

**Popular political oratory and itinerant lecturing in Yorkshire
and the North East in
the age of Chartism, 1837-60**

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ABSTRACT

Itinerant lecturers declaiming upon free trade, Chartism, temperance, or anti-slavery could be heard in market places and halls across the country during the years 1837-60. The power of the spoken word was such that all major pressure groups employed lecturers and sent them on extensive tours. Print historians tend to overplay the importance of newspapers and tracts in disseminating political ideas and forming public opinion. This thesis demonstrates the importance of older, traditional forms of communication. Inert printed pages were no match for charismatic oratory. Combining personal magnetism, drama and immediacy, the itinerant lecturer was the most effective medium through which to reach those with limited access to books, newspapers or national political culture. Orators crucially united their dispersed audiences in national struggles for reform, fomenting discussion and coalescing political opinion, while railways, the telegraph and expanding press reportage allowed speakers and their arguments to circulate rapidly.

Understanding of political oratory and public meetings has been skewed by over-emphasis upon the hustings and high-profile politicians. This has generated two misconceptions: that political meetings were generally rowdy and that a golden age of political oratory was secured only through Gladstone's legendary stumping tours. However, this thesis argues that, far from being disorderly, public meetings were carefully regulated and controlled offering disenfranchised males a genuine democratic space for political discussion. Its detailed research into Yorkshire and the North East, demonstrates both the growth of popular political speechmaking and the emergence of a class of professional lecturers. It identifies a paradigm shift from classical oratory to more populist styles of speaking, as more humble speakers took to the platform; and it argues that through the growth of popular political oratory the platform had been rehabilitated by the 1860s and the lecture format commercialized.

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In memory of Dr Donna Collette McCormick,
(1970-2008)

An inspiration and a dearly missed friend

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ABBREVIATIONS

ABTC	<i>Anti-Bread Tax Circular</i>
ACLA	Anti-Corn Law Association
ACLC	<i>Anti-Corn Law Circular</i>
ACLL	Anti-Corn Law League
BTL	British Temperance League
BASCA	British Anti-State Church Association
BLPTA	Bradford Long Pledged Teetotal Association
BO	<i>Bradford Observer</i>
CSU	Complete Suffrage Union
DLB	Dictionary of Labour Biography
LHASC	Labour History Archive and Study Centre
LCS	London Corresponding Society
LWMA	London Working Men's Association
NPSA	National Public School Association,
NCA	National Charter Association
NPU	Northern Reform League
NRU	Northern Reform Union
NRL	Northern Reform League
NS	<i>Northern Star</i>
NTL	Northern Temperance League
ODNB	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>
REAS	Raymond English Anti-Slavery collection
TNA	The National Archives
UCLAN	University of Central Lancashire
WYAS	West Yorkshire Archive Service
UKA	United Kingdom Alliance

Original in colour



'A Chartist Meeting, Basin Stones, Todmorden, 1842,' by A. W. Bayes, Calderdale MBC, Museums and Arts.

Chapter one: Introduction

Towards the end of February 1839, the evocatively named sub-committee of the Chartist Convention, the ‘Committee for the Diffusion of Political Knowledge’, dispatched eleven delegates who were to serve as ‘missionaries’.¹ Their task was to agitate the ‘portions of the kingdom which are not sufficiently instructed of the Chartist movement, to explain the principles of the Charter [and] to obtain signatures to the National Petition’.² What followed, in the words of a current historian, was a ‘remarkable’ and ‘unparalleled’ awakening of popular political consciousness.³ The letters from delegates-cum-missionaries preserved in the Convention papers spoke of widespread political ignorance and how, once explained, the Charter was embraced with great enthusiasm by the people.⁴ Initially, areas in southern England were targeted but it was soon realised that effective instruction was also wanted in the movement’s heartlands. A letter sent in March 1839 from Bishopwearmouth, Sunderland, for example, requested that a Convention missionary be sent as soon as possible to County Durham, where ‘the soil is good but the labourers to cultivate it are few – too few’. The correspondent went on to describe how only three months ago there was not one Chartist group in Sunderland and now the area could boast ‘eighteen District Societies’, a fact which proved ‘the readiness of the People to receive the principles when explained’.⁵

Chartism was a reform movement which drew its support from the poorest classes. Persuading the impoverished, illiterate and dispossessed that the Charter offered a solution to their grievances was more readily effected by a rousing address by a charismatic speaker than any number of tracts. As the Convention missionaries toured the country they addressed audience after audience both indoors and out.⁶ Their speeches set out, in simple

¹ A name which deliberately alluded to the Whig Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge which had been founded in 1826 by the former Lord Chancellor, Lord Brougham.

² British Library, Dept. of Manuscripts, London, Correspondence and papers of the General Convention of the Industrious Classes, ‘Report of the Committee for extending Political information’, 23 Feb 1839, Add. Mss. 34245A ff. 61-2. T. M. Parssinen, ‘Association, Convention and Anti-Parliament in British Radical Politics, 1771-1848’, *English Historical Review*, Vol. 88, No. 348, 504-533 (Jul 1973). D. J. Rowe, ‘The Chartist Convention and the regions’, *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 22:1 (1969), 58-74; Kenneth Judge, ‘Early Chartist Organisation and the convention of 1839’, *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 20, Issue 3 (1975), 379- 381.

³ Malcolm Chase, *Chartism: A New History* (Manchester, 2007), pp. 65-66.

⁴ General Convention papers, Add. Mss. 34245A and B.

⁵ Add. Mss. 34245A, ff. 101-2.

⁶ For an autobiographical account by a Convention missionary see Brian Harrison and Patricia Hollis (eds.), *Robert Lowery: Radical and Chartist* (London, 1979), pp. 128-135.

language, the problems besetting the country and offered a political solution in the shape of the *People's Charter*. The missionaries also gathered signatures for the petition, distributed printed propaganda and collected much-needed funds. Yet at the heart of their agitation lay oral communication. The Chartists were mobilised by word-of-mouth and, most crucially of all, by spirited oratory delivered by charismatic speakers before hundreds and sometimes thousands of people.

During the early Victorian period a wide range of pressure groups, influenced by the successes of the anti-slavery campaign, used charismatic orators to further their cause. This PhD examines the role played by political oratory in building reform movements in Yorkshire and the North East during the Chartist years and their immediate aftermath. It investigates how the Chartist, Owenite, anti-slavery, temperance and free trade movements all sent out paid lecturers to raise the profile of their cause and win new recruits. These agents criss-crossed the country delivering lectures, organising public meetings and participating in high-profile public debates with their political rivals. While newspapers and tracts were important in building popular reform movements, the itinerant charismatic lecturer, who dazzled audiences with vivid, entertaining speeches, was undoubtedly the star of the show.⁷ Yet, rather surprisingly, the role of the charismatic paid orator in effecting political change has been masked by history. This study places the itinerant lecturer and the rousing political speech back on centre stage and suggests that Chartist years were a golden age for public speaking when oratory truly became popular. It builds upon the work of Joseph Meisel who, while recognising the centrality of public discourse in Victorian political culture, has concentrated upon high statesmen and ministers at the expense of provincial popular political oratory.⁸

The aural qualities of nineteenth century life can be overlooked by modern commentators to whom the town crier's pronouncements, the cries of a street vendor and even the church bells have less relevance. Sound and speech were part of the fabric of everyday life and, in a society where literacy was by no means the norm, sound held greater significance than today.⁹ As we shall see, well into the nineteenth century meetings

⁷ Kitson Clark described how the eloquent speaker remained important even as literacy rose, 'in Parliament, on the hustings, in the pulpit, or even on a cart in the open air, the orator was very much master of the occasion', G. S. R. Kitson Clark, 'The Romantic element - 1830 to 1850', in J. H. Plumb (ed.), *Studies in social history: a tribute to G.M. Trevelyan* (1955), 209-39.

⁸ Joseph Meisel, *Public Speech and the Culture of Public Life in the Age of Gladstone* (New York, 2001).

⁹ Barry Reay's study of nineteenth century popular literacy (although based on a rural community in Kent) demonstrates how literacy was not necessary for many working people for whom a 'sense of smell, touch and

were convened not by printed notice but by town crier announcements, parading bands or lecturers themselves perambulating the town with a rattle or bugle to alert people to their presence. The charismatic speaker, like the story-teller, belonged to a pre-mass-literate culture and yet what is interesting about the Chartist era is that such traditional communication was revitalised and presented anew. The political lecturer was at the vanguard of change, preaching a tale of hope and progress.

The importance of pictures, iconography and images is similarly less apparent to the generations who have grown up with television, film and digital media. It is easy to forget the widespread appetite for visual imagery, cartoons and caricatures in the nineteenth century and their role in generating discussion.¹⁰ Along with exhibitions and dioramas, works of art were publically displayed, advertised in the local press, and visited by thousands before moving to the next town.¹¹ A portrait of the factory reformer Richard Oastler, for example, drew large crowds during a tour of the leading textile centres of Yorkshire and Lancashire. The importance of this visual treat was such that its reception at various destinations was reported in the *Northern Star*.¹² People were naturally curious about the physical appearance of their radical heroes, poets, authors and parliamentarians. This fact was not wasted on the *Northern Star* which, between 1837 and 1851, rewarded subscribers with a series of twenty-seven portraits of figures lauded by the radical movement. Itinerant speakers too appealed to the people's appreciation of the visual via their use of props, diagrams and exhibits and also in the brightly coloured placards, posted to announce hastily convened meetings. In recent years historians such as James Epstein, Paul Pickering, and James Vernon have presented thoughtful analyses of the role of the pictorial in popular radical culture.¹³ Conversely historical studies of auditory perceptions are rare, with the exception of Corbain's innovative study of the French church bell.¹⁴

sight' was more important than the ability to wield a pen. Barry Reay, 'The context and meaning of popular literacy: some evidence from nineteenth-century rural England', *Past & Present*, 131 (1991), p. 105.

¹⁰ Louis James, 'Cruikshank and early Victorian caricature' *History Workshop*, 6 (1978), 107-120; Henry Miller, 'The Problem with Punch', *Historical Research*, Vol. 82, No. 216 (May, 2009) 285-302.

¹¹ For example in early spring 1845 paintings of 'Adam and Eve' were on view for several months in Bradford, *Bradford Observer* (hereafter *BO*), 27 February 1845; 6 March 1845; 13 March 1845

¹² The portrait's progress was reported in the *Northern Star*, see Malcolm Chase, 'Building identity, building circulation: engraved portraiture and the *Northern Star*', in Joan Allen and Owen R. Ashton (eds.), *Papers for the People: A study of the Chartist press* (London, 2005), p. 37.

¹³ Epstein, Pickering and Vernon will be discussed at length subsequently. For a discussion of the 'pictorial turn' and the need to follow the lead of art historians see Rohan McWilliam, "What is Interdisciplinary about Victorian History Today?" *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 1 (2005), www.19.bbk.ac.uk, p. 17.

¹⁴ Alain Corbain (translated by Martin Thom), *Sound and Meaning in the Nineteenth-century French Countryside* (Columbia, 1998).

The first scholarly book on public speaking, *The Platform: its Rise and Progress* by Henry Jephson was published in two hefty volumes in 1892.¹⁵ As the name suggests it was a ‘highly narrative, highly Whiggish’ account of how the platform became an accepted component of political life.¹⁶ Starting in the eighteenth century with the religious revivalism of John Wesley and George Whitefield and continuing until 1880s, *The Platform* delineated the emergence of the political platform in the middle of the nineteenth century. For Jephson, the right of free speech, free assembly and public meetings singled out Britain from its revolutionary-bent continental neighbours. The civil rights surrounding the political platform were vital in allowing Britain to become democratic without the need for violence or revolution moreover, such peaceable change, won ‘by reason and conviction’, was more enduring than that obtained by ‘violent and forcible revolution’.¹⁷ While Jephson’s focus on order and progress is at times at odds with archival evidence, as we shall see later in this study, some of his ideas remain pertinent.

Not until the twenty-first century was the political platform to enjoy further scrutiny in the shape of Joseph Meisel’s *Public Speech and the Culture of Public Life in the Age of Gladstone* (2001).¹⁸ Despite its rather traditional emphasis on high politics, the pulpit and the law courts, it is an important book, which persuasively demonstrates how oratory remained central to the formation of public opinion in the age of mass literacy. Meisel is unapologetic in focusing upon the metropolis pointing out that this is where national public life was based and that all the key orators spoke in London at some point and many remained there. Meisel has little to say on the diversity of provincial political oratory. While this may be more appropriate for the second half of the nineteenth century, during the Chartist years a London-centric focus would be highly inappropriate as it was the provinces which led extra-parliamentary political campaigns. A more troubling oversight is the complete neglect of the role played by the professional extra-parliamentary speaker-cum-political agent who cleared a path for the ministerial platform. Yet arguably

¹⁵ Henry Jephson, *The Platform: its Rise and Progress* (2 Vols., London, 1892).

¹⁶ Meisel, *Public Speech*, p. 224.

¹⁷ Jephson, *Platform*, Vol. II, p. 574.

¹⁸ Useful commentary on the nineteenth century platform can be found in: John Vincent, *The formation of the British Liberal Party, 1857-1868* (1st ed. 1966, revised ed., Hassocks, 1976); H. C. G. Matthew, ‘Rhetoric and Politics in Great Britain’ in H. C. Waller (ed.), *Politics and Social Change in Modern Britain* (Sussex, 1987).

these paid professional agents offer an explanation of how, in the person of Gladstone, ‘the ministerial platform and the popular platform began to converge’.¹⁹

Meisel’s work has stimulated academic interest in oratory across a wide range of disciplines from literary criticism, politics and sociology to historians. The work of Martin Hewitt on popular lecturing and the cultural role of the Victorian platform, for example, builds upon issues raised by Meisel and challenges his concentration on the period after 1850.²⁰ Hewitt’s wide-ranging studies of the Victorian platform demonstrate the extent to which urban culture was ‘saturated with public speech’, and shows how speech-making was important to a wide range of people from popular preachers to emigration agents.²¹ Hewitt does not, however, consider the ways in which the political platform was precursor of a commercial cultural platform and the extent to which the political platform made lecture-going a habit for the generations who lived through the turmoil of the late 1830s and early 1840s.

Jürgen Habermas’s theoretical model of the ‘public sphere’, where ideas were circulated and discussed and public opinion formed, has made a considerable academic impact.²² Habermas argues that, in England, a bourgeois public sphere was in existence by the turn of the eighteenth century when the growing strength of the bourgeoisie challenged absolutist government replacing it with a ‘sphere in which state authority was publicly monitored through informed and critical discourse *by* the people’.²³ The public sphere, which found its strongest expression in the London coffee houses and in the liberties of the English press, was short-lived. Habermas contends that by the middle of the nineteenth century, commercialism had effectively closed down the public sphere as consumer culture

¹⁹ Meisel, *Public Speech*, p. 241.

²⁰ See special issue on ‘Platform Culture in Nineteenth-Century Britain’ edited by Martin Hewitt, *Nineteenth Century Prose*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Spring 2002).

²¹ Martin Hewitt, ‘Aspects of Platform Culture in Nineteenth-Century Britain’, *Nineteenth Century Prose*, Vol. 29, No. 1: (Spring 2002), p. 7; Hewitt, ‘Popular Platform Religion: Arthur Mursell at the Free Trade Hall, 1857-1866’, *Manchester Region History Review*, 10 (1996), 29-39; Hewitt, ‘The Emigration Lecturer: James Brown’s Lecture Tour of Great Britain and Ireland, 1861-62’, *British Journal of Canadian Studies*, Vol. 10, Issue 1 (1995), 103-119.

²² For the range of academics utilising the theoretical ideas of Habermas see Craig Calhoun, *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), and the introduction to Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: an inquiry into a category of bourgeois society*, Jürgen Habermas; translated [from German] by Thomas Burger (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), p. xiii. See also Peter Lake and Steve Pincus, ‘Rethinking the Public Sphere in Early Modern England’, *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 41 (2006), 270-292. Brian Cowan, ‘What was Masculine about the Public Sphere? Gender and the Coffeehouse Milieu in Post-Restoration England’, *History Workshop Journal*, Issue 51, (2001), 127-57.

²³ Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. xi.

replaced civic virtue.²⁴ While Habermas's chronology and focus upon a bourgeoisie public sphere is contentious, his theoretical model holds some relevance to this thesis.²⁵ The mid-nineteenth-century itinerant lecturer, like the eighteenth century coffee house debater, circulated ideas to wider society and was instrumental in the formation of public opinion. Indeed if we are to stretch Habermas's theories still further, arguably during the Chartist era the public meeting becomes the democratic equivalent of the coffee house. Such meetings, when called by signed requisition and sanctioned (however reluctantly) by a magistrate, constituted both an actual and theoretical public space: a place where ideas might be legitimately raised and openly debated. Contemporary orators were conscious of their role in formulating opinion. Henry Vincent told an Early Closing Movement meeting in 1847 that by meeting together in discussion they were forming a public opinion which had the potential to render important changes.²⁶ The continuing vibrancy of the public meeting into the twentieth century challenges Habermas's contention that the rise of commercialisation rapidly closed down the public sphere.

It is now more than a quarter of a century since Gareth Stedman Jones challenged Chartist historians to move beyond class explanations of Chartism (which he claimed were exaggerated) and instead to focus on what the Chartists actually said and wrote.²⁷ Stedman Jones saw the 'language of Chartism' not as the beginnings of class consciousness but rather as following a much older radical tradition which attributed economic discontent to the unreformed political system ('old Corruption'). Stedman Jones offered language as an explanation for Chartism's demise, primarily arguing that, as Robert Peel's Government implemented social and economic reforms during the 1840s, the older radical language no longer chimed with the political realities of the day. At the heart of his analysis was an explanation of why a movement that was 'socio-economic in content and character should take a political form'.²⁸

²⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 57-67.

²⁵ Malcolm Chase points to the strong associational cultures of eighteenth-century trade unions and friendly societies as evidence that the public sphere operated more broadly than at the level of the middle-classes, Chase, *Early Trade Unionism*, pp. 39-40.

²⁶ 'You have met to aid in forming a public opinion in favour of lessening the hours of labour', Henry Vincent, *Early Closing Movement: A Lecture delivered on Thursday evening, January, 1847 by Henry Vincent Esq., at Finsbury Chapel, Finsbury Circus* (London, 1847).

²⁷ Gareth Stedman Jones, 'The Language of Chartism' in John Epstein and Dorothy Thompson, (eds.), *The Chartist Experience: Studies in Working - Class Radicalism and Culture 1830-60* (London, 1982), extended and republished the following year as *Languages of Class: Studies in Working Class History 1832-1982* (Cambridge, 1983).

²⁸ Miles Taylor, 'Rethinking the Chartists: Searching for Synthesis in the Historiography of Chartism', *Historical Journal*, Vol. 39, No., 2 (Jun., 1996), p. 487.

Stedman's Jones theories were influential beyond Chartist historiography provoking much debate across the wider historical profession. The linguistic turn has forced historians to take a broader, more nuanced, approach to historical explanation and one in which class can no longer be unquestioningly taken as a causal factor. Indeed as the meta-narrative of class fell from favour, historians were more likely to use explanations of gender, the constitution, melodrama or patriotism to pattern their research. This trend, which has been heavily influenced by literary forms of analysis such as post-structuralism and post-modernism, at times lacks methodological rigour.²⁹ Post modernist historians have been criticised for losing sight of the broader picture in their quest for deconstruction. There is a danger that the microanalysis of a text disembodies it from wider experience such as the context in which it was produced and the audience for which it was intended.³⁰ Thus when investigating speech-making by itinerant political lecturers the manner of the delivery, the location, and the audience are of equal importance to the actual words spoken. The dangers of applying post modernist analytical techniques to nineteenth century oratory are obvious. When deconstructing text how can we be sure that our primary source, the so called verbatim speech, was in fact anything other than the reporter's imaginative reconstruction of events?

Perhaps one of the most important ripostes to the 'linguistic turn' can be found in Paul Pickering's influential article, 'Class Without Words' which challenged Stedman Jones's bias towards the written 'languages of Chartism' and instead offered persuasive evidence on the role of symbolic communication. Pickering's exploration of the use of fustian by the Chartist leader Feargus O'Connor as 'an unmistakable emblem of "class"' and the work of James Epstein and John Belchem on the symbolic use of the cap of liberty, radical dining and other political props, are important in placing oratory in the three dimensional context of delivery and performance.³¹ Performance is crucial to understanding political speech-making; indeed one of the most difficult aspects of working upon political lecturing is the inability to recreate the actual experience of oratory. Oratory

²⁹ For a critique of cultural history see, McWilliam, "What is Interdisciplinary about Victorian History Today?" especially pp. 11-12.

³⁰ Peter Mandler, 'The Problem with Cultural History', *Cultural and Social History*, Vol. 1, (2004), 94-117. See Rohan McWilliam, *Popular Politics in Nineteenth-century England* (London, 1998), pp. 98-101 for suggestions on how to move beyond these limitations.

³¹ Pickering, 'Class Without Words: Symbolic communication in the Chartist Movement', *Past and Present* (Aug, 1986); James Epstein, *Radical Expression: Political language, Ritual, and Symbol in England, 1790-1850* (Oxford 1994). John Belchem, 'Radical Language, Meaning and Identity in the Age of Chartists', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, Vol. 10: 1 (2005), 1-14; John Belchem, '1848: Feargus O'Connor and the Collapse of the Mass Platform' in Epstein and Thompson, *Chartist Experience*, 269-310.

was passionate, moving and at times illogical but above all, as Patrick Joyce has emphasised, its meaning lay in the experience, ‘in being part of it, rather than in extracting a literal significance from it, either before or after the event’.³²

Patrick Joyce, in the mid 1990s, took Stedman Jones’s arguments a step further and played an important role in presenting post-modernism to a largely reluctant historical profession. While some of his analytical concepts raise more questions than they answer, and risk introducing new theoretical strait-jackets, it has been an invigorating process.³³ Perhaps of equal significance to theoretical challenges was how Joyce, and James Vernon, have utilised hitherto underused resources such as handbills, ballads, banners, statues, dialect literature, almanacs and images.³⁴ Vernon’s *Politics and the People*, draws upon post-modernist theory in his examination of five parliamentary constituencies between 1815 and 1867. Vernon found that even in this period there was a ‘national political culture, albeit with strong and local mediations’, a theory supported by this study.³⁵ Interestingly, Vernon has stressed the ‘centrality of an oral tradition within nineteenth-century English political culture’.³⁶ Yet his overarching theory that the older ‘community-based’ political sphere was gradually closed down after the Great Reform Act is more contentious. Vernon argues that the move away from noisy, unregulated politics made local political culture less rather than more democratic. This decline, in Vernon’s eyes, was accelerated by the rise of party, the ascendancy of print, the introduction of private ballot at vestry and municipal levels and eventually the Secret Ballot Act (1872).³⁷

By 1867, Vernon argues, it is possible to discern a ‘decisive transition from an oral-cum-visual-cum-printed political culture to one in which print was increasingly dominant’. Vernon has a point but he exaggerates the speed of the transition and underestimates the continuing significance of orality. The charismatic speaker held sway well into the twentieth century and, as work by Jon Lawrence shows, the democratic public

³² Joyce, *Democratic Subjects: the self and the social in nineteenth-century England* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 119.

³³ For a useful overview of Joyce’s innovations and limitations see Dror Wahrman, ‘The New Political History: A Review Essay’, *Social History*, Vol. 21. No. 3 (Oct., 1996), pp. 344-6.

³⁴ Patrick Joyce, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the question of class, 1848-1914* (Cambridge, 1992) and *Democratic Subjects*. James Vernon, *Politics and the People: A study in English political culture, c. 1815-1867* (Cambridge, 1993).

³⁵ Vernon, *Politics and the People*, p. 11.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 117.

³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 9.

meeting remained in robust health until at least the First World War.³⁸ This study will challenge Vernon's arguments that political meetings, other than the notoriously rowdy hustings, were disorderly and violent affairs. It is worth stating here that this study concerns political speeches that took place outside of Parliament and that were not made by politicians or parliamentary candidates aligned to party interest. For this reason the rituals and oratory of the hustings will not figure largely in this work. Instead my work focuses upon lectures and meetings addressed by agents employed by reform groups along with indigenous public meetings on broader political issues such as sanitation, education and the progress of the Crimean War.

The Chartist period, for the purpose of this study, is defined as ranging from 1837, the date in which the London Working Men's Association (LWMA) resolved to draw up a bill for parliamentary reform (published the following spring), to the demise of its formal governing body, the National Charter Association, which, in theory if not in practice, lingered on until 1860.³⁹ Previous research into Chartism, Owenism or temperance has typically focused on either the leadership or, at the opposite end of the spectrum, focused narrowly upon a specific town or city. Thus while we know a lot about Feargus O'Connor and Ernest Jones and even Chartism in Leeds or South Durham we know rather less about the middle-ranking Chartist leaders, who travelled between towns and cities on a regional orbit.⁴⁰ This study deliberately takes a regional approach because research carried out at the level of the region can refine more general national studies while retaining much of the finely grained approach pioneered by localised research. Itinerant lecturers themselves bridged the gap between the provinces and an increasingly national culture and offer historians a unique insight into 'the complex dynamics between locality and centre'.⁴¹

Methodology and sources

Max Atkinson's work on the speech-making and body language of contemporary politicians demonstrates that specific rhetorical techniques generate applause, 'almost irrespective of the intellectual content of what is being said'. Atkinson's research is based

³⁸ Jon Lawrence, 'The Decline of English Popular Politics?' *Parliamentary History*, Vol. 13, Part 3 (1994), 333-337. Jon Lawrence, 'The Transformation of British Public Politics after the First World War', *Past and Present*, No. 190 (Feb, 2006) 184- 216. Jon Lawrence, *Speaking for the People: Party, language and popular politics in England, 1867-1914* (Cambridge 1998).

³⁹ Chase, *History*, pp. 8-9; 357.

⁴⁰ Asa Briggs, *Chartist Studies* (New York, 1967). R. P. Hastings, *Chartism in the North Riding and South Durham, 1838-1848*, Borthwick Paper no. 105 (2004.)

⁴¹ Taylor, 'Rethinking the Chartists', p. 492.

upon television broadcasts and wholly dependent on modern technology which permits a systematic study of style and delivery.⁴² Unfortunately there are no recordings of nineteenth century political lectures or podcasts capturing lively Victorian public meetings which means that this thesis depends upon conventional historical research. The most fruitful sources are letters written by itinerant lecturers, such as those of the anti-slavery and free trade orator, George Thompson,⁴³ held at the John Rylands Library, Manchester and those found in the letter book of the Anti-Corn Law League collection held at Manchester Central Reference Library. The League letter book holds endless letters from free trade missionaries including James Acland,⁴⁴ Abraham Paulton,⁴⁵ and Sydney Smith,⁴⁶ which have been indispensable when re-imagining the life and preoccupations of an itinerant lecturer. Similarly, the papers of George Wilson, also held at Manchester Central Reference Library, include letters from George Thompson and other free trade lecturers. The minute books of national bodies and local associations have also been used including: the British Temperance League Executive Committee minutes; the Bradford Long-Pledged Teetotal Association minutes; the Anti-Corn Law Association, Halifax minutes and the Northern Reform Union minutes. Reports of Government spies and alarmed magistrates

⁴² Max Atkinson, *Our Masters' Voices: The language and body language of politics* (London and New York, 1984), p. xii.

