics of Working-Class Politics: The Labour Movement in Preston, 1880-1940*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1987, Mike Savage used Preston as a case study to examine how working-class culture was dependent on local ties and networks. All three studies examine the interaction between political rhetoric and working-class aspiration, and concerns, to shed light on how these discourses shaped patterns of allegiance within a constituency, and thus altered national politics from the ground.

³²⁷ Some scholars have been working on these fields but there is more work to be done on the constellations of distinct working-class demands, values, perceptions and interests and how this forces national parties to act differently or be imperial differently. See, Eliza Riedi, "Women, Gender and the Promotion of Empire: The Victoria League, 1901 – 1914", *Historical Journal*, vol. 45, No. 3 (Sep 2002) PP. 569 – 599; See David Thackeray, "Home and Politics: Women and Conservative Activism in Early Twentieth-Century Britain", *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 49, No. 4, 2010, PP. 826 – 848, for the contribution the Women's Unionist and Tariff Reform Association (WUTRA) had on Edwardian discourses of citizenship. This article stands as a useful corrective to Trentmann's conclusion in *Free Trade Nation*, that tariff reformers failed to develop a popular language. More work is needed, however, to show how these auxiliary and quasi-political associations tailored discourses to speak directly to working class consumers and citizens.

as the growing influence of the agentic citizen at the beginning of the 20th century. The future of national politics weighted in the balance at local level, and the ability of local politicians to assimilate and adapt to the inevitable advance of the mass public, laid the foundations for popular political practices in the late Edwardian period and beyond.

Appendices

Appendix 1



Abbreviations

BUL (Bristol University Library)

Conservative Central Office (CCO)

Independent Labour Party (ILP)

London County Council (LCC)

London School Board (LSB)

National Liberal Federation (NLF)

National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations (NUCCA)

South African Conciliation Committee (SACC)

Tariff Reform League (TRL)

Technical Education Board (TEB)

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Special Collection, DM668, Papers of the National Liberal Club and papers relating to Liberal Politics; Political election addresses

British Library

William Gladstone Papers

Brunel University

Burnett Archive of Working Class Autobiography

Cambridge, Churchill College Archives Centre

Alexander Cadogan Papers

Islington Local History Centre, Finsbury Library

Newspaper cuttings; Dadabhai Naoroji Collection

London School of Economics Library

Selected Pamphlets; 19th Century British Pamphlets

Political and Tariff Reform Posters, Collection, COLL MISC 0519

Manchester, Central Library

Rare books and special collections

Oxford, Bodleian Library

Sandars MSS, c. 753, fol. 189

Tower Hamlets, Local History Library and Archives

Newspaper cuttings; East London Handbook

Newspapers, Journals and periodicals

Bexhill-On-Sea Observer

Chelmsford Chronicle

Daily Telegraph and Courier

East London Observer

ERA

Fabian News

Globe

Islington Gazette

Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper

London and Provincial Entr'acte

London Daily News

London Evening Standard

Local Government Journal

Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser

Morning Chronicle

Morning Post

Reynolds News

Shoreditch Observer

St. James's Gazette

The Daily News

Tower Hamlets Independent and East End Local Advertiser

Western Daily Press

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