⁴³ George Thompson (1804-1878) was a highly successful anti-slavery and free trade orator. He was one of the five agents appointed by the Anti-Slavery Agency Committee in 1831 and his great success helped define the role of paid political orator. Besides anti-slavery lecturing, Thompson was employed by the ACLL and the British India Society, he also lectured in support of the temperance and peace movements. W. A. S. Hewins, 'Thompson, George Donisthorpe (1804-1878)', *ODNB*, (Oxford, 2004). Thompson is discussed further in chapter six.

⁴⁴ James Acland (1799-1876) was a journalist, orator and political agent. Prior to working for the ACLL Acland edited a number of scurrilous unstamped newspapers including the *Bristolian* (1827-1830) and the *Hull Portfolio* (1831-1833). In the run up to the Great Reform Act (1832) Acland combined his printed tirades with open air speeches in first Bristol and then Hull, earning a reputation as a dangerous demagogue. Between 1839 and 1846 he was employed as an itinerant lecturer by the ACLL. Later Acland became a political agent, a career which culminated in his appointment in 1867 as election adviser to the Reform League. Janette Martin, 'James Acland (1799-1876)' in Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor (eds.), *Dictionary of Nineteenth Century Journalism*, forthcoming, online version. Acland is discussed further in chapter six.

⁴⁵ Abraham Walter Paulton (1812-1876) ACLL lecturer and journalist. Paulton was initially apprenticed to a surgeon but his interest in politics and involvement with the Anti-Corn Law movement led to his appointment as the ACLL's first lecturer. His suspected Chartist sympathies led to his removal from lecturing and by April 1839 he was instead editing the *ACLCL* later *ABTC*. After the Corn Laws were repealed in 1846 he managed the *Manchester Times*, see C. W. Sutton, 'Paulton, Abraham Walter (1812-1876)', rev. Matthew Lee, *ODNB* (Oxford, 2004).

⁴⁶ Sydney Smith (1805-1881), a former solicitor from Edinburgh, was engaged by the League in 1839 primarily to appeal to middle-class audiences. He later edited the *ACLCL* before moving in January 1841 to London to become secretary of the Metropolitan Anti-Corn Law Association. After the Corn Laws were repealed in 1846 he became a political agent, serving as secretary of the City of London Liberal Registration Association for thirty-three years and managing several electoral campaigns, see G. Martin Murphy, 'Smith, Sidney (1805-1881)', *ODNB* (Oxford, 2004).

have also shed light upon Chartist lecturers such as Jonathan Bairstow,⁴⁷ James William and George Binns. The correspondence and papers of the 1839 Chartist Convention held at the British Library provide a more sympathetic account of Chartism than that depicted in official records, and include rich description of the first Chartist missionary tours.

Ironically for a study which stresses oral communication over print culture newspapers have been a major contemporary source. Indeed this work is based on trawls through the in-house newspapers and periodicals produced by the major reform movements including: the Chartist newspapers, the *Northern Star*, the *Charter* and the *Northern Liberator*; the main free trade newspaper, the *Anti-Corn Law Circular* – later renamed the *Anti-Bread Tax Circular*; the Owenite newspaper the *New Moral World*; the national and local temperance press, in particular, the *British Temperance Advocate*, the *Northern Temperance Advocate*; and journals and newspapers related to the anti-slavery movement. The British Library online nineteenth century newspaper collection has facilitated finding contextual information on events and individuals from a wide range of other local and national newspapers.

Contemporary autobiographies are also richly illuminating, despite the obvious drawbacks of relying upon material written some date after the events took place with posterity in mind. Of particular note is an account by Thomas Whittaker⁴⁸ of temperance lecturing, *My Life's Battles in Temperance Armour*, and the autobiographies of the former Chartists Robert Lowery⁴⁹ and Thomas Cooper.⁵⁰ For early anti-slavery oratory the

⁴⁷ Jonathan Rembrandt Hall Bairstow (dates unknown) was a former weaver from Queensbury near Bradford. He was a highly talented Chartist orator who rose rapidly through the Chartist ranks. For more information on his political career see chapters two and six.

⁴⁸ Thomas Whittaker (1813–1899) was a temperance lecturer who itinerated during 1835–6 throughout Lancashire, Cumberland, Northumberland, and Durham as an agent of the British Association for the Promotion of Temperance. He subsequently worked as an agent for the New British and Foreign Temperance Society. He moved to Scarborough in 1849 where he became involved in Liberal politics. He was elected Mayor of Scarborough in 1880. Thomas Whittaker, *Life's Battles in Temperance Armour* (London, 1884).

⁴⁹ Robert Lowery (1809–1863) Chartist and temperance lecturer was born in 1809 at North Shields. In his early teens he was apprenticed as a sailor, but his time at sea ended after ill-health lamed him. During his recuperation Lowery read widely. While apprenticed to a Newcastle tailor he trained himself in public speaking, becoming secretary of the North Shields Political Union and a trade unionist. In 1838 he became a Chartist lecturer. He served as a Chartist Convention missionary in Cornwall and Dublin in 1839. Further illness and periods of reflection convinced Lowery of the importance of moral reform and he drifted away from Chartism via the CSU towards the temperance movement. He worked as a temperance agent until his retirement in 1862. Harrison and Hollis, *Robert Lowery*. Lowery is discussed further in chapter six.

⁵⁰ Thomas Cooper (1805–1892), Chartist, poet and later a religious lecturer. Leader of the Leicester Chartists he was arrested after the riots in the Potteries in 1842, and was sentenced the following year to two years in prison. Cooper's lecturing career is discussed further in chapter six. Thomas Cooper, *The Life of Thomas Cooper* (Leicester, 1872, republished 1971 with introduction by John Saville).

memoirs of Benjamin Godwin of Bradford are useful.⁵¹ This study has also drawn upon contemporary descriptions of lecturing in fiction and travel writing. Here George Head's, *A Home Tour through the Manufacturing Districts of England*, provided not only a fascinating description of a temperance meeting but offers valuable information on the logistics of nineteenth-century travel.⁵² Frances Trollope's *The Domestic Manners of the Americans*, furnished a vivid description of arguably the world's first public set-piece political debate. Nineteenth-century tracts, printed speeches and books, particularly those available via the *Making of the Modern World* digital resource, have added rich detail to this research. Finally the Robert Wood collection of theatre and lecture posters, held by Hartlepool Museum Services, offers an insight into the rich cultural life of a provincial town in the North East and provides a visual endorsement of the overlap between lecturing and entertainment.⁵³

It is necessary to say more about chapters two, three and four, all of which have specific methodological underpinnings. The second chapter explores the geographical dimensions of political lecturing by plotting itinerary data for the Chartist missionary Jonathan Bairstow in November 1840 and comparing it with a missionary tour undertaken by the temperance lecturer, Septimus Davis⁵⁴ in November 1858. Bairstow's lecture circuit is plotted from itinerary data extracted from the *Northern Star* and Davis from a detailed report of his missionary tour published in the *North of England Temperance League Register* (see Appendix I for the parameters of these case studies)

Chapter three and four (and to a certain degree the thesis as a whole) draws upon a detailed empirical study of a Liberal newspaper, the *Bradford Observer* between 1835 and 1860. This study provides empirical support for the trends discernable in autobiographies and printed studies of the Chartist period. In particular, it charts the changing ways in which oratory was reported and printed and the extent to which oratory grew in this period. I was also concerned with the protocol and etiquette of both calling and regulating a public meeting. In addition to furnishing empirical evidence of these changing trends, careful

⁵¹ Benjamin Godwin (1785-1871) was a Baptist minister in Bradford. Benjamin Godwin, *Reminiscences of Three Score and Ten* (2 Vols., Bradford, 1855). Copy held at Bradford Central Library, Local Studies Library, B920 GOD.

⁵² George Head, *A Home Tour through the Manufacturing Districts of England in the summer of 1835 by Sir George Head* (1836, 2nd ed. with introduction by W. H. Chaloner 1968, London).

⁵³ Hartlepool Museums Services, Hartlepool: The Robert Wood Collection (printers' proofs of John Proctor, 1809-1860). Many of the handbills for lectures in this collection are visually similar to those used by theatres.

⁵⁴ Septimus Davis (dates unknown) was a political agent involved in trade unionism, Chartism and temperance.

reading, issue by issue, immersed me in the period and allowed me to appreciate the central role played by oratory, public meetings and lectures in the cultural life of mid-nineteenth century Bradford. A detailed explanation of the methodology employed in this study and further information upon the *Bradford Observer* is given in Appendix I.

Yorkshire and the North East

The two regions of my case study, the North East and the West Riding of Yorkshire, were both of great importance to Chartism and Owenism and were also strongholds for temperance, anti-slavery, and the free trade campaign.⁵⁵ William Wilberforce was MP for Yorkshire and Quakers in both regions (notably the Pease family of Darlington) were active participants in the anti-slavery movement. In both regions the places most receptive to itinerant proselytisers were the urban industrial centres. Obviously it was far easier to get up a meeting and assemble an audience in a densely populated town or city. Town dwellers, as the *Leeds Intelligencer* pointed out in 1844, were readily able to attend political meetings, even from mere curiosity, ‘in a well lighted public room a few streets from their own doors’. This was in stark contrast to the agricultural workers who tended to live in ‘comparative seclusion’, and thus required something more than a ‘mere itching’ to draw them together from their distant homes.⁵⁶ Rural communities generally lacked meeting space that was free from the influence of the local landowner or clergyman often making it unavailable to itinerant or local lecturers speaking on controversial political or religious issues. This problem was also felt in company towns such as Middlesbrough where the owners of ‘The Middlesbrough Estate, Ltd’ extended an iron grip over the town, refusing Chartist speakers access to meeting space.⁵⁷

Yet while urbanisation furnished opportunities, the isolation of rural communities should not be overplayed. The village of Haworth, presented by Elizabeth Gaskell in her *Life of Charlotte Bronte* (1847) as a remote outpost far from culture and civilisation, was, in fact, only a four mile walk or coach-ride from the industrial town of Keighley.

⁵⁵ A point made by Donald Read whose book includes useful chapters on Chartism, the anti-slavery movement, and the Anti-Corn Law League. Donald Read, *The English Provinces c 1760-1960, A Study in Influence* (London, 1964).

⁵⁶ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 20 January 1844. A problem faced by Joseph Arch when trying to unionise the farm workers in the 1870s, Pamela Horn, *Labouring Life in the Victorian Countryside* (Dublin, 1976), pp. 126-143.

⁵⁷ For this reason early Chartism in Middlesbrough was largely conducted under the guise of temperance societies, Malcolm Chase, ‘Chartism, 1838-1858: responses in two Teesside towns’, in Stephen Roberts (ed.), *The People's Charter: Democratic Agitation in Early Victorian Britain* (London, 2003), pp. 158-9.

Nineteenth-century Keighley, for all its rough edges, was certainly on the lecture circuit of itinerant speakers, scientific demonstrators and popular entertainers.⁵⁸ As a glance at Victorian local newspapers will confirm itinerant speakers reached into the smallest villages and for those prepared to walk three or four miles the range of speakers and topics on offer was remarkable.⁵⁹ The more astute itinerant lecturers visiting the North East and Yorkshire shaped their rhetoric and tactics to suit local cultural, social, trade and political circumstances. Geographical factors came into play too, particularly for planning routes and utilising transport links. For this reason a brief description of the nature of each region will be useful.

Radical politics and reform movements in the West Riding were predominantly concentrated in industrial areas centred upon the textile and manufacturing towns of Bradford, Dewsbury, Keighley, Huddersfield, and Halifax and larger, industrially diverse, urban centres such as Leeds and Sheffield. The hinterlands of these industrialised centres included satellite townships, villages and hamlets many with their own robust radical traditions. For example, the village of Queensbury located on hilly terrain between Halifax and Bradford had one of the earliest radical and earliest temperance groups in the region. The combined population of Queensbury and three other adjacent villages in 1836 was only 4,459 and yet its stature was such that Feargus O'Connor lectured there on at least one occasion.⁶⁰ Theodore Koditschek's study of Bradford shows the impact of the urban-industrial revolution on a West Riding town. While Bradford, with its dependence upon the wool textile industry, differed from more commercially diverse towns such as Leeds, the tensions generated by the emerging urban bourgeoisie were common to other northern towns in this period.⁶¹

The industrial towns of Yorkshire were home to the textile industry which during the Chartist years was in the process of being mechanised. The anger of the dispossessed Yorkshire handloom weaver, whose very livelihood was threatened by factory system, fed into Yorkshire Chartism. It has been estimated that those in declining industries accounted

⁵⁸ Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Bronte* (London, 1857, reprinted with introduction by Peter Merchant, 2008). Joseph Constantine's autobiography gives a good insight into the range of itinerant speakers and entertainers that visited mid-nineteenth century Keighley, Joseph Constantine, *Fifty years of the Water Cure, with autobiographical notes* (London, 1892).

⁵⁹ The pages of the *Bradford Observer* demonstrate that small settlements and villages in the hinterlands of Bradford were widely visited by itinerant entertainers and lecturers.

⁶⁰ Dorothy Thompson, *The Chartists: Popular Politics in the Industrial Revolution* (Hounslow, 1984), pp. 244-5. *Northern Star* (hereafter, *NS*) 19 January 1839.

⁶¹ Theodore Koditschek, *Class formation and urban industrial society: Bradford, 1750-1850* (Cambridge, 1990).

for a significant percentage of Chartist membership.⁶² Local knowledge of trade conditions was important for missionaries and could be used to win over a local populace. The Chartist missionary Jonathan Bairstow, for example, when speaking in the textile towns of his native Yorkshire in August 1840 focused his arguments on the problems of mechanisation.⁶³ Yorkshire, like many other industrialising counties, also supported sizeable numbers of colliers and quarrymen alongside engineers, craftsmen and artisans. For historical reasons (largely the dependency by early textile mechanisation on water power), many of the industrial areas of the West Riding adjoined upland areas whose geography and topography was unsuited to agriculture.⁶⁴ As will become evident in the next chapter, terrain influenced lecture circuits: for example, older packhorse routes offered a more direct route in upland areas than roads following circuitous valleys.

Methodism was strong in the West Riding and radicalism borrowed from the structural organisation of Nonconformity in its use of the lecture circuit and preacher plan. Within the West Riding there was a long tradition of radicalism. Huddersfield, for example, was the site of a rising in 1817 in protest at the heavy taxation and lack of trade which beset the country in the aftermath of the Napoleonic War.⁶⁵ Such radicalism was assisted by the geography - Yorkshire was remote from the centre of Government. But this was beginning to change in the early decades of the nineteenth century with the introduction of the faster stage coaches, 'flying coaches', and by the late 1830s with the arrival of the railways. In 1840 Leeds was linked to the North Midland Railway and thence via the Midland Counties Railway and the London & Birmingham to London. The following year a trans-Pennine route opened between Normanton and Manchester taking in the principal towns of the West Riding.⁶⁶

The North East, for the purposes of this study, encompasses the two historic counties of Northumberland and Durham and Middlesbrough which, although located in the North Riding of Yorkshire had strong affinities with the North East. Within this larger area attention is primarily focused upon the rapidly expanding industrial towns and villages

⁶² The membership book of Great Horton (Bradford) branch of the NCA, for example, shows that three-quarters of the membership were either weavers or woolcombers, D. G. Wright, *The Chartist Risings in Bradford* (Bradford, 1987), p. 27.

⁶³ *BO*, 13 August 1840; *NS*, 15 August 1840.

⁶⁴ For an overview of Yorkshire see David Hey, *A History of Yorkshire: 'County of the Broad Acres'* (Lancaster, 2005).

⁶⁵ John A. Hargreaves, "'A Metropolis of Discontent': Popular Protest in Huddersfield c.1780-1850", in Hilary Haigh (ed.), *Huddersfield, A Most Handsome Town: Aspects of the history and culture of a West Riding Town* (Huddersfield, 1992), p. 205.

⁶⁶ A. Haigh, *Railways in West Yorkshire* (Lancaster, 1974).

surrounding the River Tyne and River Wear and the mining communities of the great northern coalfield. The North East, which stretches northwards until it meets the Scottish borders, was remote from the Parliament and central Government. This geographical position fostered a sense of independence, expressed via political radicalism and religious Nonconformity. While further away from the capital than Yorkshire it had the advantage of an extensive coast line and major sea ports. The importance of the sea to the North-East's identity and trade should not be underestimated – all the major towns of the North East were on 'navigable rivers or on the coast, and all were active ports into the twentieth century'.⁶⁷ The North East was also an early beneficiary of the railway age. Indeed the world's first passenger railway operated between Stockton and Darlington from 1825.⁶⁸ During the first railway boom of the 1830s and 1840s railways were rapidly built across the industrialised North East linking pits and industrial sites to ports. Passenger transport flourished too. By 1844 it was possible to travel from Gateshead to London by train providing a much quicker alternative than the traditional method of travelling from the North East by sea packet around the coast line into the River Thames.⁶⁹ Such technological advances drew the North East more closely into a national political culture.

The inhabitants of Durham and Northumberland spoke with a strong accent in a speech peppered with dialect words. Indeed the language of some of the remote, culturally isolated colliery and quarry settlements were particularly difficult for outsiders to comprehend. Yorkshire too had a pronounced regional accent.⁷⁰ Yet I have found no instances of missionaries perplexed by local speech or local audiences failing to comprehend itinerant lecturers. Indeed where both the audience and the speakers were keen to communicate these barriers were not insurmountable and might even provide opportunity for light-hearted banter.⁷¹ The young temperance lecturer Thomas Whittaker, for example, was a sensation in Newcastle temperance circles, attracting large curious

⁶⁷ Graeme J. Milne, *North-East England, 1850-1914: The Dynamics of a Maritime-industrial Region* (Woodbridge, 2006), p. 9. Robert Allen, *The British Industrial Revolution in Global Perspective* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 93-4.

⁶⁸ K. Hoole, *A regional history of the railways of Great Britain, Vol. IV, North East England*, (London, 1965), p. 13.

⁶⁹ Newcastle had to wait until 1850 before it could be connected to the railway network due to the difficulties involved in building a bridge across the deep gorge of the River Tyne. Jack Simmons and Gordon Biddle (eds.), *The Oxford Companion to British Railway History* (Oxford, 2000), p. 345.

⁷⁰ Katie Wales, 'North of the Trent: images of Northern-ness and Northern English in the Eighteenth Century', in Helen Berry & Jeremy Gregory (eds.), *Creating and Consuming Culture in North-East England, 1600-1830* (Aldershot, 2004). Wales describes how provincial accents were measured against the pronunciations of the London elite and derided as rustic and vulgar, p. 31.

⁷¹ See chapter five p. 175-77 for a discussion of how dialect might be used to win audience approval.

audiences largely because of the novelty of his Lancashire accent.⁷² The Chartist era perhaps represents the point at which accents were beginning to decline (or at least become more accommodating to outsiders) as the railways and expanding newspaper and print culture increasingly imposed ‘correct’ pronunciation on the masses – a process that gained pace with the introduction of compulsory state education from the 1870s.⁷³

The driving power behind the rapid industrialisation of the North East was coal. Between the foothills of the Pennines and the sea, stretching from the River Coquet in the North and to the River Tees in the South were rich seams of easily retrievable coal. Coal powered all Victorian industries and the great northern coalfield was the key supplier to domestic and overseas markets. Not only was coal abundant and cheap to mine, the coal fields were located within easy proximity of navigable rivers, coastal ports and later railways.⁷⁴ By the dawn of the Chartist era, thanks to the ready supply of coal and ease of transportation, Newcastle, Sunderland, Gateshead and the towns dotted along the River Tyne supported thriving iron, steel, shipbuilding, and engineering industries. While life was undeniably hard for miners, shipbuilders and iron workers, compared to the plight of the Yorkshire handloom weaver, trade (albeit interspersed with periodic slumps) was booming and unemployment relatively low. The industrial towns of the North East grew at an astonishing rate (none more so than the Victorian boom town of Middlesbrough). Such growth brought in its wake problems of over-crowding, squalor and sanitation.⁷⁵

During the Chartist years agriculture remained an important component of the North East’s economy and thus repeal of the Corn Laws was as lively an issue here as in the rural parts of Yorkshire.⁷⁶ Religious Nonconformity also thrived. The isolated mining communities of Durham and Northumberland were renowned for their strong adherence to Primitive Methodism. The hard drinking miners were early targets for the missionaries and the improving culture of temperance and chapel gained importance in mining districts competing with the older, rougher traditions of machismo and hard-drinking. According to Frank Musgrove, Methodism (and other strands of nonconformity) formed part of a wider

⁷² Whittaker, *Life’s Battles*, pp. 130-131.

⁷³ For a detailed study of correct pronunciation see Lynda Mugglestone, *‘Talking Proper:’ The Rise of Accent as a Social Symbol* (Oxford, 1995). However it would be wrong to over emphasise the decline in regional speaking styles, even today the ‘Geordie’ accent remains strongly distinctive.

⁷⁴ For background information on coal mining in the North East see chapter two, Aidan Doyle, *The great northern coalfield: mining collections at Beamish Museum* (Newcastle, 2005).

⁷⁵ Norman McCord and Richard Thompson, *The Northern Counties from AD 1000* (Harlow, 1998), pp. 300-306.

⁷⁶ Milne, *North-East England*, p. 7.

battle between the new industrial order and the Anglican ruling class and the aristocracy.⁷⁷ Both regions in this study were characterised by high levels of trade union organisation which, at that time, was associated with skilled workers and privilege.⁷⁸ Trade unionism and Methodism fed into political and social life crucially giving the labouring classes experience of organisation and public speaking. As this study demonstrates trade unionism and Methodism are vital to understanding how political mobilisation occurred in Northern England.

The chronology of itinerant political lecturing

The 1840s was the golden age of paid political oratory, but to appreciate the roots of itinerant political lecturing we need to go back to the late eighteenth century and look at the campaign to end slavery. The anti-slavery movement was quick to recognise the importance of the spoken word and town hall meetings in the battle for public opinion. In 1787 Thomas Clarkson embarked on a series of lecture tours across the length and breadth of England, covering over 35,000 miles and addressing thousands of meetings over the next seven years.⁷⁹ His propaganda techniques were copied in 1825 by the wealthy Quaker, James Cropper, who addressed public meetings on the iniquities of slavery in Ireland, York, Hull, Manchester Sheffield and Leeds.⁸⁰ But it was not until 1831, as the anti-slavery campaign reached a crescendo, that a breakaway group of campaigners employed paid agents.⁸¹ Early temperance groups were also at this time making tentative moves to employ paid speaking talent. In December 1830 the Bradford Temperance Society advertised in the *Leeds Mercury* for a ‘gentleman of suitable talents, to give lectures, or to deliver addresses at public meetings, on the principles and objectives of Temperance Societies’. At the start of 1831 the Rev. J. Jackson, a Baptist minister from

⁷⁷ Musgrove overplays the clash between the new industrial order (of both workers and masters) and the aristocracy in his eagerness to diminish the role of class, Frank Musgrove, *The North of England: A History from Roman Times to the Present* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 271-276.

⁷⁸ Malcolm Chase, *Early trade unionism: fraternity, skill, and the politics of labour* (Aldershot, 2000).

⁷⁹ James Walvin, ‘The Propaganda of Anti-Slavery’, in James Walvin (eds.), *Slavery and British Society 1776-1846* (London, 1982), p. 52.

⁸⁰ David Brion Davis, ‘James Cropper and the British Anti-Slavery Movement, 1823-33’, *Journal of Negro History*, (1961), p. 162.

⁸¹ George Stephen, *Anti-Slavery Recollections in a Series of Letters addressed to Mrs Beecher Stowe* (1854, 2nd ed., 1971, London), pp. 129-30.

Hebden Bridge, was appointed as a missionary. Jackson travelled 900 miles and delivered more than forty lectures in the space of three months.⁸²

Political radicals too recognised the potential of the itinerant lecturer. In February 1796, perhaps influenced by Thomas Clarkson's speaking tours, the London Corresponding Society (LCS) engaged John Gale Jones to embark upon a political tour of the Medway towns to visit and enquire into state of radical societies in these townships. During his tour Jones addressed several meetings. It is not clear whether he was paid for his services yet his tour set a precedent for radical (Chartist, Owenite and Anti-Corn Law League) missionary tours of the late 1830s and 1840s.⁸³ The LCS was also closely associated with one of the most eminent public speakers of the period, John Thelwall (1764-1834), political theorist, poet, orator and early pioneer of speech therapy.⁸⁴ Thelwall had been briefly imprisoned and tried for treason in 1794 due to radical activities under the auspices of the LCS. After his acquittal and release, and undeterred by the passing of the Seditious Meetings Act of 1795, he continued to lecture, hiding his political theories under the guise of classical history.⁸⁵ Although he lectured for money his audience was drawn from a wide range of society and he was never a paid agent in the later sense of the word.⁸⁶

In 1812 the constitutionalist reformer, Mayor John Cartwright, toured the country holding meetings, mobilising those in support of parliamentary reform and setting up Hampden Club which flourished in to the cotton districts of Lancashire.⁸⁷ By 1817 delegates from were sent from Lancashire to proselytise the West Riding and the Potteries.⁸⁸ The impetus for political reform remained strong in the aftermath of the Napoleonic War, and radicals like Henry Hunt were able to mobilise mass popular support

⁸² *Annual Report of the Bradford Temperance Society*, 1832, p. 13. Jackson started work on 12 January 1831 - several months before the anti-slavery society employed its first agents, *British Temperance Advocate*, 27 September 1862.

⁸³ John Gale Jones, *A Political Tour Through Rochester, Chatham, Maidstone, Gravesend &c* (1796; republished 1997 with an introduction by Dr Philip MacDougall). Political missionaries were still used to reach working-class audiences in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, see James Owen, 'Dissident missionaries? re-narrating the political strategy of the Social-Democratic Federation, 1884-1887', *Labour History Review*, Vol. 73, Issue 2 (2008), 187-207.

⁸⁴ Nicholas Roe, 'Thelwall, John (1764-1834)', *ODNB*, (Oxford, 2004).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* See also Saree Maldiski, 'Blake's Metropolitan Radicalism' in James Chandler and Kevin Gilmartin (eds.) *Romantic Metropolis: the Urban Scene of British Culture, 1780-1840* (Cambridge, 2005), p.120.

⁸⁶ Thelwall lectured across the country extensively under the auspices of Literary and Philosophical Societies, see Thelwall's elocution prospectus and correspondence held at Manchester Local Studies Library, Royal Manchester Institution, M6/1/48/1 - M6/1/49/4; M6/1/50 - M6/1/52. See also Robert Lamb and Corinna Wagner, *Selected Political Writings of John Thelwall* (4 Vols., London, 2008).

⁸⁷ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1963), pp. 665-7. The most recent biography of Cartwright disappointingly has little to say on his itinerant speech making, John W. Osbourne *John Cartwright* (Cambridge, 1972).

⁸⁸ John K. Walton, *Lancashire: A social history, 1558-1939* (Manchester, 1987), p. 154.

for political reform as displayed at a series of mass meetings held in late 1816 and early 1817 at Spa Fields in London and the infamous meeting at St Peter's Fields, Manchester in 1819.⁸⁹ Government repression in the wake of the Peterloo massacre effectively stifled the mass outdoor platform during the 1820s and it was not until the run up to the Great Reform Act that it regained momentum.⁹⁰ After the formation of the Birmingham Political Union (BPU) a succession of radical political unions were formed across the country.⁹¹ Meanwhile William Cobbett, who had consistently kept political reform on the agenda via the pages of his unstamped newspaper the *Political Register*, toured the country addressing large meetings in the Midlands and the North.⁹² It was widely felt that the visible mobilisation of the people forced the Government into passing the 1832 Great Reform Bill.

The Chartist movement continued the tradition of the mass platform as a constitutional way in which to coerce Government into greater democratic provision. Early reform agitation was predominantly carried out by unpaid gentlemanly leaders (Cartwright, Cobbett, Hunt): a pattern that was perpetuated into the 1840s and 1850s by men such as Richard Oastler, Feargus O'Connor and Ernest Jones. Yet increasingly such men shared the platform with professional agitators and by the late 1830s the paid professional agitator was in ascendancy. The years between the 1830s and 1860s witnessed an array of reform movements and pressure groups from single issue campaigns such as temperance and repeal of the Corn Laws to more complex platforms such as Owenism and Chartism, all of which employed paid lecturers. To provide a context for subsequent discussions of popular oratory and itinerant lecturing, the main reform movements discussed in this thesis will be broadly sketched here.⁹³ Given its pre-eminence and its pioneering role in pressure politics, we shall start with the anti-slavery campaign.

The anti-slavery campaign from its late eighteenth century inception was associated with leading Quakers, evangelicals and Nonconformists. It was predominantly an urban middle-class movement although it was also supported by sections of the labouring classes. The anti-slavery movement operated a comprehensive network of local and regional

⁸⁹ John Belchem, *Orator Hunt: Henry Hunt and English Working-class radicalism* (Oxford, 1985); John Belchem 'Henry Hunt and the Evolution of the Mass Platform', *English Historical Review*, Vol. XCIII (Oct. 1978), 739-773.

⁹⁰ Meisel, *Public Speech*, pp. 236-7.

⁹¹ Nancy D. LoPatin, *Political Unions, Popular Politics, and the Great Reform Act of 1832* (Basingstoke, 1999).

⁹² George Spater, *William Cobbett, the poor man's friend* (2 Vols., Cambridge, 1982), p. 501.

⁹³ See pioneering study edited by Patricia Hollis, *Pressure from Without Pressure in early Victorian England* (London, 1974); J.T. Ward, *Popular Movements c 1830-1850*, D. G. Wright *Popular Radicalism: the working class experience* (Harlow, 1988). Read, *English Provinces*.

auxiliaries, which at the height of the national campaign numbered around 1,200. The wives and daughters of leading campaigners played a crucial role keeping these local and regional bodies active and exerting behind-the-scenes influence.⁹⁴ Tracts, newspapers and books, bankrolled by wealthy Quakers, disseminated propaganda, while strategies for influencing Parliament such as lobbying, drawing up voters lists and obtaining pledges were also used.⁹⁵ The anti-slavery campaigners initiated the use of mass nationwide petitions to force parliamentary discussion on gradual elimination of slavery. But progress was slow and by 1831 some of the Anti-Slavery Society's younger and more radical elements organised the Agency Committee which called for the unconditional and immediate abolition of slavery. The Agency took the controversial step of appointing in July 1831 six paid lecturers to agitate the country.⁹⁶ While using itinerant speakers was not new to the campaign (see Clarkson and Cropper discussed earlier), using paid advocates was a bold and novel step.

According to George Stephen, the Agency lecturers were instrumental in mobilising public opinion in the fight to abolish West Indian slavery.⁹⁷ Certainly the number of branches mushroomed, rallies, meetings and public debates on the morality of slavery were organised and editors persuaded to include anti-slavery material in their columns. The anti-slavery campaign also benefited from the extension of the franchise in (1832) as many members of the extended Commons were sympathetic to abolition, and the following year the Slavery Abolition Act was passed. British campaigners now extended their remit to include the end of the slave trade and slave systems throughout the world. Yet as the campaign broadened out it failed to capture public interest as much as West Indian emancipation. Thus while George Thompson met with great success in the 1830s, his attempts to mobilise support for anti-slavery campaigns in British India were markedly less successful.⁹⁸ Support for British anti-slavery declined during the 1850s and 1860s, albeit periodically revived by the presence of former slaves like Frederick Douglass, Moses Roper, Sarah Parker Remond and Charles Lenox Remond itinerating across

⁹⁴ Clare Midgley, *Women against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780-1870* (New York, 1995); Karen I. Halbersleben, *Women's participation in the British anti-slavery movement, 1824-1865* (Lewiston, 1993).

⁹⁵ Howard Temperley, 'Anti-Slavery', in Hollis, *Pressure from Without*, pp. 30-1.

⁹⁶ The lecturers were George Thompson, E. Baldwin, Captain Pilkington, Mr Scoble, Revd Dewdney and Mr Hume, Stephen, *Anti-Slavery Recollections*, pp. 143-158.

⁹⁷ Temperley, 'Anti-Slavery', pp. 28 -31.

⁹⁸ Ronald M. Gifford 'George Thompson and Transatlantic Anti-slavery, 1831-1865', (unpublished PhD thesis, Indiana University, 1999).

England and Scotland, especially in the wake of the notorious Fugitive Slave Act (1850).⁹⁹ The publication of Harriet Beecher Stowe's book, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) and Stowe's subsequent visit to the United Kingdom in 1853 similarly generated, in the short-term, great enthusiasm.

The Anti-Corn Law League (ACLL), whose leaders included Richard Cobden and John Bright, was formalised in Manchester in March 1839.¹⁰⁰ Like the anti-slavery movement the ACCL was a single issue pressure group. It sought to repeal the Corn Laws whose restrictive tariffs artificially inflated the price of bread by keeping the price of imported grain prohibitively high, an arrangement which protected the interests of the landed aristocracy at the expense of the hungry industrial worker, for whom bread was their staple diet. The League based its agitating strategy on tactics pioneered by the anti-slavery movement and Daniel O'Connell's Catholic Association. It published pamphlets, established a network of local branches, organised petitions and employed itinerant speakers to address public meetings. Oratory and the theatre of the large rally or dinner were integral to the campaign. Besides the rousing speeches delivered by John Bright, Richard Cobden and Colonel T. P. Thompson, at its peak the ACCL employed fourteen or fifteen paid lecturers, in addition to those employed by local Anti-Corn Law Associations (ACLAs).¹⁰¹ These men were sent on missionary tours across the country to proselytise through the medium of lectures, set-piece debates and speeches. While the early missionary tours were deemed an expensive failure the rousing speeches of League agents certainly kept the issue of repeal high on the political agenda.

The League pioneered many important propaganda techniques including using the penny post to launch a massive leafleting campaign and the careful manipulation of the electoral registration courts to maximise the number of sympathetic voters. Like all reform movements of the period it supported its own newspaper, which initially went by the title of *Anti-Corn Law Circular (ACLC)*, before adopting the emotive title, *Anti-Bread Tax Circular (ABTC)* in 1841.¹⁰² The speeches of its key orators like George Thompson and W. J. Fox were also published and circulated as tracts. In 1845, after five years of

⁹⁹ Douglas A. Lorimer, *Colour, Class and the Victorians: English attitudes to the Negro in the mid-nineteenth century* (Leicester, 1978). Lorimer said that it was the vibrant speeches and not the plodding rhetoric of printed tracts which got the message across, p. 72.

¹⁰⁰ Norman McCord, *The Anti-Corn Law League, 1838-1846* (London, 1st ed. 1958, 2nd ed. 1968), p. 53.

¹⁰¹ Paul A. Pickering and Alex Tyrell, *The People's Bread: A History of the Anti-Corn Law League* (Leicester, 2000), p. 20.

¹⁰² Pickering and Tyrell, *People's Bread*, p. 120.

sustained agitation Robert Peel was forced to review the Corn Laws against the backdrop of the Irish potato famine. In January 1846 the Corn Laws were effectively repealed.¹⁰³ The most striking aspect of the League's campaign was its efficient organisation and mobilisation of opinion, its remarkable success ensured that it was the model *par excellence* for subsequent pressure groups.

The Chartists were in direct conflict with the ACLL which appears incongruous considering they both sought to better the lot of the working-classes and divert power away from the landed interest. The Chartists distrusted the predominantly middle-class Leaguers as the betrayal of 1832 was still fresh in the radical political memory. Furthermore they suspected the League's intentions were based on self-interest, pointing out that cheap bread would inevitably lead to falling wages. Chartism was formed from the convergence of factory and anti-poor law movement with the campaign for parliamentary reform and had its stronghold in the industrial centres of the North and Midlands. Its name derived from *The People's Charter* (1838), which sought a remedy to the social and economic grievances of the labouring classes. The six points of the People's Charter were all political demands connected to parliamentary representation: universal manhood suffrage, annual elections, secret ballot, equal electoral districts, payment of MPs and abolition of the property qualification for MPs.¹⁰⁴

From the beginning Chartism used gifted speakers and the platform to mobilise its supporters. Feargus O'Connor, proprietor of the *Northern Star* and leader of the movement until the early 1850s, was renowned for his oratorical prowess. The successes of the Chartist Convention missionaries encouraged the move towards professional paid lecturers and their use was promoted by the National Charter Association (NCA) founded in 1840. Indeed a key role of the NCA was the distribution and supervision of Chartist missionaries to maximise the movement's growth; so much so, one Chartist historian dubbed the NCA 'the old lecturing organisation'.¹⁰⁵ Chartist lecturers were typically funded at the level of the district, by levying a small amount of money from local NCA branches. In addition to the paid regional lecturers, areas with particularly vibrant Chartist communities also organised local lecturers who spoke in their spare time gratuitously while at the apex of the

¹⁰³ *Ibid*; McCord, *Anti-Corn Law League*; Archibald Prentice, *History of the Anti-Corn Law League*, (2 Vols., 1853, 2nd ed., with introduction by W. H. Chaloner, London, 1968).

¹⁰⁴ Edward Royle, *Chartism* (1980, reprinted Essex, 1996).

¹⁰⁵ David Jones, *Chartism and the Chartists* (London, 1975), p. 103.

movement gentlemanly radicals like Feargus O'Connor and Ernest Jones clocked up epic lecture tours without charge.

Chartism was a disparate movement which varied greatly from region to region and yet it was bound into a cohesive role by both the Chartist press, notably by O'Connor's *Northern Star* and also by the lecture tours of Chartist leaders and paid Chartist lecturers.¹⁰⁶ The missionary tours and speeches of the heroes of the Chartist platform were printed at length in radical newspapers and their rousing speeches were read aloud in workplaces, pubs and homes. While Chartism commanded vast support (the 1842 petition commanded over 3.3 million signatures)¹⁰⁷ its membership was overwhelmingly drawn from the poorest classes and thus, unlike the wealthy ACLL or even the anti-slavery movement, Chartism could not fund an expensive campaign.

Chartism also borrowed from the techniques pioneered by the anti-slavery lobby, in particular, the use of itinerant agents and mass petitions. Petitioning was valued by the Chartists as a means of keeping their agitation within the bounds of legality. Moreover, the actual delivery of the petition was an opportunity to demonstrate visually extensive support. Collecting signatures was carried out by local activists and by professional missionaries who took petition sheets on their lecture tours actively canvassing for support as they moved from place to place. Three major petitions (1839, 1842 and 1848) were delivered in support of the Charter. All three were declined. After the 1848 petition was rejected Chartism as a mass movement effectively ended but the National Charter Association endured for another decade or so, after 1852 under the leadership of Ernest Jones. In parts of the North East and the West Riding, notably Halifax (which had specific connections with Ernest Jones), Chartism remained strong into the 1850s.¹⁰⁸ Elsewhere, even when formal Chartist structures had long since disappeared Chartism continued to shape local politics as activists applied Chartist principles towards municipal politics.¹⁰⁹

The Owenite movement, founded upon the utopian philosophy of Robert Owen (1771-1858), peaked during the late 1830s and early 1840s. Owenite socialists believed

¹⁰⁶ For an editorial celebrating the *Northern Star*'s role in pulling together a disparate movement see, *NS*, 14 November 1840.

¹⁰⁷ A figure which is incredible given that signatories to this, the biggest Chartist petition, equated to around a third of the adult population of England, Wales and Scotland. Chase, *Chartism*, p. 205.

¹⁰⁸ Kate Tiller's 'Late Chartism : Halifax 1847-58', in Epstein and Thompson, *Chartist Experience*, 311-44. Miles Taylor, *Ernest Jones and the Romance of Politics* (Oxford, 2003).

¹⁰⁹ Leeds provides a good example of 'civic' or 'municipal Chartism'. J. F. C. Harrison, 'Chartism in Leeds', in Asa Briggs (ed.), *Chartist Studies* (London, 1959), 65-98. In Bradford local Chartists, such as David Lightowler and George White, played an active part in local political campaigns.

that human character was shaped by circumstance and could thus be transformed by good working conditions, proper housing, and education. Real progress could only be achieved by building a 'new moral world', a communal society where inequality between the sexes would be abolished, property held collectively and established religion shunned.¹¹⁰ Owenism was always a minority creed, composed of educated labourers and petite bourgeois intellectuals. It was by no means representative of working-class opinion as many working people disliked the taint of atheism, free love and communism. The Chartist movement for example, while carrying articles and notices sympathetic to the Owenite movement had grave reservations over its perceived atheism, although individual Chartists such as Joshua Hobson, printer and later editor of the *Northern Star*, and the Huddersfield radical, Lawrence Pitkeithley, were staunch Owenites.¹¹¹

Following his American experiences Robert Owen pioneered the use of the public set-piece debate as a propaganda technique which, by the 1840s, was used widely by the leading reform movements. Owenism employed lecturers (or socialist missionaries as it called them) alongside a dedicated periodical the *New Moral World* to promote its cause. In May 1838 six paid social missionaries were appointed to spread Owen's ideas and the following year the number of paid Owenite professionals (both men and women) rose to ten with several assistants. According to J.F.C. Harrison, the missionaries 'were the best known people in the movement: they lectured and debated publicly, they organized branch activities, they spoke at annual conferences and their reports and articles were prominent in the *New Moral World*'.¹¹² In areas where Owenism flourished, such as Huddersfield and Sheffield, purpose-built Halls of Science were built to accommodate lectures and social events. The movement effectively collapsed after the failure of the utopian Queenswood colony in Hampshire in 1845, although its branch structure and much of its philosophy fed

¹¹⁰ For a feminist overview of Owenism see Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1983), pp. x – xv.

¹¹¹ Edward Royle, 'Chartists and Owenites ... many parts but one body', *Labour History Review*, Vol. 65, Issue 1 (Spring 2000), 2-21. For an account of Joshua Hobson's Chartist and Owenite activities see Simon C. E. Cordery, 'Voice of the West Riding: Joshua Hobson in Huddersfield and Leeds, 1831-1845' (unpublished MA thesis, University of York, 1984).

¹¹² J. F. C. Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites in Britain and America: the Quest for the New Moral World* (London, 1969), p. 219. See also Edward Royle, *Robert Owen and the Commencement of the millennium: A Study of the Harmony Community* (Manchester, 1998), especially pp. 107-8.

into the mid-nineteenth century secular movement under the direction of George Jacob Holyoake.¹¹³

Drinking and drunkenness were rife in nineteenth-century society and the impact of intemperance affected all classes. The lower classes were particularly castigated for their drunkenness which was more visible and public than that of the aristocracy and middle-classes. The first English temperance society was formed in Bradford in 1830 and was concerned with moderation rather than abstention.¹¹⁴ Two years later a group of seven working men in Preston administered to themselves the first teetotal pledge to eschew alcoholic beverages altogether. Joseph Livesey, James Teare, Henry Anderton and other members of the Preston teetotal society embarked on a missionary tour on July 8 1833, which took in the chief towns of Lancashire.¹¹⁵ Over the following years pioneering teetotal advocates, such as James Teare and Thomas Whittaker, extensively toured the country lecturing to large numbers of people.¹¹⁶

The movement started out as a series of independent local societies but it was quickly recognised that moral crusade alone could not succeed and that local societies required a structural mechanism to tie them to the centre. From the close of the 1830s various plans for local, regional and national organisational structures appeared.¹¹⁷ The temperance movement relied on the spoken word: it was rousing temperance oratory alongside the persistent home visits of temperance advocates which convinced thousands to take the pledge. Tracts and newspapers of course played their part, but their role was chiefly in consolidating existing associations, giving followers a sense of unity and, perhaps, convincing the literate and educated. While there have been several studies of the temperance movement, oratory, the role of missionaries and the geographical organisation of temperance has been neglected.¹¹⁸

Both my study areas, the North East and the West Riding of Yorkshire, were strongholds of temperance. Temperance thrived in Nonconformist, urban, artisan areas

¹¹³ For mismanagement of Owenite colonies see Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites*, pp.180-92. For overlaps between Owenism and secularism see, Edward Royle, *Victorian Infidels: the origins of the British secularist movement, 1791-1866* (Manchester, 1974), pp. 43-53.

¹¹⁴ The inaugural meeting of the Bradford Temperance Society took place on 14 June 1830. William Logan, *The Early Heroes of the Temperance Reformation* (Glasgow, 1873), p. 69.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 90-1.

¹¹⁶ Whittaker, *Life's Battles*, p. 185.

¹¹⁷ The *Temperance Advocate*, for example, recommended the formation of 'an organised and consolidated union of smaller societies' registered as branches of the British Association for the Promotion of Temperance, the *Temperance Advocate and Herald*, February 1838, pp. 9-10.

¹¹⁸ Notably Brian Harrison's ground breaking study, *Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England 1815-1872* (1971, reprinted 1994, Keele).

with a tradition of independence, education, self-help and associational activity. Unlike Chartism and the campaign against the Corn Laws, temperance was primarily a non-political moral crusade sustained by religious conviction (characteristics also shared by the anti-slavery campaign). The temperance movement was concerned with individual sin and inner redemption rather than addressing the profound structural and economic equalities of nineteenth century society. After the formation of the United Kingdom Alliance (hereafter UKA) in 1853, part of the temperance movement adopted an aggressive political persona. The UKA, founded in Manchester, took its inspiration from the ACLL and mounted a sustained and well-orchestrated parliamentary prohibition campaign.¹¹⁹ The temperance movement was one of the most enduring pressure groups of the nineteenth century and its influence on the professionalization of the political agent was profound.

There is an understandable tendency to see slavery and free trade as middle-class and the rest of the pressure groups (Chartism, Owenism and temperance) as being largely lower class. Yet while this division provides a useful shorthand it is a crude working tool. Both anti-slavery and free trade had working-class adherents, across Yorkshire and the North East. Indeed Operative Anti-Corn Law Associations were established in numerous towns in both regions, while Sheffield boasted a long-lived Sheffield Mechanics' Anti-Bread-Tax Society. In January 1840 thousands of working men attended a banquet hosted by the League in Manchester (albeit on a separate day from the League's more illustrious supporters).¹²⁰ Moreover, while disparaging the way in which anti-slavery advocates conveniently ignored exploitation in their own country, the factory movement and Chartism incorporated the language and strategies of the anti-slavery campaign into their own cause.¹²¹ Richard Oastler, for example, forcibly put factory children on the agenda with an emotive letter to the *Leeds Mercury* headed 'Slavery in Yorkshire'.¹²²

After Chartism and Owenism petered out and the hungry forties gave way to the more prosperous 1850s, radicalism declined and popular Liberalism was in the

¹¹⁹ A. E. Dingle, *The Campaign for Prohibition in Victorian England: The United Kingdom Alliance, 1872-1895* (London, 1980).

¹²⁰ *BO*, 16 January 1840.

¹²¹ Betty Fladeland, "'Our cause being one and the same": Abolitionists and Chartism', in James Walvin (ed.), *Slavery and British Society*, 69-99.

¹²² Oastler's Yorkshire Slavery letter is reproduced in Elaine Freedgood, *Factory Production in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 215-7.

ascendant.¹²³ While Miles Taylor argues that the 1850s did not represent a vacuum for radical activity inasmuch as there was a strong radical presence in constitutional parliamentary circles, there was little evidence of a sustained grassroots radical movement.¹²⁴ Instead local radicalism was diverted away from parliamentary reform to a myriad of causes such as education, temperance, sanitation and the relationship between state and religion. The Crimean War (1854-1856) accentuated the move away from parliamentary reform by diverting radical attention from home to overseas affairs. Lecturers like George Thompson, who had acquired prominence on the anti-slavery and free trade platform, now turned their attention towards questioning the morality of the war raging on the Crimea.¹²⁵ David Urquhart and his Foreign Affairs Committees (which thrived in both the North East and the West Riding) also capitalised on the interest in foreign affairs stimulated by the Crimean War.¹²⁶ Former Chartists and Owenites expended their energies in the 1850s and 1860s in municipal politics, occupying local government posts and participating in public meetings – the cornerstone of mid-Victorian local democracy. This pattern is evident in the empirical study of the *Bradford Observer*, discussed in chapters three and four. Extension of the franchise periodically arose but, despite the best efforts of bodies such as the Northern Reform Union, when Lord John Russell presented a new reform bill in 1858 to Parliament, only 5,408 signatures were collected in its support.¹²⁷

Instead of itinerant radical agitators (who were predominantly humble born and wholly dependent on wages), public meetings and lecture halls were dominated by largely middle-class deputations from bodies such as the British Anti-State Church Association (BASCA): a single issue organisation founded by leading Nonconformists whose aims were clearly discernable in its title. Deputations were useful in that they allowed campaigners to proselytise beyond their locality, but in the controlled context of an indoor

¹²³ Margot C. Finn, *After Chartism: Class and nation in English radical politics, 1848-1874* (Cambridge, 1993); Eugenio F. Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform: Popular Liberalism in the Age of Gladstone, 1860-1880* (Cambridge, 1992).

¹²⁴ Miles Taylor, *Decline of British Radicalism 1847-1860* (Oxford 1995).

¹²⁵ Alex Tyrrell, 'Making the Millennium: the mid-nineteenth century peace movement', *Historical Journal*, XX (1978), 75-95.

¹²⁶ Richard Shannon, 'David Urquhart and the Foreign Affairs Committees', in Hollis (ed.), *Pressure from Without*, 239-261. Asa Briggs, 'David Urquhart and the West Riding foreign affairs committee', *Bradford Antiquity*, Vol. 39 (1958) 197-207. Joan Allen, *Joseph Cowen and Popular radicalism on Tyneside, 1829-1900* (Monmouth, 2007), pp. 35-6.

¹²⁷ Though, of course, this may also have reflected the limitation of its provisions and declining interest in franchise reform as evidenced in the modest signatures to the fourth and fifth national Chartist petition, Royle, *Chartism*, p. 52, Chase, *Chartism*, pp. 332; 339-40.

meeting and in response to an invitation of local worthies.¹²⁸ Education, another contentious single-issue cause, was taken up by groups such as the Manchester-based National Public School Association (NPSA),¹²⁹ whose campaign for state funded non-denominational education was also promoted via public meeting and depositions, strategies which were also used by the Freehold Land Movement, which originated in Birmingham in 1847. Richard Cobden was a staunch supporter, viewing the forty shilling freehold movement as a vehicle of reform and lending his support to the movement at various public meetings in London and the provinces. The movement's tireless secretary, James Taylor, also lectured extensively across the country: in January 1850, for example, he addressed a large audience in Leeds.¹³⁰ The single-issue pressure groups of the 1850s still relied upon oratory to get their message across; however, there was a shift away from the charismatic freelance agitator to the higher class deputation addressing regulated town hall meetings.

Chapter-by-chapter overview of the thesis

The proselytising lecture tour lies at the heart of my thesis and thus the chapter two focuses on the geographies of political lecturing and the rigours of mid-nineteenth century travel. Chartism, Temperance, Owenism, the ACLL and the anti-slavery movement have all been the focus of extensive historical research, yet we do not have detailed accounts of their spatial organisation (in terms of local, regional and national organisational structures) or a proper explanation of how lecturing was organised. While useful work has been carried out by historical geographers using GIS technology to map itinerant lecture tours and investigate the geography of lecturing, such work tends to be one-dimensional as it neglects the broader mechanics of political lecturing (venue, payment, publicity, and reporting) or the cultural context of public speaking.¹³¹ Political lecturers employed in the late 1830s and 1840s were operating during a period of great social, technological and

¹²⁸ For example a BASCA meeting in Bradford in November 1850 was addressed by a mixture of local and national speakers including William Rand, Revd W. M. Kerrow and Samuel Kydd, *BO*, 21 November 1850.

¹²⁹ The papers of the National Public School Association are held at Manchester Local Studies and Archives ref., M136.

¹³⁰ *BO*, 19 January 1850, for progress of the movement see *BO*, 13 June 1850, and for a report of lecture by Taylor in Sheffield, see *Manchester Times*, 27 February 1849. Malcolm Chase, 'Out of Radicalism: the Mid-Victorian Freehold Land Movement', *English Historical Review*, Vol. CVI, No. 419 (April, 1991), 319-345. David Martin, 'Land Reform', in Hollis (ed.), *Pressure from Without*, pp. 150-2.

¹³¹ Southall, 'Agitate! Agitate! Organize! Political Travellers and the construction of a National Politics', *Transactions of The Royal Geographic Society*, Vol. 21 (1996) 177-193. Philip Howell, 'Diffusing the Light of Liberty': the Geography of Political Lecturing in the Chartist Movement' in Robert Stephens, *The People's Charter: Democratic Agitation in Early Victorian Britain* (London, 2003).

economic change. A key concern will be ascertaining the extent to which lecturing (in terms of distance, mode of travel etc) changed at the start and end of the period. In particular what was the impact of the railway, penny post and telegraph on the life of an itinerant agitator?

Chapter three is concerned with the etiquette and protocols governing public speech. It considers the behaviour expected at public meetings and explores the notions of 'fair play' and 'gentlemanly conduct'. The rise of the set-piece public debate, which had its origins in American theological debate, will be assessed. Chapter three challenges current historiography (particularly James Vernon and Jon Lawrence) on the riotous and violent nature of public political meetings suggesting that beyond the notoriously high-spirited hustings most meetings were characterised by decorum and a genuine willingness to hear all sides of an argument. Even Chartism, for all its physical force posturing, was disciplined and strait-laced, having more in common with the LCS and Francis Place than it was probably prepared to admit.¹³²

The use of temperate language during political meetings obviously protected orators from prosecution but it also importantly made political arguments more legitimate and less easy to dismiss. A mood that was evident in the trade union newspaper, the *Miners Advocate*, which reminded its members that arguments, whether on the page or platform, should be conducted with a temperate and reasonable attitude 'we shall have no recourse to insulting language ... [at] all times and seasons meet the oppressors of the collier, whatever their rank or station, on the broad basis of sound argument and invincible truth'.¹³³ The importance of temperate language was also championed by the Newcastle-based Northern Reform Union, which is used as a case study in chapter three to show how the popular political platform changed in wake of Chartism's demise. Chapter three also discusses the concept of the 'free born' Englishman, who was popularly believed to enjoy an inalienable right of free assembly and free speech. Of particular relevance was the constitutional right to petition which allowed groups to meet legitimately, ostensibly for the purpose of

¹³² Boyd Hilton, for example, argues that deep down the Chartist seemed 'to have accepted the Peelite vision of a society in which individual effort, thrift and moral desert should bring its reward'. Boyd Hilton, *A mad, bad and dangerous people?: England 1783-1846* (Oxford, 2006), p. 621. Justin Wasserman and Edwin Jaggard show that that electoral violence peaked post-Chartism, reaching its highest levels between 1857-68, Justin Wasserman and Edwin Jaggard, 'Electoral violence in mid nineteenth-century England and Wales', *Historical Research*, Vol. 80, Issue 207 (2007), p. 129.

¹³³ *Miners Advocate* 2 December 1843 cited in John Flanagan, 'Workplace Protest and Popular Politics on the North East Coalfield, 1844-1869', (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Sunderland, 2008), p. 82.

supervising the progress of a petition. The impact of sedition legislation on public meetings will also be considered.

Chapter four explores the significant after-lives of political speeches in the form of newspaper reports and tracts. For much of the Chartist period the press enjoyed a symbiotic relationship with the public meeting, with the local newspaper adopting the quasi-official role of town chronicler. The town hall public meeting was in effect a mini-Parliament whose authority lay in its etiquette and the detailed reporting and accountability of its proceedings. During the first three decades of Victoria's reign, technological advances in newspaper production, the arrival of the telegraph and the rise of shorthand (especially Pitman's new system in 1837) meant that more speeches could be reported at greater length than ever before. But accurate reporting remained problematic. Shorthand reporters faced many difficulties from bad acoustics and cramped accommodation to speakers who mumbled, spoke rapidly or, worse of all, did both. At noisy outdoor meetings creative reporting was perhaps inevitable. In 1856, at a meeting to celebrate the return of the exiled Chartist leader John Frost on a hillside near Halifax, Ernest Jones, proprietor of the *People's Paper*, allegedly told his reporter: 'Don't trouble to recall what they said; send me three or four columns of what they ought to have said.'¹³⁴ This remark raises the uncomfortable possibility that at least some reported speech was, in reality, the invention of the reporter.

Chapter four is also concerned with the interrelation between oral and print culture. Malcolm Chase's contention that the Chartist era was 'situated on the cusp of the transition from a largely oral to a mainly print-based popular culture', offers a starting point for this investigation.¹³⁵ While there was a long tradition of working-class intellectualism and autodidact culture the bulk of the people lacked the time, money or expertise for anything more taxing than a printed ballad or popular broad sheet. The poorly educated and poverty-stricken labourer inhabited a predominately oral world in which new ideas would be heard rather than read. Indeed when working men and women did encounter print culture it was often via communal reading rather than by personal, silent consumption. During the mid-Victorian period rising literacy rates, the reduction and later abolition of the taxes on knowledge and the explosion of local newspapers and periodicals have all lent weight to

¹³⁴ Edward Royle, 'Newspapers and Periodicals in Historical Research', in Laurel Brake, Aled Jones and Lionel Madden (eds.), *Investigating Victorian Journalism* (London, 1990), p. 58.

¹³⁵ Chase, *Chartism*, p. 45.

the argument that political culture was shifting away from customary oral forms of communication towards a rational print based culture.

Print historians, while championing the ascendancy of print culture, have largely overlooked the role of lecturing or the fact that much printed matter was first delivered orally. Nor has the way in which orality shaped text been adequately considered. David Vincent and Jonathan Rose both disregard the role played by popular lecturing in reaching the illiterate and the continuing importance of oral communication for the dissemination of ideas and culture. Richard Altick, to his credit, does note that the Mechanic's Institute lecture was often 'a painless substitute for reading', and was sometimes a mechanism for increased literacy in that, within every audience, some listeners went on to read more on their own.¹³⁶ However, overall the dominance of print in nineteenth-century historiography has tended to obscure the role played by oratory and speech in the dissemination of political ideas. It is a particularly troubling oversight for working-class movements for whom oral communication was equal to, if not more important, than print culture.

The Chartist era is pivotal as it was during these turbulent times that ordinary people began to cultivate public speaking skills, whether for self improvement or career advancement; to voice their opinions at public meetings; or, for the truly gifted, to establish themselves as itinerant popular lecturers. During this period there was a renewed interest in public speaking epitomized by debating societies, elocution lessons and a new awareness of the rhetorical art. Chapter four investigates both traditional elocutionary teachings and the advent of popular speaking guides such as the ubiquitous *Bell's Standard Elocutionist*. The influence of homiletics on the political pulpit, and the rise of popular preachers such as Charles Haddon Spurgeon and George Dawson will also be considered.

Chapter five, which attempts to recreate a sense of the 'experience of oratory', examines contemporary sources which describe speeches, lectures and meetings. Nineteenth-century elocution manuals containing diagrams depicting movements of the feet, gestures and facial expression also emphasise that oratory was far from static. Nevertheless one of the frustrations of working with oratory is never being able to 'hear' sources in their original context. I am, for instance, intrigued by the possibilities that platform orators, like field preachers, employed specific intonation and delivered their words to a specific metre or rhythm. Contemporaries regularly commented on the disparity

¹³⁶ David Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture, England 1750-1914* (Cambridge, 1989); Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (Yale, 2002); Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader* (Chicago, 1957, 2nd ed., 1998), p. 204.

between reading a speech and hearing it delivered. The preface to a compilation of the greatest orations of the celebrity temperance speaker J. B. Gough makes this point:

Although this collection of Mr. Gough's Orations may convey some faint idea of an eloquence ... the reader is requested to remember, that the printed word conveys but a poor idea of the spoken one – that you cannot transfer to paper the speaker's eye, or gesture, or tone – that to be appreciated he must be heard and not read; looked at, as he stands inspired upon the platform, not as the reporter gives a feeble image of him on the printed page.¹³⁷

Arguably the endless political lectures delivered in this period changed oratory itself. Classical oratory, taught at the ancient universities, dealt with studied feeling, imagination and passion and was primarily a literary art rather than a tool for analysing the problems of an industrialising society. Chapter five concerns the shift from predominantly classical styles of speaking to more popular styles of oratory. Arguably, during the nineteenth century, oratory evolved to suit an emerging urban industrial and increasingly commercial age. Political oratory will also be situated within the broader cultural context of the Victorian stage, the pulpit and the law courts. Each of which fostered its own distinctive style of speaking which was adapted and utilised on the political platform. The theatre, the pulpit and the courtroom were also potential venues for politicised oratory whether in the shape of political trials, the radical-political pulpit epitomised by the Rev. J. R. Stephens or during the performance of plays such as *Wat Tyler*.

Chapter six concerns the lecturers themselves. Why did they choose to live a life of perpetual motion, without regular home comforts and wholly dependent on their wit? A biographical analysis of the career trajectories of several professional lecturers considers the motivation, pay and conditions of professional orators and assesses whether it was possible to sustain a living from oratory beyond periods of great political excitement. It also charts how the political platform was slowly rehabilitated during the later Chartist period, thanks in part to the commercialisation of the lecture format and the popularity of the oration. The lecture, whether political, literary, scientific or morally uplifting, became a dominant cultural form and one that appealed to both middle-class and working-class audiences. As Martin Hewitt suggests there is a case for describing the lecture, in the Victorian period, 'as a system of mass leisure'.¹³⁸ During the 1830s paid agitators were widely scorned. The ACLL, for example, struggled to find lecturers because the trade of

¹³⁷ J. B. Gough, *The Life and Orations of John B Gough* (London, 1875), p. iv.

¹³⁸ Hewitt, 'Aspects of Platform Culture', p. 3.

political agent was held in 'bad odour'.¹³⁹ Even many working-class movements harboured suspicion of 'itinerant demagogues' who made 'a market of the passions and feelings of the people'.¹⁴⁰ Yet by the end of the Chartist period, mainstream politicians such as Bright, Cobden and later Gladstone regularly addressed large indoor and outdoor gatherings.

¹³⁹ McCord, *Anti-Corn Law League*, p. 56.

¹⁴⁰ J. A. Leatherland, *Essays and Poems, with a Brief Autobiographical Memoir* (Leicester, 1857), p. 19. Leatherhead was a leading Kettering Chartist.

Chapter two: Itinerancy and the geographies of lecturing

I have been able, by rapid movements, and the choice of the more central and important towns – with the aid of the press and the co-operation of local friends – to diffuse throughout the country a vast amount of information.¹

Those were days of stage coaches and carriers wagons more than are these, and getting about was much more difficult and expensive than is the case now. My twenty shillings a week would not admit of many special costs ... there was no provision of anything beyond a walking distance from town to town.²

The geographical orbits of itinerant agitators were instrumental in building political movements. Chartist, Owenite, free trade, temperance and anti-slavery movements all shared a common structure of a central executive or association and loosely affiliated, geographically dispersed branches. While dedicated newspapers, such as the *Northern Star*, the *New Moral World* and the *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, played a crucial role in uniting isolated local societies into a unified central cause, the printed word alone could not have built up a mass following. The itinerant agent was the crucial link between the centre and the peripheries, and unlike the inanimate page, offered drama, excitement and immediacy. Besides attracting new recruits by their persuasive speeches, itinerant lecturers co-ordinated local activity, collecting signatures for petitions, founding new branches, and inspiring existing members to greater activity.

This chapter will investigate the geographies of lecturing, by which I mean how lecture routes were determined geographically and the spatial organisation of reform movements at a local level. The scope and direction of lecture routes were influenced not only by terrain, topography and the convenience of established transport routes but also by kinship links, radical networks and local knowledge. Barriers to communication such as lack of venue or sustained opposition also shaped the dissemination of political propaganda. A key consideration will be the extent to which technological advances such as the rapidly expanding railway network, the penny post and the arrival of the telegram changed the ways in which ideas circulated. What did these changes mean for those engaged on itinerant lecture tours and to what extent did travelling political lecturers draw provincial towns and villages into an increasingly national political culture?

¹ Letter from George Thompson to William Lloyd Garrison (1837) cited in Gifford 'George Thompson', p. 186.

² Whittaker, *Life's Battles*, p. 241.

Literary scholars have written at length on pedestrianism and romanticism at the end of the eighteenth century, citing John Thelwall's perambulations as evidence of a radical walking tradition. Yet there has been little consideration of the role of pedestrianism in mid-nineteenth century political mobilisation.³ The extent to which 'radical walking' and radicalised romantic travel writing continued through the early nineteenth century and into the Chartist era has been overlooked. Contemporary perceptions of travellers are also pertinent; in particular, the ingrained suspicion directed towards itinerants by the settled population.

The final section of this chapter examines the proposed lecture tour of a West Riding Chartist missionary in November 1840 and a tour made by an itinerant temperance agent nearly two decades later in the North East. These case studies illustrate the nature of itinerant propaganda and travel at the start and end of my research period. Central to my argument is that while the Chartist era was an age of profound transition earlier forms of transport and communication were not immediately rendered obsolete. Just as print did not replace speech as the most effective tool for political persuasion, neither did rail travel overtake other forms of transportation, especially for those engaged as agitators by working-class, or poorly funded organisations. Not surprisingly modes of travel favoured by itinerant agents were largely determined by class and income. While the Chartist leader, Feargus O'Connor, the elite League agent, Sidney Smith, and the renowned, anti-slavery orator, George Thompson, could readily afford train journeys and were able to travel by coach to areas without convenient rail links, this was not true for less renowned itinerant speakers. Chartist, temperance or Owenite missionaries, operating on a local or regional circuit, had little choice but to make the bulk of their journeys on foot.

Space and temporality

In the wake of the linguistic turn's impact upon historical research a similar period of rethinking has taken place within academic geography. The so called 'spatial turn', has reclaimed 'space' and 'temporality' as central to interpretations of the past.⁴ Cultural

³ Robin Jarvis's study of pedestrianism and literature includes a brief section on John Thelwall and 'radical walking', Robin Jarvis, *Romantic Writing and Pedestrian Travel*. (London, 1997), pp. 33-9. Carl Thompson also discusses the link between radicalism and walking in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, Carl Thompson, *The Suffering Traveller and the Romantic Imagination* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 137-145.

⁴ Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London, 2005); John Urry, *Mobility and Proximity*, *Sociology*, Vol. 36, No. 2, May 2002, 255-274; Simon Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class: Ritual and Authority and the English industrial City, 1840-1914* (Manchester, 2000); Nigel Thrift 'Space', *Theory Culture Society*, Vol. 23 (2006), 139-146. Colin Divall and George Revill, 'Cultures of Transport, representation, practice and technology', *Journal of Transport History*, Mar. (2005), 99-111, and response by Michael Freeman, 'Turn if

historians have viewed such research with interest and have begun to raise questions of spatiality (both actual and theoretical) in radical and political history. Thus James Epstein argues that the history of popular radicalism can in part be viewed as a fight for access 'to appropriate sites of assembly and expression' and the formation of a 'plebeian counter-public sphere'.⁵ John Belchem, another advocate of the spatial turn, urges those working upon political rhetoric 'to look beyond textual deconstruction' and instead 'reconstruct the spatial practices ... of political discourse'.⁶ Perhaps we need to go further than this and see movement as being integral to political argument. For example, this study underlines how political speeches were developed and formulated in the minds of itinerant lecturers as they moved from place to place. The journey itself was an educative process which furnished tangible arguments for political reform. While the contemplative nature of the journey has been appreciated by literary scholars its role in the formation and articulation of political ideology requires emphasis.

Pioneering work on the spatial distribution of political protest has been carried out by the geographer Andrew Charlesworth. Charlesworth mapped the distribution of Cobbett's *Political Register* against the outbreaks of violence and arson that occurred during the 1830s in Southern England. His findings replaced earlier assumptions, that the Swing Riots were characterised by spontaneous action triggered by worsening economic conditions, with a theory that disturbances were as much political as economic and were dependent upon a coordinating network of village activists. He also demonstrated the importance of the road network in political mobilisation.⁷ In more recent years, aided by the advent of Geographical Information Systems (GIS), historical geographers have investigated the spatial distribution of a range of nineteenth and twentieth century political movements. Such works offer insights into the relationship between propaganda and growth.⁸ More specifically Humphrey Southall and Philip Howell have used GIS to investigate the geographies of Chartist lecturing by plotting the lecture circuits of several

you want to' a comment on the 'cultural turn' in Divall and Revill's 'Cultures of Transport', *Journal of Transport History*, Mar. (2006), 138-143.

⁵ Epstein reminds historians that that space is not shorthand for context: the two are distinct entities. James Epstein, 'Spatial Practices/Democratic Vistas', *Social History*, Vol. 42 (1999), p. 103.

⁶ John Belchem, 'Radical Language, Meaning and Identity in the Age of Chartists', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, Vol. 10, Issue 1 (Spring 2005), p. 2.

⁷ Andrew Charlesworth, 'Social protest in a Rural Society: the spatial diffusion of the Captain Swing disturbances of 1830-1831', *Historical Geography Research Series No. 1*, (October 1979).

⁸ The advent of GIS technology has revolutionised the ways in which historical data can be presented in relation to its geographical dimension - See Visions of Britain Project which includes a section devoted to itinerant lecturing and agitation, <http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/maps/index.jsp>. [accessed January 9 2009] Andrew Charlesworth, David Gilbert, Adrian Randall, Humphrey Southall and Chris Wrigley, *An Atlas of Industrial Protest in Britain 1750-1990* (Basingstoke, 1996).

Chartist orators, including Feargus O'Connor and Jonathan Bairstow.⁹ While such research graphically illustrates the epic journeys carried out by itinerant Chartist speakers in the 1840s, it lacks contextual information on the mechanics of travel and the protocols of calling meetings and organising lecture venues in the field. Nor does it set lecturing within the broader context of mid-nineteenth century communication. The lecture format was adopted far more widely than the Chartist movement: a whole range of political, religious and reform movements used lecturers as a means of expanding their cause. Indeed the policy of employing itinerant agents was also adopted by emigration, insurance and telegraph companies, the freehold land movement and even those promoting shorthand.¹⁰

'Time' and 'place' were both pertinent to itinerant lecturing. It is evident that the location and timing of a meeting might be loaded with cultural significance and carefully selected to resonate with audiences. Every city, town or village had places, often the market place or the village green, that were customary sites for outdoor speeches and announcements.¹¹ If speakers were prevented from delivering address at these central locations they might literally and symbolically take their audience beyond the township's border onto open moors and wasteland. Primitive Methodists had, since the celebrated Mow Cop meeting of May 1807, gathered their supporters' on the hills establishing a tradition of vast outdoor meetings where customary doctrines could be challenged. The innovative model of the Methodist camp meeting, and often the same physical locations, were subsequently adopted by popular radicalism.¹² Because such sites were used by successive generations they acquired a sense of legitimacy as democratic places. Castle Hill in Huddersfield, Basin Stones, near Todmorden and the Town Moor in Sunderland were all enduring sites for reform gatherings.¹³ The use of high ground was visually significant. In Huddersfield, for example, Castle Hill overshadows the town and any mass

⁹ Southall, 'Agitate! Agitate! Organize!' Howell, 'Diffusing the Light of Liberty'. Howell plotted a lecture tour undertaken by Bairstow in 1842, see p. 122.

¹⁰ See chapter six for a discussion of the ways in which the lecture became a marketing tool.

¹¹ Malcolm Chase notes that in Stockton Chartist activity centred on the market cross where 'a right of free assembly was popularly believed to be an ancient privilege', Malcolm Chase, 'Chartism 1838-1848: responses in Two Teesside Towns', in Roberts (ed.), *The People's Charter*, p. 154.

¹² Robert Wearmouth, *Some Working-Class Movements of the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1948), pp. 144-172; Eileen Groth Lyon, *Politicians in the Pulpit: Christian Radicalism in Britain from the Fall of the Bastille to the Disintegration of Chartism* (Aldershot, 1999), pp. 202-7. Chase, *Chartism*, pp. 141-2. Biagini has also commented the similarity between a Chartist camp meeting and a Methodist revival meeting, Eugenio F Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform: Popular Liberalism in the Age of Gladstone, 1860-1880* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 38, footnote 43.

¹³ Castle Hill in Huddersfield was used by Methodists, Chartists, Owenites and Secularists, John H Rumsby, 'A Castle Well Guarded': the Archaeology and History of Castle Hill, Almondbury', in Haigh, *Huddersfield, A most Handsome Town*, p. 10. For a depiction of a camp meeting at Basin Stones see above p. vii.

gathering there was clearly visible to the inhabitants and magistrates below: a menacing demonstration of support and a visual reminder of grievances. Blackstone Edge, a popular site for Chartist camp meetings, was selected for its ambiguous status. Its location on the remote and mountainous border of Yorkshire and Lancashire meant that it was unclear which county's magistrates had judicial control.¹⁴

The very timing of a meeting might evoke specific connotations in the audience's mind. Speeches made on Sundays, a day traditionally given over to religious worship, often took on a devout tone. Indeed the distinction between lecture and sermon was at times blurred, a theme which will be explored further in chapter five. The Chartist lecturer, Jonathan Bairstow, symbolically billed his Sunday lectures as sermons. During the summer of 1841 Bairstow preached consecutive Sundays in Derby market place intermingling prayers and readings from *Watts's Hymn Book* with Chartist argument. The hour selected for a meeting could also be symbolic. Bairstow timed his 'sermons' to coincide with when the pubs were closed for divine service, both to maximise his audience and in a deliberate attempt to preach in competition with the established churches.¹⁵ The timing of meetings might also be used to filter out opposition. Agents hoping to attract a polite audience (and to avoid rowdy interruptions) held meetings during working hours.¹⁶ Thus when George Thompson and Sidney Smith convened mid-week meetings at 2 pm they were obviously targeting the wealthier classes. Questions of time inevitably shaped and determined the routes of itinerant agents, from the pragmatic needs of fulfilling previously agreed engagements to arranging visits around transport connections. For the propagandist, it was rational to visit a location on the busiest days of the calendar: thus lecturers, where possible, timed their visits to coincide with market day, local fairs and hustings, when the population of a town would be considerably swelled by visitors from the hinterlands.¹⁷

¹⁴ Katrina Navickas, 'Moor, Fields, and Popular Protest in South Lancashire and the West Riding of Yorkshire, 1800-1848', *Northern History*, Vol. XLVI (March 2009), p. 96.

¹⁵ TNA, HO 45/45 ff. 3-5a; HO 45/45 ff. 7-8, Police report on funeral sermon preached by Mr Bairstow on the late Mr Clayton. See also Derbyshire Local Studies Library, MS BA/909/16186, item 4, report sent to local magistrates on a funeral sermon preached by Jonathan Bairstow, 22 Mar 1841. Groth Lyon, *Politicians in the Pulpit*, p. 221. This event is discussed further in chapter 5, see pp. 193-4 below.

¹⁶ A strategy also used to filter out working-class opposition from the open meetings held to elect delegates to the December 1842 Complete Suffrage Union Conference, Chase, *Chartism*, p. 228.

¹⁷ According to Holyoake James Acland liked to make a dramatic entrance on market day, Holyoake, *Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life*, Vol. II, pp. 226-7. See also *BO*, 25 April 1844. Temperance agents deliberately targeted wakes weeks, race meetings and fairs where drunkenness would be in evidence.

Perceptions of itinerancy & pedestrianism

Weekly markets not only facilitated trade and the exchange of consumer goods, they were also a key mechanism for the transmission of ideas. Prior to the arrival of the telegram and cheap press, the traveller was an important source of information whose journeys connected outlying areas to the wider culture, passing on news and personal observations. People living in the provinces and outside the main centres of population were often hungry for news. George Jacob Holyoake, in 1838, while traversing the country on a walking adventure in his late teens, was surprised by how eager people were to converse with a youthful stranger:

A pale-faced young traveller, of unforbidding aspect and his head full of town ideas, was—when there were no penny papers to give news—sometimes as welcome in English country places as a New York "prospector" at a prairie farm in the Far West. I found it so. Often the husband would sit up until a late hour conversing. Sometimes I thought the cottagers regarded me as a pedlar of news, since they made me only very moderate charges for my night's accommodation.¹⁸

While a young man of unthreatening aspect might have been generally welcome the same was not true for the itinerant agent whose effectiveness might be hampered by widespread suspicion of strangers and travellers. Outsiders, particularly those whose presence fomented discontent, were often the subject of grave suspicion as it was impossible to ascertain their sincerity, motivation or track record. James Acland's rabble rousing career in Hull during the early 1830s illustrates this point. While Acland was able to quickly win over the sympathies of the working and middling classes, the town's oligarchy was outraged by this eloquent trouble maker. To counter his influence the Tory *Hull Packet* launched a lengthy attack on Acland's character which centred upon his status as a stranger: 'Who is this Mr Acland, and what are his claims to the confidence of the people of Hull?' Acland's former profession as 'showman to an itinerant calculator' was also held up as evidence of his dubious character.¹⁹ Of course the *Packet's* hostility was grounded in political differences yet it is surely significant that, beyond the circles of the migrant poor, character in this period was connected to residence and belonging. As a young man the editor of the *Leeds Mercury*, Edward Baines senior, had tramped from Preston to Leeds in pursuit of work. Baines's supporters held up this incidence as evidence of his industry and drive, yet it is significant that his political opponents used the episode to portray him as a dishonest and untrustworthy man. Richard Oastler in 1836, for

¹⁸ *Ibid*, Vol. I, p. 71.

¹⁹ *Hull Packet*, 25 October 1831.

example, published a pamphlet, *Letter to a Runaway MP*, alluding to Baines's arrival in Leeds 'with all his sins and all his "wardrobe" on him'.²⁰ The prejudice felt towards the itinerant professions was also evident in appointment negotiations between the League and Sidney Smith. Smith claimed that 'to itinerate as a paid lecturer' would inevitably damage his character and standing as solicitor.²¹ Even the Northern Reform Union (1858-1862), which campaigned for universal male suffrage, thought that the franchise should be restricted to those of fixed residence (which, in its eyes, denoted respectability).²²

Certainly itinerant orators, like pedlars, strolling actors, itinerant preachers and purveyors of quack medicines, were viewed with suspicion: travellers, whether selling wares or peddling ideas, were not respectable. It is telling that most words in the English language connected to traveller or itinerant have negative connotations.²³ While agitators may have been heartily disliked for their principles, it seems to have been more than this. Distrust of the paid orator can, in part, be attributed to fear of the unknown and to a deep rooted suspicion of 'itinerants' (especially those travelling on foot) from more settled portions of the population.²⁴ The circuit judge is the only example of a respectable itinerant occupation, yet arguably their circuits were periodic not itinerant in that permanent homes, in the form of judges lodgings, were provided for their visits.

During the Chartist era great swathes of the population were on the move, generally in pursuit of work. Consecutive waves of Irish immigrants arrived attracted by the prospect of work on the burgeoning railway network or driven from their country in the wake of the potato famine. In the areas of my case studies, families struggling to live off the land moved to find work in the mills and factories of the West Riding or in the heavy industries of the Tyne and Wear region. These economic migrants maintained kinship and emotional ties with their place of origin, employing rare periods of leisure visiting former homes. In the artisan trades mobility was facilitated by the institution of tramping which

²⁰ Richard Oastler, *Letter to a Runaway MP* (Leeds, 1836), p. 3, cited in Derek Fraser, 'Edward Baines' in Hollis (ed.) *Pressure from Without*, p. 184.

²¹ Smith also emphasised the considerable sacrifice involved in such work to one 'accustomed to a settled home'. Manchester Local Studies and Archives, ACLL letter book, f. 75, letter from Sidney Smith, 25 Feb 1839. At the end of his lecturing stint Smith ruefully noted that he had 'rubbed off a little of the enamel of respectability'. McCord, *The Anti-Corn Law League*, p. 63.

²² Maurice Milne, 'Reed, Richard Bagnall (1831-1908)' in Joyce M Bellamy and John Saville (eds.), *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, Vol. IV, p. 143.

²³ 'Itinerant, *adj.* - itinerant traders, travelling, peripatetic, wandering, roving, roaming, touring, nomadic, gypsy, migrant, vagrant, vagabond, of no fixed address/abode. Wanderer, *noun* - rambler, hiker, migrant, roamer, rover, itinerant, rolling stone, bird of passage, nomad, tramp, drifter, vagabond, vagrant', *The Oxford Paperback Thesaurus* [online, accessed 8 Jan 2009].

²⁴ Anne Wallace, *Walking and Literature and English Culture: The origins and use of the peripatetic in the nineteenth century* (Oxford, 1993), especially pp. 28-34.

allowed unionised working men to embark on extensive walking tours in pursuit of work.²⁵ Commercial travellers, actors and musicians, itinerant tea sellers, chiropodists, opticians and dentists also itinerated between towns and cities, many operating time-worn circuits. All of which meant that at any given time large numbers of working people were on the move.

While such traffic was necessary for commerce it did not render the traveller respectable.²⁶ Historically, suspicion of the traveller was rooted in the Elizabethan poor law. The Settlement Act (1662) discouraged vagrancy by making the parish central to entitlement. Strangers, who were unable to support themselves and their families, might be reduced to begging and thieving or might incur removal costs payable by the local rate payers. Travellers were thus objects of fear and suspicion. The Poor Law Amendment Act (1834), for all its detached rationality, did not sever the link between settlement and entitlement to relief.²⁷ In addition to representing potential burdens on the parish, rootless travellers were alarmingly independent and outside the normal bonds of familial and patriarchal control. The traveller might be on the move as he had something to hide whether unpaid bills, or something more sinister. The authorities feared that such figures would breed discontent by providing an alternative model of existence and one which was, by necessity, democratic and independent. The opposition expressed towards itinerant Methodist preachers in the early nineteenth century touched upon such fears.²⁸ During the summer of 1809 a West Riding clergyman, in a letter to Lord Milton, expressed great alarm at the Methodist 'itinerant system' and its potential for 'generating & extending over the country a medley of religious & political democracy'. His solution was to confine such preachers to their respective meeting houses, which suggests that his concern was as much about movement as doctrinal differences.²⁹

²⁵ R. A. Leeson, *Travelling Brothers: The six centuries' road from craft fellowship to trade unionism* (London, 1979). Eric J. Hobsbawm, 'The tramping artisan'. *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., Vol. 3 Issue 3 (1951), 299-320, reprinted in Eric J. Hobsbawm (ed.) *Labouring Men. Studies in the History of Labour* (London, 1972), 5-22. For more recent research see Chase, *Early trade unionism*.

²⁶ Attitudes towards travelling labourers, artisan and economic migrants, of course, differed between the common people and the elites. The former would have had a good deal more sympathy than the later, having perhaps faced similar experiences themselves.

²⁷ Michael E. Rose, 'Settlement, Removal and the New Poor Law, in Derek Fraser (ed.), *The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1976), pp. 27-28.

²⁸ See the discussion of Lord Sidmouth's Bill to restrict the itinerant Methodist ministry in David Hempton, *The Religion of the People: Methodism and Popular Religion c. 1750-1900* (London, 1996).

²⁹ Sheffield Archives, Sheffield, WWM/G/83/23, letter from Richard Walker to Lord Milton, 24 June 1809. Unease was also founded upon the fact that the majority of Methodist lay preachers were drawn from the ranks of the working class – in itself a dangerous levelling principle.

To don the garb of a traveller and take to the road was a time-honoured literary technique. During the closing decades of the eighteenth century the pedestrian tour became an established part of the romantic cannon and walking, as the optimum way of appreciating landscape, enjoyed a new found popularity with the leisured classes. Walking was, by necessity, a democratic form of movement and therefore it is not surprising that the genre developed radical connotations. John Thelwall, the talented lecturer notorious for his involvement with the London Corresponding Society, was the first to take the contemplative walk beyond poetry into politics.³⁰ In 1793 Thelwall published *The Peripatetic*, a book structured around a pedestrian tour. *The Peripatetic* was significant as it married the tradition of romanticised topographical description with political commentary and a keen observation of the economic and social picture. Unlike genteel travel writers, who were preoccupied by landscape and antiquities, Thelwall's willingness to travel on foot and away from the principal thoroughfares symbolised his solidarity with the ordinary working people and his intention to present his observations of society and politics from the bottom upwards.³¹ When Thelwall undertook a second tour in 1797, he was ostensibly retired from public life, yet his interest in political information gathering remained evident. The essay inspired by his second tour was distinctly sociological with Thelwall scoring the people of each village on criteria such as physical appearance, wages, condition of children and degree of education.³²

William Cobbett's *Rural Rides* (albeit from the perspective of horseback) continued this tradition of observation and social commentary presented to the reader from the perspective of the traveller and outsider.³³ Like Thelwall, his descriptions were characterised by vehement political criticism and an exposure of the true condition of the labouring population. A generation later, itinerant Chartist and Owenite lecturers were heir to the same literary convention. Henry Vincent's weekly 'Life and Rambles' printed in the

³⁰ Thelwall also wrote poetry and was acquainted with Coleridge and Wordsworth. In July 1797, Thelwall spent several days visiting Coleridge at Nether Stowey. William Wordsworth was also visiting which led to widespread, albeit misguided, belief in the neighbourhood that the long walks enjoyed by the Thelwall and the poets were primarily to plot treason. E. K. Chambers, *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: A biographical Study* (Oxford, 1938), pp. 79-83.

³¹ John Thelwall, *The Peripatetic, or Sketches of the Heart, of Nature and Society* (1793) edited with an introduction by Judith Thompson (Detroit, 2001).

³² Michael Scrivener, Jacobin Romanticism: John Thelwall's 'Wye' essay and 'Pedestrian Excursion', (1797-1801) in Peter J. Kitson (ed.), *Placing and Displacing Romanticism* (Aldershot, 2001), 73-87.

³³ Cobbett initially published his commentaries in instalments in the *Political Register* between 1822 and 1826 before publishing them in two volumes in 1830 as *Rural Rides*.

Western Vindicator during the spring of 1839 are typical of the genre.³⁴ Vincent's column combined romanticised descriptions of the picturesque Welsh landscape with political commentary as he travelled between political meetings.³⁵ Politics is similarly foregrounded against a romantic backdrop of landscape, place and people in the reminiscences of Robert Gammage and the autobiographies of George Jacob Holyoake and W. E. Adams.³⁶ Paid itinerant lecturing work allowed the participant to indulge in the romance of travel while situating themselves within the broader tradition of the 'enlightened pedestrian'. The Chartist and elocutionary lecturer David Ross claimed that his motivation for becoming an itinerant political orator was his love of literature and desire to follow 'a literary profession'.³⁷ Certainly his prose was immersed in the romanticism.³⁸ His report of a walk over the hills between Holmfirth and Mossley, printed in the *Northern Star*, equated liberty with the grandeur of nature:

If man would commune with nature, let him pay a visit to this wild region, where stern sublimity sits enthroned. Here the Geologist can learn more in a single day than tradition can impart in whole years. Thousands of ages have rolled onward; nations have risen, empires fallen; but these storm-clad mountains, misty valleys, foaming steeps, and roaring torrents are still unchanged. The partridge and the plover alone inhabit these wild regions, where liberty and man might love to dwell.³⁹

Ross, like many Chartists, was also a poet and the editor of Robert Peddie's prison poetry anthology, *A Dungeon's Harp*.⁴⁰

³⁴ Henry Vincent (1813-1878) journalist and orator, was born in London, moving to Hull as a child after his father's business failed. In Hull Vincent was apprenticed to a printer and joined various radical debating groups where he acquired a reputation for oratory. Vincent was a supporter of universal suffrage, lecturing first on behalf of the LWMA, later becoming a Chartist missionary. He also edited the Chartist newspaper the *Western Vindicator* (1839-1841). By 1842 Vincent had joined the CSU and had distanced himself from Feargus O'Connor and his followers. He also lectured on temperance, peace and anti-slavery. Vincent continued itinerant lecturing into old age. Albert Nicholson, 'Vincent, Henry (1813-1878)', rev. Eileen Groth Lyon, *ODNB* (Oxford, 2004). See also chapter six.

³⁵ Extracts of Vincent's 'Life and Rambles' can be viewed at the Visions of Britain website http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/text/contents_page.jsp?t_id=Vincent [accessed 5 January 2009]. This site also holds information on the itinerant tours of Feargus O'Connor, Robert Gammage and W. E. Adams.

³⁶ W. H. Maehl (ed.), *Robert Gammage: Reminiscences of a Chartist* (Manchester, 1983); Holyoake, *Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life* and W. E. Adams, *Memoirs of a Social Atom* (1903, reprinted with an introduction by John Saville, New York, 1968).

³⁷ David Ross (dates unknown) was a Chartist lecturer, an elocutionist and a water cure practitioner. David Ross, *Atmopathy and Hydropathy: how to prevent and cure diseases by the application of steam and water* (London, 1848), p. vi. For more information on his political career see chapter six.

³⁸ For Chartism's relationship with the landscape see Anne Janowitz, 'The Chartist Picturesque', in Stephen Copley and Peter Garside, *The Politics of the Picturesque: Literature, landscape and aesthetics since 1770* (Cambridge, 1994).

³⁹ *NS*, 25 October 1843.

⁴⁰ Robert Peddie, *The Dungeon Harp: Being a number of poetical Pieces written during a cruel imprisonment of three years in the Dungeons of Beverley*, with preface by David Ross (Edinburgh, 1844).

Spatial networks and the determination of route

The romantic Chartist traveller might like to present himself as a free spirit at one with nature, but on a more prosaic level the political lecturer, like the tramping artisan, was dependent upon a network of supporters offering food and shelter. When David Ross finished his epic walk across the South Pennines he was greeted by his friends ('warm hearted and well-minded Democrats') who presumably saw that he was rested and fed before his lecture. It is to the grassroots structures of political and reforming movements we shall now turn, for without them poorly funded radical movements could not have sustained itinerant agents. Movement between regions and localities in the nineteenth century was eased by trade, religious, personal or kinship connections. Perhaps one of the most important was the movement of artisans on the tramp, which paradoxically as an institutionalised form of travelling, embodied both 'belonging' and 'mobility'. Humphrey Southall's research into the mobility of nineteenth century artisans demonstrates the extent to which trades and crafts relied upon a mobile workforce and how such movement was sustained by trade union networks alongside kinship and personal contacts. Interestingly, Southall stresses that such men were vectors disseminating both trade knowledge and broader information.⁴¹

For an adventurous young man 'going on the tramp' provided an opportunity to see something of the world. The prospect of visiting hitherto unknown towns and cities, meeting new people and seeing new sights could be remarkably seductive, especially for those who longed to see the birthplaces and landscapes of their favourite authors. W. E. Adams, for example, described how he deviated some distance from his route to Stratford-on-Avon to see Shakespeare's birthplace. Similarly, George Jacob Holyoake's pedestrian tour in 1838 paused at Boscobel to see the oak in which Charles II was said to have hidden.⁴² It is easy to see how romantic young men, with a gift for public speaking, were encouraged to take up the trade of itinerant lecturing. Tramping artisans, like itinerant lecturers and tradesmen and preachers, were in a position to judge the social and economic state of the country themselves and, for young men like Robert Gammage, this was sufficient to politicise them. During his travels at the start of 1840 Gammage relied upon his remarkably extensive family and friendship network and his trade society, the United

⁴¹ Southall has looked at the transmission of political ideology by tramping artisans working mainly from autobiographical accounts and the records of the Steam Engine Makers' Society. Humphrey Southall, 'Mobility, the artisan community and popular politics in early nineteenth-Century England', in Gerry Kearns and Charles W. J. Withers (eds.), *Urbanising Britain: Essays on class and community in the nineteenth century* (Cambridge, 1991) See also Hobsbawm, 'The tramping artisan'.

⁴² Adams, *Memoirs of a Social Atom*, p. 304. Holyoake, *Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life*, Vol. I, p. 75.

Kingdom Society of Coachmakers. Gamage's reminiscences demonstrate that in addition to transport connections, geography and topography, choice of route was determined by a series of inter-connecting networks: membership of the same cause, kinship, personal friendships, trade, and religion.⁴³

Itinerant speakers employed by middle-class reform bodies, such as free trade and anti-slavery groups, also drew upon geographically dispersed networks of support.⁴⁴ Anti-slavery agents, in particular, were assisted in the field by religious bodies, evangelicals and Quakers. The letters of the anti-slavery orator, George Thompson, to his wife in the early 1830s reveal how he was treated with great sympathy by numerous ministers who gave him access to their churches and chapels and provided him with comfortable lodgings and food, often within their own households. In Rochester, for example, his host fed him on 'mutton chops & roasted potatoes' and 'two glassfuls of wine'.⁴⁵ It is significant how much assistance took the form of individual acts of kindness in a domestic setting. Indeed the domestic setting provided a perfect arena to build alliances and consolidate support. While working as the agent for the British India Society Thompson sought to persuade William Smeal and William Paton (both leading Glasgow abolitionists) to support Indian emancipation. His strategy, as he jovially remarked in a letter to his friend Elizabeth Pease, was to 'get them to my own house to breakfast (nothing like putting our opinions into tea, & coffee & between bread & butter when you want folks to swallow them!),'⁴⁶

Prominent women, such as the philanthropist and intellectual Harriet Martineau, were at the hub of urban associational networks and their personal connections and goodwill could open doors for lecturers in the field.⁴⁷ This was particularly the case for Quaker and evangelical women involved in the transatlantic anti-slavery movement. From within the confines of the domestic sphere these often wealthy women exerted political

⁴³ Over a period of three days Gamage met with a friend's mother, visited a friend in the coach making trade, stayed at the house of his friends Mr and Mrs Clifford and made a diversion to see a cousin he had not seen since childhood. Maehl, *Robert Gamage*, p. 44.

⁴⁴ Norman McCord has noted how League lecturers benefited from a network of free trade supporters who assisted them in the field, providing insider political information on a given locality and offering advice on venues and other practical support, McCord, *Anti-corn Law League*, p. 60.

⁴⁵ John Rylands University Library, Raymond English Anti-Slavery Papers (hereafter REAS), REAS/2/1/2, letter, 24 Sept 1831.

⁴⁶ Gifford, 'George Thompson', p. 200.

⁴⁷ Graeme Morton, Boudien de Vries, R. J. Morris, (eds.) *Civil Society, Associations and Urban Places: Class, Nation and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Aldershot, 2006). Sarah Richardson, "'Well-neighboured houses': the political networks of elite women, 1780-1860", in Kathryn Gleadle, & Sarah Richardson (eds.), *Women in British politics, 1760-1860: the power of the petticoat* (Basingstoke, 2000).

pressure, via correspondence and family connections.⁴⁸ At a local and regional level the British anti-slavery movement depended upon the activities of female supporters. Indeed during the mid-1830s George Thompson's missionary work was largely financed by money collected by the female auxiliary of the Glasgow Emancipation Society.⁴⁹ Thompson addressed female audiences at polite drawing room meetings and published anti slavery and free trade tracts, with ornate covers, specifically geared towards female supporters.⁵⁰ Energetic and talented women like the radical Darlington Quaker, Elizabeth Pease, active in the anti-slavery campaign and sympathetic to Chartism and the League, also provided much practical support to reform movements.⁵¹ As recent research has shown, the ACLL similarly harnessed the energy and resources of feminine supporters, channelling their efforts into fundraising bazaars and tea parties.⁵² Radical women, without the leisure or wealth of their middle-class sisters, were more circumscribed in their support, although their role in providing food, laundry services and accommodation to temperance and Chartist lecturers was crucial. Thomas Whittaker's autobiography gives a touching account of a poor woman who gave up her bed so that he might rest and sat up all night undertaking his laundry promising to 'have all clean, warm, and dry for me in the morning'.⁵³ Women, however, were left firmly in the 'private sphere', largely because pervasive social constraints kept women from participating in the masculine space of the political platform.

Lecturers, whether following an advertised circuit or travelling in response to a specific invitation, would expect arrangements such as room and publicity to have been organised by local supporters. It was far more onerous to arrive in a new locality unexpected. On such occasions the itinerant agent had to seek suitable premises and raise an audience by distributing handbills and engaging the bell ringer. Where specific local

⁴⁸ Midgley, *Women against Slavery*; Halbersleben, *Women's participation in the British anti-slavery movement*; J R Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British anti-slavery: the mobilisation of public opinion against the slave trade, 1787-1807* (London, 1998); David Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery, 1780-1860* (London, 1991).

⁴⁹ Jane Smeal to Elizabeth Pease 21 Dec 1836, in Clare Taylor, *British and American Abolitionists: an episode in transatlantic understanding* (Edinburgh, 1974), p. 54.

⁵⁰ George Thompson, *Corn Laws: Lectures delivered before the Ladies of Manchester* (Manchester, 1841).

⁵¹ Pease for a time co-ordinated George Thompson's work for the British India Society, Clare Midgley, 'Nichol, Elizabeth Pease (1807-1897)', *ODNB* (Oxford, 2004).

⁵² Simon Morgan, 'A sort of land debatable': female influence, civic virtue and middle-class identity, c 1830-1860', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 13, Number 2, 2004, 183-209; Simon Morgan, *A Victorian Woman's Place: Public Culture in the Nineteenth Century* (London and New York, 2007).

⁵³ Whittaker, *My Life's Battles*, p. 115. Robert Gammage and Henry Vincent describe refreshments prepared by the wives of radicals and sympathetic landladies, Maehl, *Robert Gammage*, p. 46; Henry Vincent, 'Life and Rambles', in the *Western Vindicator*, 6th April 1839 [accessed Jan 18 2009 from <http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/>].

contacts did not exist the newly arrived speaker might seek out people and organisations potentially sympathetic to the cause. The temperance advocate, Thomas Whittaker, who toured the North East during the 1830s, would first enquire after Quakers and, failing that, Primitive Methodists (both groups having shown much kindness towards the fledgling temperance movement).⁵⁴ Chartist agents or Owenite missionaries would be more likely to enquire after radical book sellers, a list of whose names the editors of radical publications such as the *Northern Star* or the *New Moral World* were careful to print and keep updated.

In sizeable towns local newspaper offices were useful sources of information, although the helpfulness of the staff depended upon the political proclivities of the editor and proprietor. Sympathetic editors could not only advertise the presence of a speaker but also ensure coverage of speeches. For this reason astute itinerant agents utilised the network of local newspapers as they travelled.⁵⁵ Local printers, whose trade involved handbills and placards, were another potential source of assistance. The itinerant scientific lecturer, William Richardson, who was based in Southowram, near Halifax, relied on assistance from local printers during his tours of the North East in the 1840s and 1850s, not only for producing and posting placards prior to his arrival but also for advice on potential venues and other commercial issues.⁵⁶ Another significant resource was the temperance hotel. Proprietors and customers of temperance hotels tended to be sympathetic to other progressive movements; indeed in several towns and cities they were at the hub of local radical activity. Thornton's Temperance Hotel, which opened in Huddersfield 1855, was important as a lecture venue, a place to stay and as a means of plugging straight into a network of information, resources and connections.⁵⁷

If lecturers were dependent upon geographically dispersed contacts, local reform groups were equally reliant upon the travelling agent. The agent was the crucial vector which held together and transcended the 'disparate local components' of reform

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 127.

⁵⁵ James Acland's experience as a reporter and a journalist stood him in good stead when trying to get his free trade speeches reported in the provincial press. A letter to Manchester notes that after negotiations with a Plymouth paper he is confident that the League will 'have a good leader and report'. ACLL letter book, f. 191, 5 May 1839.

⁵⁶ Richardson embarked upon extensive lecturer tours around the towns and villages of Durham and Northumberland in the 1840s and 1850s. Letters from Richardson to the printer John Procter are reproduced in Robert Wood, *The Victorian Provincial Printer and the Stage: An essay based on information gleaned from the papers left by John Procter and his son* (Newcastle, 1972), pp. 19-20.

⁵⁷ Radicals who stayed there included: Ernest Jones, Charles Bradlaugh, Joseph Barker, Harriet Law, Isaac Ironside, Lloyd Jones, Henry Vincent, Bronterre O'Brien, Thomas Cooper, George Julian Harney, Samuel Kydd, George Howell. See Alan J. Brooke, 'The Centre of Light and Knowledge: Thornton's Temperance Hotel, 1854-1909, in Stephen Wade (ed.), *Aspects of Huddersfield, Discovering local history* (Barnsley, 2002).

movements.⁵⁸ The tours of itinerant agents and speakers (in conjunction with a dedicated press) bridged the gaps between branch, district, regional and national organisational structures: a fact recognised by Feargus O'Connor who used the metaphor of a great chain to describe how his epic tours linked city to city and region to region.⁵⁹ In order to appreciate the role of the agent in binding together dispersed groups, it is necessary to explore the spatial organisation and stratification of reform movements.

Chartism, temperance, anti-slavery and the free trade movement all comprised overlapping layers of authority: at the apex were the national bodies, leaders and executives, followed by regional groupings and districts, down to local branches and the rank and file membership.⁶⁰ Political orators operated at each of these levels. Indeed, one point which requires emphasis is the hierarchy of itinerant lecturers. As Philip Howell points out Chartist lecturing was 'a characteristically layered but systematically organised activity', with localities typically operating a tier of speakers.⁶¹ Anti-slavery, Owenite and temperance speakers were similarly stratified. Typically lecturers ranged from local, voluntary speakers, whose travels rarely took them beyond a day's walk of their home, through the middle ranking paid agitator who tended to operate at the level of the region, to the celebrity speaker or national leader whose circuit was rarely confined by cost or geography.⁶² Paid professional agents generally operated at the level of the region and for this reason the middle ranking lecturer is the focus of this study.⁶³

This is not to deny the significance of the voluntary activist and part-time radical orators. Local speakers such as Benjamin Rushton in Halifax, or James Maw of Middlesbrough, were vital in keeping the radical cause alive in their immediate locality.⁶⁴ Visits by itinerant agents were by necessity intermittent and thus all movements encouraged local activists to deliver *ad hoc* lectures to maintain enthusiasm on a day-to-day basis. The League frequently entreated its genteel supporters to consider delivering a

⁵⁸ Thompson, *Chartists*, p. 119, cited in Southall, 'Agitate! Agitate! Organize!' p. 191. Mapping chartist activity against geographic locations was first carried out by Dorothy Thompson, see *Chartists*, appendix: 'Location and Timing of Chartist Activity', which lists locations alongside recorded Chartist activities over time.

⁵⁹ 'All the links were now perfect. London, Newcastle, Carlisle, Edinburgh and Glasgow had now become forged as it were together'. *NS*, 21 July 1838, cited in Southall, 'Agitate! Agitate! Organize!' p. 181.

⁶⁰ The organisation in the Bradford area was quite remarkable, each village in the area sending a delegate to the Bradford Northern Union, and from these meetings delegates to the West Riding delegates meeting would be selected. Judge, 'Early Chartist organisation', p. 385.

⁶¹ Howell 'Diffusing the Light' p. 123.

⁶² See also chapter 6 pp. 216 and 221 for a discussion of the different grades of lecturer.

⁶³ Philip Howell also claims that proselytism was 'by and large a regional affair' *Ibid*, p. 122.

⁶⁴ John A Hargreaves, *Benjamin Rushton: Handloom Weaver and Chartist* (Halifax, 2006). Malcolm Chase, 'Maw, James (1807-75)', in Bellamy and Saville, *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, Vol. X, p. 138.

lecture in their locality.⁶⁵ The anti-slavery campaign too, was sustained by local ministers, such as Benjamin Godwin of Bradford, who used their pulpits and hired lecture rooms to denounce the evils of slavery.⁶⁶

Spatial organisation of reform groups

Early Victorian radical movements drew upon both the organisational models developed by the anti-slavery campaign (as discussed above) and the structures employed by working class associations such as friendly societies and trade unions.⁶⁷ Precedents were also set by eighteenth century radical movements, notably the London Corresponding Society (LCS).⁶⁸ Methodism provided another significant influence and it is striking that many agitators were raised in the culture of the Chapel.⁶⁹ The rapid expansion of Methodism was partly due to its innovative strategy of organising its followers into local classes (ideally of no more than ten members) which met weekly for discussion. 'Classes' were also eminently suited to the discussion of political matters as quickly recognised by the Chartist, Owenite and temperance movements which adopted weekly class meetings as a means of encouraging regular debate and sustained local activity.⁷⁰ Such small groupings kept enthusiasm high and were an important mechanism for the collection of subscriptions. Moreover, in times of heightened excitement or political repression such structures permitted movements to organise simultaneous action without the need for public meetings.⁷¹ The class meeting was also the place where those with the potential to become local lecturers were encouraged and supported.⁷² Indeed, the Methodist paradigm was so

⁶⁵ *BO*, 16 April 1840

⁶⁶ The Baptist minister, Benjamin Godwin, quickly realised that his own chapel was too small to accommodate large audiences and thus lectured in the newly built Bradford Exchange Building, Godwin, *Reminiscences* p. 498.

⁶⁷ Chase, *Early trade unionism*; Chase, *Chartism*, pp. 140-4; Gosden, P. H. J. H., *The Friendly Societies in England, 1815-1875* (Manchester, 1961), pp. 13-70.

⁶⁸ The Sheffield Branch of the LCS, for example, in May 1792 divided its large membership into classes of ten and developed a hierarchical structure upwards to the General Council, Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, p. 164.

⁶⁹ Michael S. Edwards, 'Methodism and the Chartist Movement', *London Quarterly & Holborn Review*, Vol. 191 (1966), p. 307.

⁷⁰ Joseph Barker's autobiography provides a useful description of the duties of a Methodist class leader, *The History and Confessions of a Man, as put forth by himself* (Wortley, 1846), especially pp. 95 & 103. The Owenites also employed a system of 'lecturers ... missionary districts, circuits, class meetings, and the weekly penny subscription', Royle, *Victorian Infidels*, pp. 48-49.

⁷¹ Eileen Yeo, 'Some Practices and Problems of Chartist Democracy', in James Epstein and Dorothy Thompson (eds.), *The Chartist Experience: Studies in Working Class Radicalism and Culture, 1830-60* (London, 1982), p. 352. Chase, *History*, p. 149.

⁷² Wearmouth, *Some Working-Class Movements*, pp. 126-143.

effective that when the Chartist movement formally re-constituted itself and adopted a plan of organisation in July 1840 the class system lay at the heart of its local strategy.⁷³

Methodism also bequeathed to nineteenth century radicalism the circuit and preacher plan. Unlike the fixed nature of the Anglican incumbents, Methodist ministers were stationed in different circuits every few years which ensured variety and guarded against complacency.⁷⁴ Perhaps more important still was the system of lay preachers. The phenomenal growth of Methodism was founded upon the voluntary lay preacher who itinerated across local orbits taking the gospel to the dispersed populations in the hinterlands and outlying areas.⁷⁵ The geographical structure of the Methodist circuit was copied by radical reformers, sometimes literally. James Maw, for example, used his contacts on the Wesleyan Circuit to arrange Chartist meetings which angered the Wesleyan hierarchy to such a degree that a North Riding Methodist was subsequently dismissed.⁷⁶ Methodist preacher plans, which organised local or lay preachers into published rotas, took the form of compact grid showing time, place and speaker. When printed and distributed in advance published preacher plans were an effective means of maximising attendance.⁷⁷ The early temperance and Chartist movements were quick to appreciate the potential of preacher plans and used similar models to coordinate their local and district speakers. The South Lancashire local Chartist lecturers, for example, compiled and printed a plan for the first three months of 1841.⁷⁸ In the North East, the county Chartist missionary John Deegan was similarly advised to organise his agitation 'similar to that in religious bodies'.⁷⁹ However, such plans dealt only with local speakers, the regional lecture tours of paid Chartists or temperance lecturers could not be planned with such precision several months in advance.

Spatial organisation and geographical knowledge was essential for any kind of reform. During the 1830s, profound changes to the administrative geography of England

⁷³ The NCA plan advised local groups to form classes of ten members who were to meet weekly for political discussion, *NS*, 1 August 1840.

⁷⁴ John Munsey Turner, *John Wesley: the Evangelical Revival and the rise of Methodism in England* (Peterborough, 2002), pp. 35-6.

⁷⁵ For the role of itinerant preachers in spreading Methodism, see Hempton's discussion of the charismatic Irish preacher Gideon Ouseley (1762-1839), Hempton, *The Religion of the People*, chapter 7.

⁷⁶ Chase, 'Maw' *DLB*, p. 138. Joseph Barker, while serving as a Methodist preacher used the circuit to spread teetotalism. During the day he addressed audiences on merits of teetotalism and by night attended to his preaching duties, Barker, *History and Confessions of a Man*, pp. 372-7.

⁷⁷ See preaching plans held at WYAS: Leeds, WYL 1225/2/1, Bramley Circuit, 1818-1850 and WYL 1225/22/5, Horsforth & Bramley, 1828- 1851.

⁷⁸ The National Archives (hereafter TNA), HO 45/46. The plan has been reproduced in David Jones, *Chartism and The Chartists* (New York, 1975), p. 105.

⁷⁹ *NS*, 28 Nov 1840; In Leeds the local Chartists drew 'up a plan for Lectures and Addresses, similar to ... Manchester', *NS*, 1 May 1840.

were introduced by the Poor Law Amendment Act (1834), the Municipal Reform Act (1835) and the Rural Constabulary Act (1839) which imposed new geographical divisions beyond the centuries-old boundaries of the parish. While radicals opposed ‘the Bastilles’ and viewed the police with great suspicion, they surely observed with interest how a national stamp of organisation had been impressed on the localities.⁸⁰ Radical associations and temperance branches found that, by dividing up large towns into districts, they could more accurately plan lectures, tract distribution, and collect statistical information. The Bradford Long Pledged Teetotal Association, for example, carved up Bradford into manageable districts both to set up ubiquitous structure of local branch secretary and treasurer and to further its ambitious plans for statistical analysis.⁸¹ Not only did rational organisational structures offer stature and authority to reform bodies they were also instrumental for gathering statistics and data. The 1830s was the age of the statistic. In large urban centres middle-class enthusiasts formed statistical societies, whose aims were to collect and codify data, thereby providing answers to social problems.⁸² Working-class radicals had misgivings over the tendency of statistics to ignore the individuality of the poor and justify unfeeling social policy, yet they were quick to recognise the potential of statistics in the propaganda war. Chartist, temperance and Owenite orators often cited ‘official’ statistics in their speeches to ‘prove’ their point, a strategy which will be discussed further in chapter five.

As early as 1839 the Chartist Convention drew up a questionnaire to be sent to working men’s clubs and Chartist localities across the country. Although the responses were patchy and they do not seem to have been actively translated into Chartist policy the very existence of the questionnaire is significant. It shows that the Chartist leadership recognised the importance of building up a detailed picture of the localities to inform and

⁸⁰ An obvious exception being the Anti-Poor Law movement, which abhorred the way in which the traditional responsibility of the parish for its own poor had been severed by the larger, impersonal administrative unit of the Poor Law Union. John Knott, *Popular Opposition to the 1834 Poor Law* (London, 1986); Nicholas C. Edsall, *The Anti-Poor Law Movement 1834-44* (Manchester, 1971).

⁸¹ The BLPTA divided Bradford into six districts each of which had four committee members: president, treasurer, sub-treasurer and secretary. WYAS: Bradford, DB16 C25, Minute book of the Bradford Long Pledged Teetotal Association. Leeds Temperance Society also established a post for collecting statistics, WYAS: Leeds, Leeds Temperance Society Minutes, 8 Feb 1844 and 25 Apr 1844.

⁸² Statistical societies were formed in London, Leeds, Manchester and elsewhere during the 1830s. See M. J. Cullen, *The Statistical Movement in early Victorian Britain: The foundation of social research* (Sussex, 1975) and Martin Daunton (ed.), *The organisation of knowledge in Victorian Britain* (Oxford, 2005). Lawrence Goldman, ‘The origins of British “social science”: political economy, natural science and statistics’, *Historical Journal*, 26 (1983), 587-616. Mary Poovey, *Making a social body: British cultural formation, 1830-1864* (Chicago, 1995).

guide national strategies.⁸³ Reform movements depended upon accurate information, and it should be kept in mind that the lecturer was both speaker and information gatherer. The task of information gathering was most comprehensively developed by the ACLL whose successful campaign was to become the model *par excellence* for subsequent pressure groups.⁸⁴ The League encouraged its agents to gather information on the range of opinions in the locality, gauge the strength of the opposition and ascertain which leading figures were supportive of free trade. Some agents, like Alexander Somerville, were employed not to lecture, but to compile detailed reports on the condition of the agricultural labourer.⁸⁵

Before leaving the structure and organisation of movements in the locality, one final point deserves emphasis. It would be wrong to imagine that itinerant agents set up branches from scratch or that the central bodies were able to strictly control local affiliates. Many towns and larger settlements in Yorkshire and the North East had a long tradition of radical organisations. Iorwerth Prothero makes the very valid point that local radical groupings were generally long-lived and might affiliate to successive movements over the years. For example, a local Political Union might transform itself into an Anti-Poor Law Association and then several years later be reconstituted as a branch of the National Charter Association.⁸⁶ Eileen Yeo has stressed that local Chartist organisations not only often predated the movement but generally outlasted attempts to build national and regional structures.⁸⁷ This pattern continues well into the nineteenth century, in the North East, for example, there are clear continuities from Chartist structural organisation to the Northern Reform Union (1858-62) and subsequently to the regional branches of the Reform League (1865-1869).⁸⁸ The temperance movement too increased its grassroots coverage by persuading existing Sunday school groups, mutual improvement or Chartists groupings to realign themselves as teetotal organisations. In this respect movements were not creating their grassroots structure anew, but incorporating and building upon existing structures.

⁸³ Add. Mss. 34245 A.

⁸⁴ Most notably the UKA which was founded in 1853 to lobby for the British equivalent of Maine Law, see John Greenaway, *Drink and British Politics since 1830: A Study in Policy-Making* (Basingstoke, 2003); Dingle, *Campaign for Prohibition in Victorian England*.

⁸⁵ McCord, *Anti-Corn Law League*, pp. 243-4. Somerville's data gathering role is evident in the title of his subsequent book, Alexander Somerville, *The Whistler at the Plough: containing travels, statistics, and descriptions of scenery & agricultural customs in most parts of England* (Manchester, 1852).

⁸⁶ Iorwerth Prothero, *Radical Artisans in England and France, 1830-1870* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 222; Thompson, *The Chartists* pp. 60-61 and Kate Tiller's observation on the political tradition in Halifax, Kate Tiller, 'Working Class attitudes and Organisation in three industrial towns, 1850-1875' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 1975), p. 396.

⁸⁷ Yeo, 'Some Practices and Problems', p. 353.

⁸⁸ For a more detailed discussion of the Northern Reform Union see chapter three.

Barriers to communication

At the start of the 1840s the landscape was relatively unscathed by rail roads and the early telegraph was limited to conveying signalling messages between junctions and stations. Newspapers were still subjected to ‘taxes on knowledge’, and long distance travel was expensive and often tediously slow.⁸⁹ This ensured that regional and local identity remained strong. A distinctive sense of local culture was apparent in the early reports of temperance, free trade and Chartist missionaries, some of which were published and circulated in dedicated newspapers and annual reports. Acland’s tour of Devonshire in the summer of 1839 reported on the impoverished agricultural labourers with the detached curiosity of an urban observer: a strategy which deliberately inverted protectionist propaganda on the poor conditions endured by workers in the urban, manufacturing districts.⁹⁰ Like Thelwall and Cobbett before him, Acland was not only building up a picture of local and regional distinctiveness but actively proselytising.⁹¹ Travel endowed itinerant agitators with the authority of personal experience. Both detractors and promoters saw itinerant circuits, especially those taking in villages and hamlets in outlying areas, as a mechanism which opened up the countryside to new ideas, exposing their inhabitants to questions of national importance. As the century progressed the rapid transport opportunities offered by the passenger train (both for cheap day excursions and for agents travelling to their next destination) would inevitably accelerate the shift away from parochialism and isolation.

Access to a reliable supply of money was a serious problem for meagrely paid Chartist, temperance and Owenite lecturers.⁹² It was not uncommon for those attending a radical lecture to be asked to contribute to the cost of getting up a meeting or for leading radicals to provide the speaker with hospitality and even a bed for the night. For the League and anti-slavery movements, costs were generally borne by wealthy supporters.⁹³ Yet this central supply of funding was not without problems. As the League suffered a financial crisis during the first lecture campaign of 1839, lecturers in the field found themselves stranded through the failure of the cash-strapped headquarters to forward funds

⁸⁹ The tediousness of travel in the early railway period is evident in a letter sent by Ernest Jones to his wife in April 1848 which notes that it took him ten hours and ‘4 railroads, two steamers and 3 coaches’ to travel from Edinburgh to Aberdeen, Labour History Archive and Study Centre at the People’s History Museum, Manchester, LHASC/misc/E. Jones/1, letter 18 April 1848.

⁹⁰ Acland’s tours of Devon were initially reported in the *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, see the *Charter*, 21 July 1839, which reprinted Acland’s report.

⁹¹ Acland opens his account by stating his ‘twofold purpose of giving and acquiring information’, *Ibid.*

⁹² For salaries paid to Chartist county missionaries and Owenite lecturers see chapter six p. 221

⁹³ Local free traders generally subscribed very little to the costs, McCord, *Anti-Corn-Law League*, p. 74.

in a timely fashion. James Acland was on several occasions financially embarrassed. During one notable incident he was forced to leave his bags and clothing at Arundel and walk twenty miles to the post office in Brighton, where his hopes of finding a remittance from the League and thus being able to reclaim his belongings were dashed.⁹⁴ For the itinerant speaker who lacked a fixed address the extensive network of post office branches was essential in supplying finance, directives and also in furnishing travelling lecturers with the latest polemical books, articles or newspapers.⁹⁵ The lives of commercial travellers, itinerant labourers and religious and political missionaries were considerably improved by the advent of the Royal Mail money transfer in 1838 which allowed small amounts of money to be cheaply and efficiently transmitted via the national network of post offices. The money order system removed the need to send currency by registered post and it guarded against fraud.⁹⁶ To date no historians have considered the communicative and financial systems supporting itinerant workers, yet such systems were essential to a rapidly industrialising economy.

Rowland Hill's reform of the postal service at the start of the Chartist era not only expanded the geographical reach of daily posts, it also introduced a vital resource for political lecturers – the penny post.⁹⁷ The introduction of the penny post in January 1840 revolutionised the ease at which lecturers in the field could communicate with their employers.⁹⁸ It also fostered greater contact between dispersed branches and central executives, enabling local branches to send regular accounts of their activities to their house newspaper and make direct requests for visits from lecturers. During the autumn of 1840 the League embarked upon an ambitious plan to send tracts and handbills to 'every person whose name is in *Pigott's* directory': a tactic that was inconceivable prior to the penny post.⁹⁹ Yet at times the provision of cheap postage led to administrative overload as illustrated by an exasperated notice in the *Northern Star*, a month after the introduction of a flat rate of 1d. The *Star* complained that it now received over 500 letters a week and was tired of wading through three sides of closely written foolscap before reaching the order

⁹⁴ 'Leaving bags and baggages at Arundel I have walked here in the hope of finding a remittance with which to release my wardrobe etc but there is no letter at the post office. I earnestly entreat some commensuration', ACLL letter book, f. 256, letter sent from Brighton, 1 Aug 1839; McCord, *Anti-Corn Law League*, pp. 66-7.

⁹⁵ See request by Acland to the League, 'Pray remit me money to the Post Office in Norwich. Another £10 will be requisite', ACLL letter book, f. 461, 27 Mar 1840.

⁹⁶ Money orders were a forerunner of the postal order which was launched in the 1870s. The British Postal Museum and Archive: The Royal Mail Archive, London, Money Order Minute Book, Apr 1838- Feb 1840 and POST 27/65, *The Post Office and its Money Order System* by Henry Callender.

⁹⁷ Howard Robinson, *The British Post Office: A history* (Princeton, 1948), pp. 356-8

⁹⁸ The penny post came into operation on 10 January 1840, prepaid stamps May 1840, *Ibid*, pp. 297-300.

⁹⁹ Pickering and Tyrell, *People's Bread*, pp. 26-7.

details.¹⁰⁰ The overburdened Manchester post office too complained at the volume of mail generated by the League's new pressure tactics.¹⁰¹

The Chartists were wary of using the postal system for communication (with due cause as the letters of leading Chartists were routinely opened and scrutinised by the Government).¹⁰² The status of the NCA under the sedition laws was ambiguous and, rather than encouraging Chartist branches to communicate with one another, secretary to secretary, open communication via the Chartist press was instead encouraged.¹⁰³ Chartist missionaries such as Jonathan Bairstow printed their itineraries in the *Northern Star* rather than dealing directly with radicals at each leg of their tours: a practice ill-suited to communicating unforeseen delays or accommodating changes to itinerary schedules.¹⁰⁴ The envelopes of correspondence confiscated from Thomas Cooper after his arrest in 1842 suggests that Chartist lecturers received mail sent 'care of' to booksellers, printers, inns and friends along their projected route.¹⁰⁵ For radical agitators, this method of communication might be favoured over collecting mail from post office branches. The League, with its powerful middle-class supporters, was less fearful of Government surveillance, as evidenced by the extensive letter book concerning all aspects of League business preserved at Manchester Central Library. These letters represent only a fraction of the League's correspondence: in 1844 alone the League was estimated to have received 25,000 letters.¹⁰⁶

The impact of the telegraph was also profound. Although the telegraph was developed to assist railway signalmen, it was not long before its broader potential was realised.¹⁰⁷ In 1845 the first public telegraph line opened between London and Gosport and six years later the first submarine cable was laid between England and France. The age

¹⁰⁰ *NS* 15 February 1840. The distribution of the massive print runs of the *Northern Star* created havoc in the vicinity of the Star's office on Briggate in Leeds, Chase 'Building identity, building circulation', p. 39.

¹⁰¹ Pickering and Tyrell, *People's Bread*, p. 27.

¹⁰² Thomas Cooper, while caught up in the potteries disturbances in the summer of 1842, thought better about sending a letter proposing a strike until the Charter became the law of the land via the post office to the Leicester Chartists. Instead that communication and a letter to his wife was hand delivered by a working man who walked from Hanley to Leicester overnight for a fee of five shillings. Cooper, *Life of Thomas Cooper*, p. 193. Mather, *Public Order*, pp. 218-225.

¹⁰³ Yeo, 'Some Practices and Problems', pp. 360-3. Radzinowicz notes that the Chartists avoided activities which might render them liable under the Six Acts, Leon Radzinowicz, 'New Departure in Maintaining Public Order in the face of Chartist Disturbances', *Cambridge Law Journal*, Vol. 51 (1960), p. 52.

¹⁰⁴ It seems inconceivable that this was the only means of communication. Surely Bairstow's organising committee contacted local groups via letter, although such correspondence has not survived.

¹⁰⁵ TNA TS/11/600 and 601.

¹⁰⁶ Pickering and Tyrell, *People's Bread*, p. 27.

¹⁰⁷ The *Morning Chronicle* in May 1845 published a report of a railway meeting in Portsmouth which had been transmitted via telegram, noting that it illustrated 'the important and numerous services' which telegrams 'will soon render to the public'. *BO*, 15 May 1845.

of telegraphic news had arrived.¹⁰⁸ By the 1850s telegraphs were widely used for the transmission of political news: whether an account of the latest parliamentary debate or first-hand reports from the Crimean front line.¹⁰⁹ When Mr Greaves of the Electric Telegraph Company gave a public lecture at Bradford St George's Hall in February 1860, it was Lord John Russell's introduction to the Reform Bill which was relayed back to the eager Bradford audience.¹¹⁰ The modernising impact of the rapid communications of ideas and the ability to transport people and goods at ever quicker paces deserves emphasis. Just as the late twentieth and early twenty-first century has been revolutionised by the ability to rapidly find and retrieve information via the internet search engine, Victorians lived through a similar age of exhilarating potential.¹¹¹

While communication was improving, other aspects of a travelling agitator's life remained challenging: in particular, the very real threat of violent opposition and physical assault. Peddling unpopular ideas in the heartland of opposing factions was not without risk. In May 1840 James Acland was badly mauled during a free trade lecture in Saxmondham, Suffolk, when a gang of roughs hired by local landowners interrupted his lecture by forcibly removing him from the platform. Elsewhere in Suffolk the unfortunate Acland was drenched with water from the parish fire engine and, when this failed to stop him, a brass band was employed to drown out his voice.¹¹² The League did offer some protection to its lecturers in the shape of a legal adviser which could advise on ill treatment 'from the spite of individuals, whether clothed in official dignity or boasting aristocratic connexions'.¹¹³ In Manchester, the League also bankrolled a less respectable means of protecting the League Platform, the euphemistically named 'Anti-Corn Law Police:' a gang of Irish thugs whose brief was to protect League meetings while disrupting those held by the Chartists.¹¹⁴

Travelling in the mid-nineteenth century was a stressful business. If transport connections failed it was impossible to get a message to an audience waiting in a village hall ten or fifteen miles distant. Some lecturers undertook heroic feats of travel in order to

¹⁰⁸ Jeffrey Kieve, *The Electric Telegraph: a social and economic history* (Newton Abbot, 1973).

¹⁰⁹ Meisel, *Public Speech*, p. 270.

¹¹⁰ *BO*, 8 March 1860.

¹¹¹ Tom Standage, *The Victorian Internet: the remarkable story of the telegraph and the nineteenth century's on-line Pioneers* (New York, 1998).

¹¹² ACLL letter book, f. 341, 8 May 1840; *BO*, 21 May 1840; McCord, *Anti-Corn Law League*, pp. 57; 74.

¹¹³ *ACLC*, 30 April 1839.

¹¹⁴ Pickering and Tyrell, *People's Bread*, p. 147. Thompson, *The Chartists*, p. 289. For more general battles between Chartists and League, see Lucy Brown, 'The Chartists and the Anti-Corn Law League', in Asa Briggs, *Chartist Studies* (London, 1959), 342-71.

avoid disappointing their audience. The Chartist missionary, Robert Gammage, described how, on one occasion, he narrowly missed a coach and, rather than miss his speaking engagement and disappoint his friend, he continued on foot, 'walking 46 miles without a minute in bed'.¹¹⁵ Organisers, too, might find making arrangements with lecturers in the field trying. A letter from Joseph Sturge to George Wilson at the League headquarter conveys some of the difficulties inherent in arranging for high profile itinerant speakers to address large public meetings. Sturge, anxious because he had arranged for George Thompson to deliver a lecture in Birmingham on the Indian and Chinese wars, wrote:

He was to be at 15 Lever Street Manchester today. If anything have prevented his arrival I shall feel obliged if thou wd [sic] send a special messenger by the first train on Monday morning that we may put it off if possible. I have no reason to doubt his arrival but as he does not know that the meeting is appointed till he gets to Manchester, I am rather anxious about it.¹¹⁶

The advent of the telegram and frequent passenger train to a more comprehensive range of destinations improved matters greatly, but these benefits were only felt towards the very end of the Chartist period.

Itinerant agents carried with them knapsacks holding tracts, petitions, diagrams and props in addition to water, food, spare items of clothing and a waterproof overcoat.¹¹⁷ For the poorer agent on foot, this must have been quite a burden. Another challenge for the itinerant activist would be navigation. The unfortunate Chartist, Thomas Cooper, who was travelling through the Midlands during the plug plot disturbances, took the wrong road to Macclesfield where he planned to catch a coach to Manchester.¹¹⁸ His wrong turn led him to Burslem, where he was recognised and arrested.¹¹⁹ This highlights a very real problem for itinerant agents: when travelling in unknown localities how did they find their way? How too did they find out about transport connections to the next town and thereafter?

The missionaries sent out by the Chartist convention in 1839 were instructed to buy a cheap map of the districts they were to visit and it is probable that most itinerant lecturers carried a well thumbed pocket atlas.¹²⁰ Maps and travel guides such as *Leigh's new pocket*

¹¹⁵ Gammage, on this occasion, was given the wrong timetable information and arrived at 6.00 am to find the coach had departed earlier. His forty-six mile jaunt was broken by a short sleep at the roadside, Maehl, *Robert Gammage*, p. 29.

¹¹⁶ George Wilson Papers, letter from Joseph Sturge to George Wilson, 7 May 1842.

¹¹⁷ Holyoake travelled with a large overcoat and a knapsack, Holyoake, *Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life*, Vol. I, p. 73.

¹¹⁸ Thomas Cooper was in the potteries at the time of the unrest as he was making his way to the NCA Conference in Manchester as a delegate representing the Leicester Chartists. Cooper, *Life*, p. 185.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 17; 198-203.

¹²⁰ Add. Mss. 34245A, ff. 61-62, 'Report of the committee for extending political information', 23 Feb 1839.

road-book of England and Wales or Sidney Hall's *A travelling county atlas* (see Fig. 1), could be picked up cheaply second-hand, especially as the emerging railway networks made such publications date rapidly.¹²¹ The absence of railroads mattered little to poorer itinerant lecturers, as Holyoake pointed out, 'a map of 1780 was still of use to a pedestrian in 1838'.¹²² Besides mail coach routes and timetables and details of existing railways (and those under construction) such guides included tourist and commercial information such as the charges made for a pair of horses. Given the number of steamers and coaches missed by itinerant speakers, relying on timetables printed in road atlases was risky. The railways ushered in an age of greater precision and reliability. After 1847, most railway companies adopted Greenwich Mean Time while the development of reliable train timetables such as *Bradshaw's*, which amalgamated information from rival rail companies, revolutionised passenger transport for those wealthy enough to travel by train. *Bradshaw's Railway Companion* first appeared in 1839. By December 1841 Bradshaw's timetables cost 6d and were a vital mechanism for making sense of the uncoordinated network of competing railway companies.¹²³ It is to transport we shall now turn.

Prior to the first railway boom, a retired commissary general called Sir George Head (1782–1855), travelled around the industrial north in 1835. The following year he published his experiences in a book called *A Home Tour through the Manufacturing Districts of England*. Besides discussing trade and the character of the places he passed through, Head also described at length how he travelled.¹²⁴ His book illustrates the wide range of transport available to the pre-railway traveller and reminds the historian that, as E. P. Thompson cautioned, 'we are too ready to emphasise the difficulties of communication

¹²¹ A selection of miniature atlas and pocket book traveller guides are held at the Brotherton Library Special Collections, University of Leeds: *Leigh's New Pocket Road Book of England and Wales: containing an account of all the Direct, Cross and Railroads; a description of every principal town and remarkable place; with curiosities, manufactures, commerce. Population, inns etc ... with a new and correct list of mail coach routes* (London, 1839). Sidney Hall, *A travelling county atlas: with all the coach and rail roads accurately laid down and coloured, and carefully corrected to the present time* (London, 1850). Both atlases were repeatedly revised and republished during this period.

¹²² Holyoake, *Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life*, Vol. I, p. 69.

¹²³ G. Royde Smith, *The History of Bradshaw: A centenary Review of the Origin and Growth of the most famous guide in the world* (London and Manchester, 1939).

¹²⁴ Head, *Home Tour*. The biography of Billy Purvis, the itinerant showman, provides another useful description of transport options in the pre-railway era. Arthur Thomas, *The Life of Billy Purvis, the extraordinary, witty and comical showman (1784-1853)* (1st ed. Sunderland, 1875, reprinted facsimile, Newcastle, 1981), pp. 83-84; 96; 117.

Original in colour

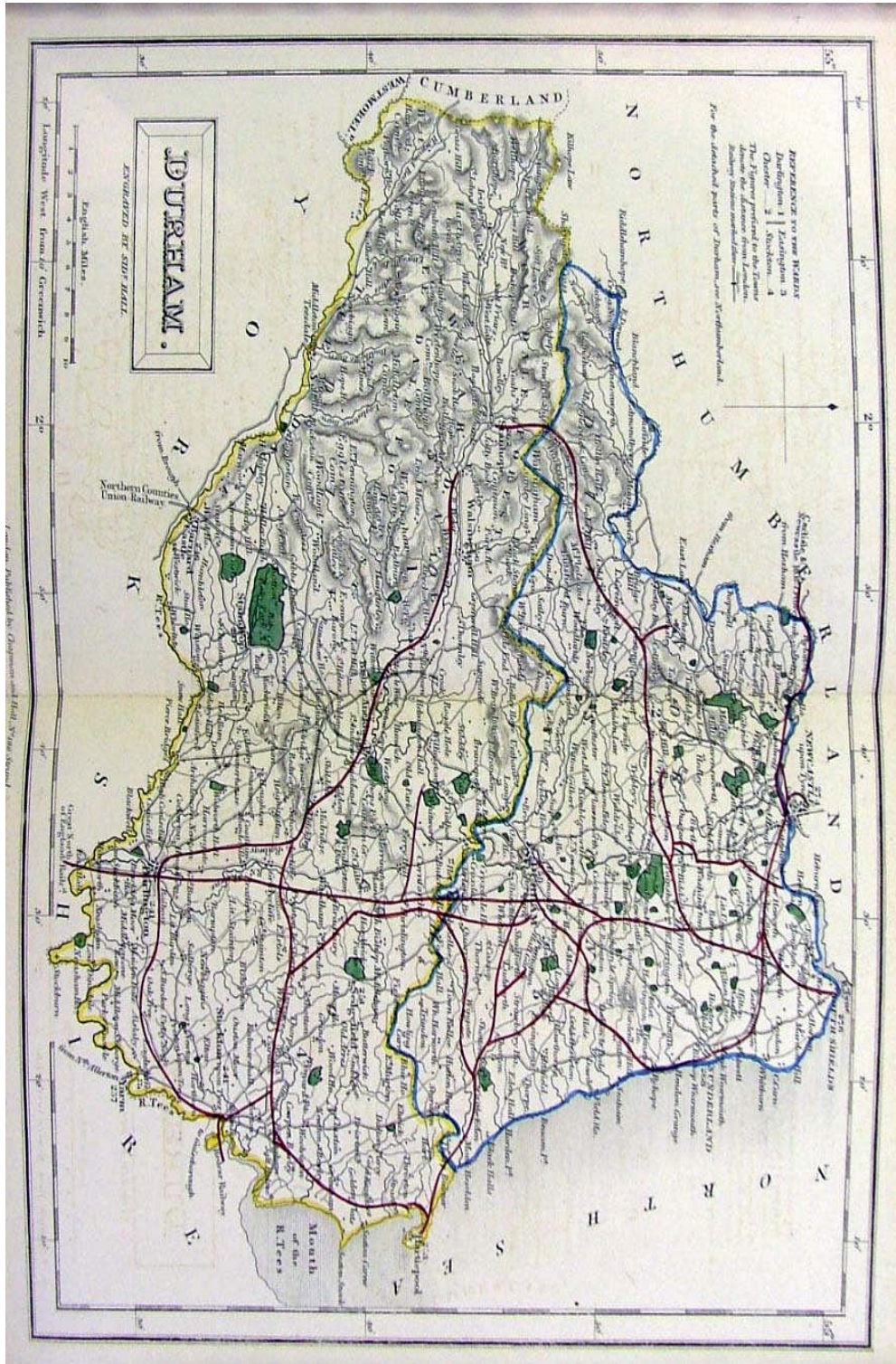


Fig. 1: Sidney Hall, *A travelling county atlas*, (London, 1850)

before the coming of the railways'.¹²⁵ At the start of the 1840s only a few cities and towns were served by a railway. Even as the rail network expanded trains were not as widely used by itinerant speakers in the late 1840s and 1850s as we might expect due to high fares, limited destinations, inconvenient timetabling of Parliamentary and workmen's trains, and lack of shelter in third class carriages.¹²⁶ Many large towns were not initially connected to the rail network, which meant even for gentlemanly leaders, rail travel was not an option for certain legs of the journey. To reach towns, villages and hamlets not connected to the railway network, and without a road carrier service, walking was often the best option; the alternative being the expense of coach hire and the upkeep of a horse. Walking was a staple form of transport in the Victorian period: lower class people routinely walked long distances simply because there was no alternative.¹²⁷ Regional itinerant agents too were compelled to travel extensively on foot. Yet it would be wrong to over emphasise pedestrianism. It is evident that paid itinerant lecturers pragmatically coupled walking with other less taxing forms of travel.¹²⁸ When money and opportunity permitted footsore lecturers also travelled by stage coach and omnibus, took a ride on a packet boat or canal barge or hitched lifts in the wagons or carriages of sympathetic farmers or tradesmen.¹²⁹

The 1830s was the golden age of the stage coach when 'flying coaches' could transport affluent travellers in relative comfort and safety at speeds up to ten miles per hour.¹³⁰ The road network, like the later railways, primarily radiated from London in the

¹²⁵ For example during Major Cartwright's second tour in January and February 1813 he visited thirty-five places in the Midlands, North and West in less than thirty days, Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, p. 667.

¹²⁶ Parliamentary trains, introduced by Gladstone in 1844, were statutory limited to 1d per mile and companies were compelled to run at least one train per day but even this rate was expensive and working people used such services for economic migration rather than daily commuting. Workmen's trains were not under parliamentary control and were introduced on a voluntary basis by companies with vested interest in transporting labourers cheaply and efficiently. For example, from 1852 the Stockton and Darlington Railway operated workmen's trains to take labourers from Middlesbrough to the iron working village of Eston, Simmons and Biddle, *Oxford Companion to British Railway History*, pp. 369; 568.

¹²⁷ Jarvis, *Romantic Writing*, p. 21. Pedestrianism was also a leisure pursuit, local papers regularly carried stories of walkers proceeding backwards, at epic speed, or over long distances, see *BO*, 3 December 1840. For nineteenth-century city walking see Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom: Liberalism and the Modern City* (London, 2003), especially pp. 212-219.

¹²⁸ For canal, road, rail, and sea transport in this period see, Philip S. Bagwell and Peter Lyth (eds.), *The Transport Revolution from 1770 to 2000* (London, 2001); Derek H. Aldcroft and Michael J. Freeman (eds.), *Transport in the Industrial Revolution* (Manchester, 1983).

¹²⁹ Robert Gammage's reminiscences demonstrate that lecturers used a range of transport options in addition to walking, Meahl, *Robert Gammage*.

¹³⁰ Tom Bradley, *The Old Coaching Days in Yorkshire* (Leeds, 1889), pp. 12-3; William Albert, *The Turnpike Road System in England, 1663-1840* (Cambridge, 1972); Theo Barker and Dorian Gerhold, *The Rise and Rise of Road Transport, 1700-1990* (Cambridge, 1996). It was possible to take a day trip from Bradford to Manchester and back on the Duchess of Leeds coach, *BO*, 12 December 1838.

direction of major cities and towns. Destinations off the major routes were less well served and roads which traversed the country ‘across the grain’ were inconvenient. Minor roads (or cross roads as they were called by contemporaries) were served only by local carriers thus for League or anti-slavery agents visiting the more geographically isolated towns and cities, the only option other than walking was to hire their own transport and pay for the upkeep of a horse(s). An insight into the difficulties of travelling across country is provided by James Acland, who, while trying to reach Norwich in the spring of 1840, complained to the Manchester headquarters that even if he travelled ‘all day and all night it will be as much as I can do to get there. It is all cross road. The expense will be very heavy’.¹³¹ We also know from Alexander Somerville’s later virulent attacks on Cobden and the League that his travel costs, while engaged in fact finding tour in the mid-1840s countryside, were substantial.¹³²

Lower class agents might sometime travel on the outside of a carriage, where passage was much cheaper than in the sheltered interior but, unless travelling on a pleasant summer evening, such journeys were challenging.¹³³ Thomas Whittaker, for example, recalled in horror a twenty-two hour coach journey he made between Manchester and London in the bitter cold seated on the outside of the carriage.¹³⁴ At least the pedestrian was able to keep warm by his own exertions. Travellers were also able to travel cheaply on canal barges. George Jacob Holyoake travelled to Liverpool on the Bridgewater Canal during his walking tour of 1838, and Thomas Whittaker also made use of this form of travel.¹³⁵ For the itinerant lecturer with articles to read and lectures to prepare the slow progress of a barge offered precious time for preparation and reflection. It also provided the propagandist with a captive audience of fellow travellers as Thomas Whittaker was quick to recognise. Whittaker used a trip on the canal barge between Preston and Lancaster (aboard a rather inappropriately named ‘flying packet’) to distribute his tracts and proselytise the other passengers who were drinking beer.¹³⁶

¹³¹ ACLL letter book, f. 461, letter 27 March 1840.

¹³² Somerville, who was employed in the collection of data on the impact of the potato blight, noted that ‘It was necessary to diverge from the railways and turnpike roads, where no public conveyances were and go to farms and remote villages. For this I hired a horse and a gig, with keep of horses and toll-gates – at my own charge’. Alexander Somerville, *Cobdenic Policy the internal Enemy of England* (London, 1854), p. 61.

¹³³ A return coach journey between Bradford and Manchester in 1838 ranged from seven shillings outside to eleven inside, which was beyond the means of a working man, *BO*, 12 December 1838.

¹³⁴ Whittaker, *My Life’s Battles*, p. 243. Whittaker also recalled how in winter 1838 he made a fifteen mile trip between Newcastle and Shotley Bridge to address a meeting – travelling in cart through heavy snow pulled by one lame horse, he arrived four hours later ‘all but starved to death’, *Ibid*, p. 164.

¹³⁵ Holyoake, *Sixty Years of an Agitator’s Life*, Vol. I, p. 72.

¹³⁶ Whittaker, *My Life’s Battle’s*, pp. 87-88.

Topography influenced travel patterns: parts of the West Riding of Yorkshire and the counties of Durham and Northumberland comprise moorlands, which meant boggy terrain and arduous climbs for the traveller.¹³⁷ Atlases such as those published by Sidney Hall (see Fig. 1) indicated mountainous regions allowing travellers to tailor their routes accordingly. Yet for those with local knowledge high gradients might favour the pedestrian. In the upland areas of the South Pennines ancient packhorse tracks used by the outworkers in the textile industry ran over the hilltops between valley settlements offering the quickest routes between the textile towns and villages. As a former West Riding weaver, it is likely that the Chartist, Jonathan Bairstow, would have been familiar with these pathways.¹³⁸ Strategically the North-East enjoyed a great advantage over the West Riding in the form of sea transportation. Travellers routinely travelled from Newcastle to various destinations by sea. In 1839, for example, the Chartist convention delegate, Robert Knox travelled by steamer while on a missionary tour of the North East.¹³⁹ The West Riding was, by way of contrast, landlocked although canals had since the eighteenth century provided a passage for manufactured goods and industrial products to the Humber and thence the sea. Indeed the Humber was of great importance to the region. One of the earliest Yorkshire railways – the Leeds to Selby Line (1834) was built to give manufacturers in Leeds, Bradford and the surrounding areas quicker access to a port.¹⁴⁰

Jonathan Bairstow's West Riding Chartist mission, (1840) & Septimus Davis's temperance tour of the North East (1858).

The final part of this chapter will assess whether the logistics of itinerant proselytising changed during the Chartist era by plotting the lecture circuits of two paid itinerant speakers. The agents used in these brief case studies have been selected both for chronology and geographical orbit. In November and early December 1840 the Chartist missionary, Jonathan Bairstow was engaged to tour the textile towns and villages of the West Riding. Almost two decades later the temperance agent, Septimus Davis, lectured around the industrial areas of the North East. Bairstow and Davis were paid officials

¹³⁷ Hey, *History of Yorkshire*; McCord and Thompson, *Northern Counties*.

¹³⁸ David Hey, *Packmen, Carriers and Packhorse Roads* (Leicester, 1980); Titus Thornber, *Seen on the Packhorse Tracks* (South Pennine Packhorse Trails Trust, 2002); Kim Taplin, *The English Path* (Ipswich, 1979), pp. 19-20.

¹³⁹ Add. Mss. 34245A, f. 188, letter from James Williams, 6 April 1839. In the late 1830s Purvis caught the steamer from Sunderland to Hartlepool (with a tame bear in tow!) and travelled by sea from Paisley to Newcastle, Thomas, *Life of Billy Purvis*, pp. 96; 117.

¹⁴⁰ For detailed information on branch lines and railway development in the West Riding and the North East see David Joy, *A Regional History of the Railways of Great Britain: Vol. 8 South and West Yorkshire (the industrial West Riding)* (London, 1975); Hoole, *Regional History of the Railways, the North East*

whose remit included both speaking and encouraging local branches to affiliate respectively to the National Charter Association and the Northern Temperance League. Full details of each tour are given in Appendix I. Weekly maps have been created recording day-by-day destinations (see Appendix I, Figs. 10-17). As Davis's route was extracted from a printed report compiled after the tour we can be confident that the dates and places listed were actually visited.¹⁴¹ In contrast, Bairstow's itinerary describes intended journeys and not all the destinations listed were actually visited.¹⁴² While flawed as a record of actual travel, Bairstow's itinerary does demonstrate feasible travel patterns in this period. His lecture circuit was planned by a sub-committee of delegates drawn from various West Riding districts and the routes devised were based upon practical considerations of geography and distance.¹⁴³

Bairstow's West Riding Missionary tour for November and early December 1840 was published in the *Northern Star*, (Appendix I, Fig. 9). Chartist lecturers depended upon the Chartist press to advertise their visits and such announcements were essential in giving local branches sufficient time to organise a venue, post placards and to raise money and an audience.¹⁴⁴ As discussed previously such open communication of intended movements also shielded Chartist lecturers from potential charges of sedition. Unlike the retrospective account given by Septimus Davis, which makes occasional reference to modes of travel, one can do little more than conjecture on how Bairstow travelled between destinations. Certainly Bairstow, as a native of Queensbury, a small, hilltop village between Halifax and Bradford, would have been familiar with the geography of the West Riding.

We know from accounts made by the early temperance agent, Thomas Whittaker, and the Owenite lecturer George Jacob Holyoake, that poorly paid itinerant agents primarily travelled on foot between destinations.¹⁴⁵ A cursory glance at Bairstow's weekly

¹⁴¹ The report of Septimus Davis's tour was compiled 'partly from communications which have been received from temperance friends in the districts visited who attended the meetings, and partly from the account with which Mr Davis has furnished the committee' *The North of England Temperance League Register and Almanck for 1859* (Newcastle, 1859), p. 57.

¹⁴² Several disappointed Chartist groups expressed their displeasure at Bairstow's failure to stick to his itinerary schedule see *NS*, 12 December 1840.

¹⁴³ Jonathan Bairstow's route was planned by a sub-committee of the West Riding Council Meeting who at a meeting held in Leeds on Sunday 16 October were asked to 'arrange the places he shall lecture at' and ensure 'that a list be published in the Star'. The cost of Bairstow's missionary tour was to be borne by the different districts according to membership numbers, *NS*, 24 October 1840.

¹⁴⁴ Bairstow's schedule concluded with a request that the areas listed publicise his lectures, *NS*, 31 October 1840.

¹⁴⁵ Whittaker, *My Life's Battles*; Holyoake, recalled that his pay as a Socialist lecturer was so poor that on one occasion he decided to save money by walking from Sheffield to a speaking engagement in Huddersfield, George Jacob Holyoake, *Rudiments of Public Speaking and Debate: Or hints on the Application of Logic* (London, 1852), pp. 48-9.

itinerary maps shows that destinations were pragmatically arranged in geographical clusters based upon walking distance (see Figs. 10-13).¹⁴⁶ Destinations are on average eight miles (twelve kilometres) apart and therefore it seems probable that the local Chartists, who collectively planned his route, expected him to walk between engagements. As West Riding missionary, Bairstow would have received around two pounds per week from which he would have had to pay travel and subsistence costs.¹⁴⁷ This was in contrast to more prestigious Chartist work which generally included a travel budget.¹⁴⁸ Bairstow, as a rising star on the Chartist stage, was in great demand elsewhere. When speaking further afield his travel expenses would be met by the parties who proffered the invitation. Thus when invited to give a series of lectures during mid-November in the Midlands, his travel expenses from Yorkshire would have permitted third class train travel or a coach journey.¹⁴⁹ Not surprisingly, men like Bairstow, preferred high-profile engagements to less glamorous local meetings.

By 1841 the Manchester & Leeds Railway had pioneered a route across the Pennines following the Calder valley, linking Leeds to Manchester and providing easy access to intermediary centres such as Dewsbury, Huddersfield (Cooper Bridge) and Halifax (Elland).¹⁵⁰ For West Riding lecturers this railway had obvious attractions. George Julian Harney recalled that during his Yorkshire missionary work in 1841 collections made at the end of the meeting sometimes allowed him to take the train to his next destination.¹⁵¹ We know also that David Ross, who served as the West Riding Chartist missionary in 1843, travelled from Leeds to Dewsbury by train as he set out on his tour of the Lancashire textile regions.¹⁵² Yet caution must be exercised. Just because railways existed does not mean they were used by itinerant agitators, particularly for shorter distances. At the very start of railway era, trains for third class passengers were expensive and uncomfortable and

¹⁴⁶ Week 3, Fig. 12, which captures his planned return from the Midlands (presumably by rail to York) is an exception to this pattern.

¹⁴⁷ Based on terms enjoyed by the Durham County Missionary John Deegan, *NS*, 12 September 1840.

¹⁴⁸ NCA missionaries fared slightly better than county missionaries with £1 10 shillings wages per week and 'coach-hire, and one half of any other incidental expenses ... paid to them in addition, by the parties who may request their services', *NS*, 1 August 1841. It is clear from the NCA expenses controversy in 1842, that while travelling as an NCA delegate, Bairstow extensively used the railways, *NS*, 26 November 1842.

¹⁴⁹ In addition to weekday lectures Bairstow preached in Loughborough market place on Sunday 22 November 1840, *NS*, 28 November 1840. It was possible to travel from Leeds via Derby to Leicester by railway in November 1840 by taking a train to Normanton junction, changing there for a train to Derby and from Derby catching a train to Leicester, a route described in detail by Bairstow two years later, *NS*, 26 November 1842, see also Manchester and Leeds Railway timetable, *Leeds Mercury*, 16 January 1841.

¹⁵⁰ Haigh, *Railways in West Yorkshire* p. 10; Martin Bairstow, *The Manchester and Leeds Railway: The Calder Valley Line* (Cleckheaton, 1987).

¹⁵¹ A. R. Schoyen, *The Chartist Challenge: A portrait of George Julian Harney* (London, 1958), p. 105.

¹⁵² Although he appears to have completed the rest of the tour predominantly on foot, *NS* 21 October 1843.

often at inconvenient times. Harney scathingly described third class Yorkshire railway carriages in the early 1840s, in which passengers stood up exposed to the elements and the engine's smoke, as 'pig-pens on wheels'.¹⁵³ Moreover many places in this period were slow to acquire main line connections, or had stations some distance from the centre; for example until 1846 the nearest station to Bradford was Brighouse some seven miles away.¹⁵⁴ Perhaps too, in times of intense political excitement, radical agitators might eschew the railways for more anonymous modes of travel. There is evidence to suggest that station masters sometimes operated as part of the Government's surveillance apparatus. In 1842, the movements of Feargus O'Connor were reported by the Stockport station master to the Mayor of Stockport.¹⁵⁵

Walking had advantages. For Chartist agents, who traded upon their credentials as working men, travelling by foot was important. Walking was 'an almost unmistakable index of poverty' which endowed the itinerant agent with a symbolic connection with the poor, an affinity lacking in higher status travellers who arrived on coach or horseback.¹⁵⁶ As Carl Thompson described it 'the walker [was] engaging in an act of solidarity' and by operating on foot was able to 'pronounce with empirical authority on [the people's] living conditions, their actions and moral state'.¹⁵⁷ Chartist orators could weave personal observation into their speeches, conveying information on trade conditions and radical activity to subsequent audiences on their tour. Walking demanded a healthy constitution and the traveller who depended upon his own strength was symbolically free and independent. The 'manly vigour' and self-reliance of political agents reflected well on their political cause while the ardours of travel underlined their sincerity and conviction. Bairstow used his epic walking feats to impress and endear audiences. During a speech made to a Midlands' audience in 1841, for example, he emphasised the hardships of walking across the 'jagged and towering mountains' of Derbyshire likening them to those

¹⁵³ Schoyen, *Chartist Challenge*, p. 105.

¹⁵⁴ Before Bradford got a station in 1846 travellers disembarked at Brighouse (known then as Brighouse for Bradford) and travelled the last seven miles by coach (one hour journey) or foot. John Thornhill 'All Change': Bradford's through railway schemes', *Bradford Antiquary*, 3rd series, No. 2, (1986) p. 35. Thus when Feargus O'Connor made a triumphant visit to Bradford to celebrate his release from York gaol he arrived at Brighouse station by train and then transferred to a coach pulled by four horses for the last leg of the journey, D. G. Wright, *The Chartist Risings in Bradford* (Bradford, 1987), pp. 27-8.

¹⁵⁵ See unfoliated folder 'Stockport Chartist Papers, 1842' Ref. SH11, Stockport Central Library, Family & Local History Centre. The telegraph, penny post and railway increased Government surveillance of potentially seditious groups and individuals. F. C. Mather, *Public Order in the Age of the Chartists* (Manchester, 1959); F. C. Mather, 'The railways, the electric telegraph and public order during the Chartist period, 1837-48'. *History*, Vol. 38 (1953), 40-53.

¹⁵⁶ Jarvis, *Romantic Writing*, p. 21.

¹⁵⁷ Thompson argues that walking itself was a politicised act: in so far as his walk is gruelling he shares the pain and discomforts of the lower classes. Thompson, *The Suffering Traveller*, pp. 139-40.

of the Alps.¹⁵⁸ On an allegorical level the journey became a metaphor for the wider struggle: the itinerant Chartist, an agent of progress.

It should also be kept in mind that the lecturers were not the only people willing to walk great distances, audiences for radical and reform meetings might also be drawn from surprisingly wide areas.¹⁵⁹ An epic example of mass, long-distance political pedestrianism occurred in 1832, when several thousand working men from Bradford, Halifax, and Huddersfield and the outlying villages and townships accompanied Richard Oastler on the Great Factory Reform ‘pilgrimage’ to York Castle.¹⁶⁰ The Huddersfield contingent, ‘Oastler’s Own’, assembled in Huddersfield market place at dawn on Easter Monday determined to walk there and back to York, a total distance of over ninety miles, to publicise their cause and attend an outdoor public meeting. The weather was atrocious and the men were soaked to the skin, worse still on arrival in York the food ordered for the marchers failed to arrive, yet despite such setbacks, the march was a great success. As the various contingents assembled around the hustings, the sun broke through the clouds and, as food arrived, fatigue gave way to jubilation. The pilgrimage sealed Oastler’s saintly reputation and his integrity was proven by his determination to complete the journey on foot and share in the hardships of his followers.¹⁶¹ It also showed the impact of a visual display of might and the potential of disciplined political organisation: as Cecil Driver points out, the pilgrimage was ‘sheerest melodrama’ which lived long in political memory.¹⁶²

Similarly the recollections of the Chartist and teetotaler, John Bates, demonstrate the willingness of audiences to walk considerable distances to hear radical speeches. In 1838, in order to attend a meeting protesting at Richard Oastler’s dismissal from Fixby Hall, Bates recalled how he and others ‘walked from Queensbury to Rastrick, from Rastrick to Huddersfield, and then back to Queensbury after standing between three and four hours’, a walk of nearly twenty-two miles.¹⁶³ Indeed those disappointed by the failure of Bairstow to keep to his appointments in Keighley and Bingley cited not only the

¹⁵⁸ *Midland Counties Illuminator*, 24 April 1841, cited in Howell, ‘Diffusing the Light of Liberty’ p. 125.

¹⁵⁹ Southall notes that a man attending a Chartist meeting in Sheffield in 1841 was reputed to have walked forty miles from Newark to attend, Southall, ‘Agitate! Agitate! Organize!’ p. 181.

¹⁶⁰ Cecil Driver, *Tory Radical: The Life of Richard Oastler* (Oxford, 1946), chapter XIV. W. R. Croft, *History of the Factory Reform Movement* (Huddersfield, 1888), pp. 59-62.

¹⁶¹ According to Driver when Oastler arrived back at Fixby Hall ‘the skin of his feet peeled off with his stockings’, *Ibid*, p. 161.

¹⁶² *Ibid*, p. 162

¹⁶³ Bradford Central Library: Local studies library, B920 BAT, misc articles on John Bates of Queensbury. See also *John Bates of Queensbury, the veteran reformer: a sketch of his life* (Queensbury, 1895).

expense of hiring a room but also the fact that many people had walked considerable distances to attend.¹⁶⁴ The mobility of both audience and speaker was important for political mobilisation and, as Robert Gammage pointed out, permitted eloquent ‘new men’ like Jonathan Bairstow to build up a following and to rise to prominent positions within the Chartist movement.¹⁶⁵

That Bairstow viewed his West Riding missionary appointment as a springboard to better things is evident in his willingness to accept high profile speaking engagements in preference to his scheduled appointments. Bairstow was ambitious and keen to extend his influence to the Midlands where he aligned himself with the leading radical Thomas Cooper.¹⁶⁶ His tendency to favour speaking engagements in Leicester and Loughborough during his employment as West Riding missionary caused resentment.¹⁶⁷ While Bairstow’s November itinerary accommodated previous engagements in the Midlands with a week’s leave, he was scheduled to return by Monday 23 November to address the York Chartists and the Selby Chartists the following day (Fig. 12). Instead Bairstow prolonged his stay in the Midlands to meet the League lecturer, John Finnigan, in a staged public debate at a Leicester amphitheatre.¹⁶⁸ Bairstow had participated in a heated debate with Finnigan in Ashton-under-Lyne several weeks earlier which had been reported at length in the *Northern Star*.¹⁶⁹ Such encounters were undoubtedly more exhilarating than missionary tours across Yorkshire and were more likely to cement his reputation as a potential leader. Besides personal ambition Bairstow’s failure to follow his itinerary illustrates the tensions between local and regional organisers, the inherent complications of planning tours weeks in advance and the difficulties of communicating changes.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁴ *NS*, 12 December 1840.

¹⁶⁵ Gammage, *History*, p. 210.

¹⁶⁶ Thomas Cooper recalled the assistance he gave to Bairstow in the early 1840s and how he was subsequently betrayed. Cooper, *Life of Thomas Cooper*, p. 250.

¹⁶⁷ His failure to give ‘timely notice’ which could have ‘prevented the inconvenience’ was commented upon by the Keighley Chartists, while the Selby radicals demanded to know ‘Why Mr Bairstow did not visit them on the 24th November, according to promise? Or why if otherwise engaged he did not apprise them?’ *NS*, 12 December 1840.

¹⁶⁸ *NS*, 5 December 1840.

¹⁶⁹ *NS*, 7 November 1840.

¹⁷⁰ The following year his unreliability continued to raise hackles. While Bairstow was engaged as the South Lancashire missionary the Chartists of Newton Heath were furious that he opted to attend a large demonstration in support of Frost, Williams and Jones in Sheffield rather than address them as previously agreed. At the next South Lancashire County Delegates meeting a resolution was passed stipulating that ‘no lecturer be allowed to go to any place, only the one to which he is appointed, without consulting his brother lecturer’, *NS*, 30 January 1841; 16 January 1841.

Septimus Davis, unlike Jonathan Bairstow, does not appear to have acquired much recognition: he is not listed in the standard temperance biographical dictionaries.¹⁷¹ Nor was he operating at a period of great political excitement, when articulate speakers were in great demand. It is likely that he was in the lower echelons of the temperance movement, occupying mainly local or regional posts on an *ad hoc* basis.¹⁷² It is possible that his itinerant public speaking career developed in radical circles and that he moved between movements as and when opportunities arose. Intriguingly, the *Northern Star* reports the activities of an itinerant, mining trade union organiser called Septimus Davis who made extensive speaking tours around Yorkshire in 1844 and 1845. A man bearing the same name also addressed a meeting in Holytown, Lanarkshire in support of the People's Charter in 1849. Given his unusual name it seems likely that they are the same person.¹⁷³

The primary source material for Davis's tour is much richer than that for Bairstow (see Appendix I, Extract 1). In addition to listing places he visited, the printed account of his travels give an insight into the life of an itinerant temperance agent: from long walks in the pouring rain, cold rooms and thinly attended meetings, to crowded halls, processions and temperance bands. It is striking that despite operating nearly two decades later than Bairstow, Davis's itinerary destinations were still clustered within easy walking distance as the weekly maps conclusively show (see Figs. 14-17). For most legs of his tour the next destination was only three or four miles (six kilometres) away.¹⁷⁴ Perhaps the compactness of Davis's tour was in part a reflection of his age. While Bairstow at the time of his tour was in his early 20s and in his prime, from the census records we know that Davis was middle aged and perhaps less capable of walking large distances with a knapsack full of tracts and printed material.¹⁷⁵ The furthest distance in my sample covered by Davis in one day was seven miles (eleven kilometres); Black hill near Muggleswick to Newlands (Fig. 17), hardly the epic hikes endured by the Chartist and Owenite lecturers of the previous generation.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷¹ He does not warrant an entry in Brian Harrison's *Dictionary of British Temperance Biography* (Coventry, 1973). He is however mentioned very briefly in P. T. Winskill, *The Temperance Movement and its workers: a record of the social, moral, religious and political progress* (2 Vols., London, 1892), Vol. II, p. 62.

¹⁷² He later worked as an agent for the Irish Temperance League, *Belfast News-Letter*, 21 October 1862.

¹⁷³ *NS*, January 20 1844; February 3 1844; 18 January 1845; February 8 1845; 30 June 1849.

¹⁷⁴ Week two, Fig. 15, provides a good example. Davis visited Redcar, Marsh, Skelton, Guisborough, Hutton Mines and Newton Roseberry: each town was within 4 miles of the next destination.

¹⁷⁵ The 1861 census records a temperance agent called Septimus Davis who was lodging at a school in Plymouth. His birthplace was given as North Shields and his age as 42.

¹⁷⁶ In week 1 (Fig. 14), another notable distance was travelled by Davis, from Southwick to Swalwell (approximately fifteen miles) yet Davis had two days in which to make this journey.

There were exceptions. Davis's account describes an unusually long walk to Morpeth and a train journey to Tynemouth, yet the very fact that he mentions the long walk and train ride suggests that these were remarkable and not usual daily occurrences.¹⁷⁷ The North East, like the industrialised parts of the West Riding, was amply served by trains in this period.¹⁷⁸ On several occasions, notably during Davis's tour of the ironstone mining areas surrounding Guisborough in the latter part of week 2 (Fig. 15), he appears to have followed the route of a railway line. Guisborough was served by the Middlesbrough & Guisborough railway which, although primarily built to transport minerals, had operated a passenger service since February 1854. It is possible that Septimus Davis took advantage of this service, although it is not mentioned in his report and given the short distances involved and the fact there was only one passenger train a day, it was easier and cheaper to walk.¹⁷⁹ It is probable that Davis, like Bairstow two decades earlier, made pragmatic use of the transport available given the restrictions of time and money. For itinerant agents on wide orbits long-distance train travel was unavoidable, but for those whose tours were more circumspect trains were dispensable.¹⁸⁰

One form of transport which Davis could not have avoided was passenger ferries across the Tyne. During week one (Fig. 14) he lectured on Monday night at Walker Iron Works on the north bank of the Tyne and the following day he lectured in Sheriffs Hill near Gateshead. Several ferries operated across the Tyne at this period primarily to transport workmen engaged in the ship building industries.¹⁸¹ Davis must have used one of these services. As a former union organiser, Davis would have had considerable knowledge of travelling around the industrialised parts of the North East and presumably been able to draw upon networks of friends and contacts. Indeed such contacts and connections may have shaped his route and determined which destinations he chose to visit. The pattern of visits for both week 3 and 4 (Figs. 16 & 17) are not wholly logical

¹⁷⁷ 'Morpeth Oct 18, - in consequence of the long walk from Cambo and the wetness of the day, I did not visit house to house', a distance of almost twelve miles. 'Dec 1, - I went by train to Tynemouth, and visited Cullercoats', see Appendix I, Extract 1.

¹⁷⁸ In Yorkshire and the North East railways developed with the needs of industry rather than passengers in mind and on some lines passenger services were slow to arrive. However, lower middle class tradesmen living in the urbanised North East were certainly using passenger trains for short journeys during the 1840s, G. E. Milburn, *The Diary of John Young: Sunderland Chemist and Methodist Lay Preacher*, Surtees Society, Vol. 196 (Leamington Spa, 1983), pp. 102; 119; 127; 146; 158.

¹⁷⁹ Ken Hoole, *North-Eastern Branch Line Termini* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 65-6.

¹⁸⁰ The cost of third class travel was still an issue at the close of the nineteenth century, see letter from Holyoake (who was chairman of the Travelling Tax Abolition Committee for 20 years) to the editor, *The Times*, 10 March 1899.

¹⁸¹ Frank Manders and Richard Potts, *Crossing the Tyne* (Newcastle, 2001), pp. 85-87.

which suggests that other factors besides transport are at play.¹⁸² Surely a great attraction for the itinerant agent was the flexibility of the work and the ability to arrange tours (to some extent) around friendships and personal circumstance. It is significant that both Davis and Bairstow interrupt their tours with sojourns elsewhere. Davis is described as spending a week with friends at Haydon Bridge while Bairstow's trip to Leicester and Loughborough was perhaps as much about romance as lecturing. The following year Bairstow married Isabella Harris of Loughborough.¹⁸³

The two case studies demonstrate that not much had changed for the regional lecturer by the close of the 1850s. Railways were used but given the regional orbits of such agents, outlying destinations and limited funds, walking remained the primary means of transport. But for better paid middle-class anti-slavery agents, engaged upon national campaigns directed towards urban elites, railways revolutionised their speaking tours. At the start of his itinerant speaking career in 1831 George Thompson was often absent from his wife and family and had to endure gruelling journeys to visit them. In January 1838, for example, his best option when travelling between Newcastle and Edinburgh was the overnight mail coach departing Newcastle at 2.20 am and arriving at 2.00 pm the following day. Thompson's journey was made in winter and one can imagine the discomfort of travelling overnight in an unheated coach.¹⁸⁴ A decade later, Thompson, now MP for Tower Hamlets, was able to travel quite comfortably by train while engaged on business for the National Parliamentary and Financial Reform Association, and often his wife was able to accompany him.¹⁸⁵ Celebrity orators such as Charles Dickens, John Gough and Ralph Waldo Emerson were similarly able to travel quickly and comfortably between many towns and cities by the late 1840s and 1850s.¹⁸⁶

Even if poorly paid regional agents were not regular train travellers, their horizons had been greatly expanded by the momentous changes that occurred within the middle decades of the nineteenth century. The railway boom and the modernising influence of the telegraph and the abolition of the newspaper tax and stamp duty revolutionised the transmission of ideas binding the provinces to the centre and creating a much more

¹⁸² Another explanation would be that the temperance groups he was engaged to visit met on a specific days of the week and therefore he had to time his visits to suit their convenience.

¹⁸³ *NS*, 21 August 1841.

¹⁸⁴ Thompson warned his wife, his arrival time was likely to be disrupted due the state of the roads. REAS/2/1/42, letter sent from Newcastle, 25 January 1838.

¹⁸⁵ REAS/2/2/15, letter sent [c. Mar/Apr] 1849.

¹⁸⁶ Without the railways it is inconceivable that Feargus O'Connor could have addressed such an impressive number of meetings. O'Connor travelled by train where lines existed and by private coach and horses in places not connected by rail, see Southall, 'Agitate! Agitate! Organize!' p. 179.

national culture.¹⁸⁷ Both the newly affordable printed medium and the orators' address accelerated these forces for change. Contemporaries were well aware that they were living through a period of immense transition. The rhetoric used by Henry Vincent in an address to the Early Closing Society in January 1847, which equated railways with progress, was symptomatic of the age:

I never look upon our stupendous railway system extending its mighty arms east, west, north and south, threatening annihilation to time and space, but I see something more than "iron trams" threading their way through the nation, along which man, and cotton, and corn, are propelled through town to town. I read a higher, and a more spiritual meaning in those trams of iron ... I see in that the type of a glorious future, when the principles of human brotherhood shall become a practical reality, knitting the nations closer together; when science shall come down from heaven to bless and hallow the pathway of labour, and cheer the world in its onward progress.¹⁸⁸

Besides transporting celebrity orators and better paid agents, trains also gave the wider population a taste of liberation. Cheap excursion trains allowed great swathes of people to move beyond their immediate localities in search of new experiences.¹⁸⁹ The Great Exhibition (1851) drew train loads of excursionists to the capital to experience a display which emphasised the local (each town, city and region vying with its neighbour on the exhibition stands) while firmly pulling the provinces into the bigger national picture.¹⁹⁰ Politics too was changed. Audiences could now be efficiently shipped in to demonstrate mass political support. The ACLL, for example, was able to attract an audience of 30,000 people to its Wakefield rally in December 1845. The crowds were considerably swelled by the decision of the principal manufacturers in the region to give their operatives the day off and by the provision of cheap trains. A reporter described 'the extraordinary spectacle' to be seen on the railway line: 'at every station, from Todmorden to Horbury the platforms were crowded with human beings'.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁷ For a philosophical examination of the impact of the railway age on perceptions of time and space see Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: trains and travel in the 19th Century* (Oxford, 1980, 1st ed. Germany, 1977). For intriguing account of early rail travel undertaken by the Rev. James Austen, see Deirdre Le Faye, 'By Rail and Road, touring in the North of England in 1837', *NRM Review* (Friends of the National Railway Museum newsletter), (Autumn 2008), pp. 24-5; (Winter 2008/9), pp. 16-18; (Spring 2009), pp. 18-20.

¹⁸⁸ Henry Vincent, *Early Closing Movement: A Lecture delivered on Thursday evening, January, 1847 by Henry Vincent Esq., at Finsbury Chapel, Finsbury Circus* (London, 1847). For the impact of railways on language see Simmons, *Victorian Railway*, pp. 192; 309-312.

¹⁸⁹ For more information on excursionists see Susan Major, 'Mobilising the 'unwieldy mass': early railway excursion crowds (1840-1860)', (forthcoming PhD thesis, University of York).

¹⁹⁰ The principal citizens and operatives of Bradford formed organising committee at the start of 1850 to coordinate local displays and exhibition, *BO*, 17 January 1850; 24 January 1850; 24 January 1850; 4 April 1850; 18 April 1850. Jack Simmons, *The Victorian Railway* (London, 1991), pp. 274-276.

¹⁹¹ 'The third class carriages were crammed to bursting point, some passengers in desperation boarding while the train was still in motion to ensure a seat – many left at the platform and the train company was obliged to

How did the itinerant lecturer fit into this rapidly changing environment? Certainly the mechanics of lecturing were greatly simplified by the penny post, the telegram and the branch line.¹⁹² It was possible for agents in the field to travel greater distances and communicate with their paymasters and key local organisers on route with much greater ease and efficiency. Itinerant paid lecturers during this period also became more professional as increasing number of reforming, charitable and business groups sought to employ travelling agents who could both organise and speak: a fact which allowed gifted speakers to move between movements (as discussed in chapter six). Demand for printed material, stimulated in the mid 1850s by the abolition of stamp duty, rising literacy rates and the repeal of paper tax did not erode the role of the itinerant speaker; both remained important mediums for transmitting and carrying political ideas into small towns and villages.¹⁹³ Indeed print stimulated interest in lectures as those reading about a controversial subject might be encouraged to attend a lecture on the same topic and *vice versa*.¹⁹⁴

Conclusion

It is notable that, despite rapid technological changes, my two case studies reveal significant continuities between regional itinerant lecturing in the early 1840s and late 1850s. At the start and end of my period regional, paid agents predominantly travelled on foot, between logically clustered destinations and relied on supporters to organise meetings and hire rooms in advance of their arrival. While high profile leaders might profitably rush from one side of the country to another addressing large, rapturous crowds, the regional agents' slower progress was perhaps more important in fostering and sustaining a geographically dispersed membership. Here a slow pace could be advantageous. Agents who travelled by foot or on the back of a wagon had the advantage of being able to strike up casual conversations, to make chance acquaintances and to learn first-hand from the local population. The itinerant agent was the master of face-to-face communication.¹⁹⁵ For

send its carriages back for a second trip – the reporter says he heard to say that 4,000 train tickets alone were sold at Cooper Bridge', *BO*, 18 December 1845.

¹⁹² Simmons, *Victorian Railway*, especially chapter nine, 'mails and telecommunications'.

¹⁹³ Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture*, pp. 234-5. For a discussion of the repeal of the paper tax in 1861 and how the cost of paper production fell in the nineteenth century see Philip Gaskell, *A New Introduction to Bibliography*, Oxford (1972), pp. 228-230. For a full account of the radical fight against the 'taxes on knowledge' see C. D. Collett, *History of Taxes on Knowledge* (ed.), G. J. Holyoake (London, 1899).

¹⁹⁴ An issue discussed further in chapter four.

¹⁹⁵ From accounts left by Gammage, Whittaker and other itinerant lecturers there is a strong impression that agents were charming and persuasive individuals schooled in the psychology of persuasion. Maehl, *Robert Gammage*, Holyoake, *Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life*; Whittaker, *My Life's Battles*.

agents who were naturally out-going and gregarious much good could be achieved by a slow and meandering approach to travel. Thomas Whittaker described how his journey on foot to London took over six months as he stopped frequently along the route holding temperance meetings and making friends and converts.¹⁹⁶ The railway revolutionised the pace of travel for the wealthy traveller, eroding the older style of interactive journeying. So much so that Richard Oastler claimed, in a vehement outburst against the railways, that the traveller was insulated against the places through which he travelled and had little opportunity to observe and learn:

Formerly a journey was a lesson, a school, a lecture – we were always learning something everywhere, and a community of feeling, so necessary to the strength and safety of a nation, was fostered and established.¹⁹⁷

By the 1860s few people would have concurred with Oastler's sentiments. Yet paradoxically, in an age characterised by speed and progress, the radical pedestrian tour remained during the Chartist era central to the dissemination of political propaganda. The charismatic speaker, who carried ideas from one town to the next, *and* learnt from his journey, was a crucial mechanism for political mobilisation.

¹⁹⁶ Whittaker, *My Life's Battles*, p. 241.

¹⁹⁷ Cited in Harold Speak and Jean Forrester, *The West Riding of Yorkshire in 1842* (Reading, 1974), p. 16.

Chapter three: ‘Free and fair debate?’: The etiquette of public political discussion

One of the most potent agents of democratic power and change is the public meeting – whether addressed by one speaker in the form of a lecture – or by several speaking to resolutions. (Ernest Jones, August 1851).¹

Popular political oratory was governed by protocol and etiquette. This chapter explores the extent to which public meetings and lectures were a democratic space where ideas could be freely raised, contested and public opinion formed. Of particular interest are the concepts of ‘fair-play’ and the ideas surrounding ‘character’ and ‘manly conduct’. Drawing upon an empirical study of the *Bradford Observer* between 1835 and 1860 (see Appendix II), the ways in which itinerant and resident orators used public meetings, lectures and debates to mobilise public opinion in the localities will be examined. Besides considering the etiquette and protocols governing public meetings (such as the role of the chairman and use of resolutions), the mechanics of convening meetings will also be explored. The very way in which a meeting was convened could endorse, or conversely compromise, its open and democratic nature. In addition to attending public meetings and delivering lectures in provincial towns and villages, itinerant agents also began to meet their rivals in set-piece public discussions before large and curious audiences.² Such encounters were governed by clearly defined terms that were rooted within popular notions of ‘gentlemanly’ conduct and ‘fair-play’.

The final section of this chapter incorporates a case study of the Northern Reform Union (NRU) (1858-1862), which offers a useful insight into how public meeting and speaking strategies had changed by the end of the Chartist period. The NRU illustrates how, after the collapse of Chartism as a mass movement, radical meetings increasingly took the form of an indoor, town hall meeting addressed by the movement’s leadership rather than freelance missionaries or local enthusiasts. The petition too changed. After the ridicule heaped upon the last monster Chartist petition (1848), the NRU favoured a series

¹ Ernest Jones, ‘The Economy of Public Meetings’, article in *Notes to the People*, Vol. 1, pp. 291-5, reproduced in John Saville, *Ernest Jones: selections from the Writings and Speeches of Ernest Jones*, (London, 1952), p. 115.

² Edward Royle notes that while the debate had no hope of convincing partisans it provided a wonderful opportunity to broadcast one’s propaganda to the widest possible audience. Royle, *Victorian Infidels*, p. 205.

of small petitions based primarily upon a single meeting. This strategy not only distanced the NRU from Chartist excesses but ensured that Parliament was assailed with a steady stream of petitions urging parliamentary reform from towns and villages across the North East. A diverse range of pressure groups during the late Chartist period similarly convened meetings for the purpose of petitioning Parliament, which suggests that the public meeting remained at the heart of grassroots political culture.

The monster outdoor rally was undoubtedly an eye-catching feature of the early radical platform, yet such gatherings were sporadic and untypical.³ Most political oratory, even at the start of the Chartist era, was delivered before modest audiences often in the context of an indoor lecture or public meeting. By the early 1840s indoor public discussions on political, social and religious issues, whether at set-piece debates between rival orators, or at lectures or public meetings, were an established feature of urban life. The properly convened and chaired indoor meeting had greater impact and authority than speeches made in the open air. Besides practical considerations such as acoustics and shelter from the weather, meetings held indoors in the context of a chaired public meeting were more conducive to rational debate and meaningful audience participation. Partly this was due to the limited audibility of outdoor speeches, which encouraged speakers to favour rallying slogans over closely reasoned political arguments, and partly because 'public' meetings convened by the magistrates or town constable endorsed the speaker, the cause and the audience with a certain authority. Even more importantly both speakers and audiences participating in indoor meetings were more readily governed by shared notions of behaviour and etiquette: an important consideration in an age where political discussions could be heated and boisterous.

On 6 December 1850 a particularly rowdy meeting took place at the Bradford Temperance Hall. The meeting had been convened with the contentious objective of formulating a town memorial denouncing papal aggression. In a move to keep out Bradford's sizeable population of Irish Catholic labourers the organisers had deliberately called the meeting for 11 o'clock on a weekday morning. But this strategy was thwarted when David Lightowler, a leading Bradford Chartist, led a large group of Irish workers into the meeting before himself occupying a place on the platform. The uninvited Irish

³ Yet the mass platform has perhaps attracted a disproportionate amount of attention from historians. For example, Belchem, '1848: Feargus O'Connor and the Collapse of the Mass Platform', and John Saville *1848: the British State and the Chartist Movement* (Cambridge, 1987).

objected to the chairman proposed by the requisitionists,⁴ an objection that was overruled by those in charge of the meeting. Ignoring all protocol, the anti-Catholic faction refused to give way to calls for a new chair to be elected. Nor would they agree to a motion to reconvene the meeting at a later hour when the working classes would be free to attend, despite this request being supported by a majority of those present. Tempers were further inflamed when the chair prevented Lightowler and his followers from speaking on the grounds that the meeting was private not public, reading aloud a requisition to this effect four times over the growing hubbub. Lightowler and the Irish contingent demanded the right to speak claiming that the meeting was indeed public and that, as inhabitants of Bradford, they had a right to be heard.⁵ In the words of the *Bradford Observer*:

A more perfect pantomime than the “moving” and “seconding,” &c, it is impossible to imagine; - the Babel was truly hideous. Our friends who stayed at home will read in our columns ten times more that they would have heard had they been at the meeting, very few sentences, indeed, being audible beyond the immediate vicinity of the platform. The most stentorian efforts were drowned in the universal hubbub, which included every variation of the dismal utterance that throats, hands, feet, sticks, and benches could produce.⁶

There is no denying that during the Chartist era public meetings convened to discuss controversial political issues at times erupted into chaos, and sometimes violence. Partisans, as in the case of the Bradford Irish labourers, attended their adversary’s meetings in droves and literally drowned out their opponents and prevented discussion. Yet such behaviour was roundly condemned and it would be a mistake to see it as typical. Contemporary sources highlight a very real sense that public meetings and lectures which degenerated into riots brought shame and dishonour to a town or city’s sense of civic pride. This sentiment was abundantly evident in the *Bradford Observer* condemnation of both Lightowler and the anti-Catholic faction as ‘a dishonour to the cause they espouse’ and a ‘slander and a libel on [Bradford’s] ... public reputation’.⁷ Both parties were to blame for the disorder that December morning. By calling a meeting when working men were

⁴ The term ‘requisitionists’ denotes the people who signed their name in support of calling (or requisitioning) a public meeting. The requisition was a formal document comprising preamble setting out the objectives of the meeting followed by signatories. It was typically sent to the local magistrates or town constable in advance of any public meeting. See also footnote 54 below.

⁵ *BO*, 12 December 1850.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

unlikely to attend the requisitionists were playing fast and loose with the concept of a 'public' discussion and town memorial. For their part the aggrieved Irish, when denied the right to participate, drowned out attempts at rational discussion. Ultimately, as the *Bradford Observer's* editorial claimed, the chaos was caused by the way in which the organisers failed to distinguish between private and public meeting etiquette and the subsequent 'misunderstandings and jealousies' that were caused by this 'irregularity of arrangement'.⁸ Rather than being a typical public meeting of the era, the anti-papal aggression debacle represents exactly the opposite of what a properly functioning public meeting should be.

That is not to deny that itinerant lecturers at time faced great hostility and harassment, whether in the shape of physical assault by hired mobs or even prosecution and imprisonment by the state. Besides mob tactics and infiltration of public meetings, other barriers to free discussion included: calling public meetings either surreptitiously or at short notice to prevent opponents from attending; ticketing and hiring hefty doormen to keep out opposing factions; holding meetings at times which were inconvenient to those who had to earn their living; refusal by the local magistrates to sanction a public meeting and denial of access to town halls or public buildings; and pressure exerted upon the landlords of pubs or proprietors of theatres not to hire rooms to itinerant radical speakers. Of all these barriers perhaps the most significant was the legislative restrictions governing public political discussion imposed by the state. The Seditious Meetings Act, and other laws which sought to control and sanction political meetings, will be considered in this chapter along with the use of police spies and shorthand reporters. The people's constitutional right to petition the Crown and Parliament with their grievances, a privilege that was closely linked to the customary right of public assembly and discussion, will also be examined.

Henry Jephson, writing in 1892, presented the public meeting as a very necessary part of democratic government enabling the views of the people to reach Parliament when other avenues (such as the press) were insufficient.⁹ The political platform painted by Jephson was a place of 'reason and conviction' whose rituals and procedures dissipated tensions rather than aggravating them. Indeed, according to Jephson, 'listening to public speakers,

⁸ The *Observer* not only condemned the organisers for going ahead with the meeting after the mayor had refused to endorse it but also supported the right of Lightowler to speak and propose an amendment, *Ibid.*

⁹ Jephson, *Platform*, Vol. II, p. 576.

and assenting to resolutions, and [taking part] in a Platform meeting [was] in itself usually sufficient vent to public ill-humour without proceeding to acts of violence'.¹⁰ Jephson's view of the platform as a constitutional barometer of public opinion and a civilising orderly force has fallen out of favour. In more recent years the historiography of the public meeting has been skewed by a fascination with the hustings and electioneering rituals. But the hustings were a very specific form of political meeting and, given the infrequency of elections in the mid-nineteenth century, not representative of local political culture. Consequently, historians such as Frank O'Gorman, James Vernon, and Jon Lawrence have tended to overlook the ways in which local political culture strove to be democratic and instead focused upon disorder.¹¹ James Vernon's book, *Politics and the People*, for example, describes how political meetings often degenerated into a cacophony of noise, with opposing factions each trying to drown out their opponent with heckles, jeers and hisses.¹² Jon Lawrence's work on elections similarly emphasises the unruly and irreverent nature of public political debate.¹³ While this was certainly true of the hustings, historians have paid much less attention to meetings that were not specifically tied to elections or the ways in which the majority of those attending political meetings aspired to 'fair-play'. Indeed, it is striking how many newspaper reports in the Chartist period praised audiences for their decorum and the speakers for their manners and conduct.

Early nineteenth century radical culture, as depicted in Iain McCalman's *Radical Underworld*, was bawdy and deeply unrespectable.¹⁴ Radical political journalism, typified by William Cobbett or the pamphlets issued by Richard Oastler, savaged political opponents in the language of Grub Street. James Acland's unstamped newspapers, the *Bristolian* and the *Hull Portfolio*, in the late 1820s and early 1830s similarly operated within an older political culture of ribald gossip and salacious attack; in Acland's case earning him five prison terms for libel.¹⁵ The *Northern Star* by comparison was remarkably restrained. Just as the *Northern Star* eschewed older forms of crude political satire and caricature in favour of a more serious political tone, Chartist, Owenite and League

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 580.

¹¹ Frank O'Gorman, 'Campaign Rituals and Ceremonies: the social meaning of elections in England 1780-1860', *Past and Present*, 1992, Vol. 135, 79-115.

¹² Vernon, *Politics and the People*, pp. 123-5.

¹³ Jon Lawrence, *Electing our Masters: The Hustings in British Politics from Hogarth to Blair* (Oxford, 2009).

¹⁴ Iain McCalman, *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries, and Pornographers in London, 1795 – 1840* (Oxford, 1993).

¹⁵ For more on James Acland and the libel laws see p. 204.

lecturers made a great deal of their gentlemanly approach to political discussion. By behaving with restraint, dignity and decorum and minutely observing the rules of engagement, they emphasised the morality of their cause. Perhaps then radicalism's desire to be taken seriously was characterised by its devotion to fair-play, decorum and constitutional procedure during public political discussion (or more cynically, by appearing to follow the rules).¹⁶

While the middle and upper classes feared outbreaks of revolutionary protest, an enduring feature of popular radicalism in the Chartist era was its devotion to constitutional procedure: a dedication apparent in the rituals and protocols of calling meetings and regulating political discussion.¹⁷ Chartism was minutely concerned with governing its own practices and, at a local, regional and national level, sought to be as 'democratic in its workings as the principles of it are democratic in their nature'.¹⁸ This preoccupation shows continuities with late eighteenth century radicalism. The London Corresponding Society, for example, held its debates 'in an ordered manner according to strict rules of conduct'.¹⁹ That Chartism sought to work within the framework of the constitution was evident in the six points which were primarily concerned with overhauling rather than disbanding parliamentary procedure. As Miles Taylor has shown the People's Charter was 'from first till last ... an indictment of the new voting system introduced in 1832'.²⁰

Chartism, unlike the free trade, Owenite and temperance movements, did at times flirt with the potential of ulterior measures and physical violence. Yet arguably the more threatening Chartist strategies of drilling, exclusive dealing and the sacred month should be seen as acts of desperation, pursued when constitutional measures, such as the three monster petitions, were ignored and disdained.²¹ The popular slogan 'peaceably if we may, forcibly if we must', significantly puts peaceably first: 'forcibly' for most Chartists

¹⁶ As discussed below on pages 94-5 and 237-8 Chartists routinely packed the meetings of their political enemies and did not always follow the etiquette of fair play. Even William Lovett was not above bending the rules, see Yeo, 'Some Practices and Problems of Chartist Democracy', p. 375, note 4.

¹⁷ See for example, *Rules and Regulations of the General Convention of the industrious classes* (London, 1839), which outlines the duties of the Chairman and other officers and delegates.

¹⁸ Yeo, 'Some Practices and Problems of Chartist Democracy', p. 347.

¹⁹ H T Dickinson, *British Radicalism and the French Revolution, 1789-1815* (Oxford, 1985), p. 19.

²⁰ Miles Taylor, 'The Six Points: Chartism and the Reform of Parliament', in Owen Ashton, Robert Fyson and Stephen Roberts (ed.), *The Chartist Legacy* (Rendlesham, 1999), p. 11.

²¹ James Epstein has emphasised that in the 1830s and 1840 radicalism was committed to historical precedent and constitutionalism, even justifying the people's right to arm as being vested in the authority of 1688 Bill of Rights. James A. Epstein, 'The constitutional idiom: radical reasoning, rhetoric and action in early nineteenth-century England', *Journal of Social History*, 23 (1990), 553-74.

was a rhetorical flourish, which was never seriously intended. The extent to which the movement was constitutionally-minded is demonstrated by Chartism's enduring commitment to petitioning. Paul Pickering is surely correct in stressing that 'the typical Chartist did not sharpen pikes, he collected signatures'.²²

Free speech and the constitution

Travelling political lecturers could operate only within a political climate which permitted, however grudgingly, liberty of speech and freedom of assembly. During the Jacobin unrest of the late eighteenth century and the excitement of the Peterloo years, successive Governments passed repressive legislation which threatened to stifle and curtail such liberties. While legislation limited the circulation of political literature and imposed draconian penalties for those using political meetings and organisations to foment political disorder, it is significant that the state did not seek to forbid the right of public assembly entirely.²³ Indeed Lord John Russell, at a speech delivered in Liverpool in October 1838, supported the people's right to free discussion on the grounds that 'free discussion ... elicited truth. They had a right to meet'.²⁴ His sentiments, which would shortly be tested to the limits by the Chartists, reflected a genuine deep-felt attachment to notions of English liberty and a dislike of continental, authoritarian styles of government.²⁵ After the failed Newport uprising around 500 Chartist were serving prison sentences, and a similar spate of mass arrests followed in the aftermath of the plug plot disturbances in the summer of 1842 and presentation of the last great petition in April 1848.²⁶ Yet most of these arrests were concerned with riot and disorder: only a handful of high profile leaders were charged with uttering seditious speech at meetings.²⁷ Indeed revisionist historians have claimed that while the Sedition Acts remained on the statute books they primarily worked as a deterrent. The criminal law theorist, Leon Radzinowicz, argued that the Government's toleration of

²² Paul A. Pickering, 'And Your petitioners &c': Chartist petitioning in Popular Politics 1838-1848, *English Historical Review*, Vol. 116, issue 2 (2001), p. 380.

²³ Treasonable & Seditious Practices Act (1795); The Seditious Meeting Act (1795); The Seditious Societies Act (1799) and Sidmouth's Six Acts (1819). Robin Handley 'Public Order, Petitioning and Freedom of Assembly', *Journal of Legal History*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1986, pp. 128-9.

²⁴ Cited in Leon Radzinowicz, 'New Departures in maintaining public order in the face of Chartist disturbances', *Cambridge Law Journal* (1960), Vol. 18, p. 51.

²⁵ The extent to which Chartism was repressed by the state is disputed. Left-wing historians like Dorothy Thompson and John Saville, have emphasised state repression, while those on the right point to the Government's restraint. Thompson, *The Chartists* and Saville, *1848*. Radzinowicz, 'New Departures'.

²⁶ Chase, *Chartism*, pp. 150-1; 226-7; 326-7.

²⁷ For example, Ernest Jones was tried for sedition based on the short hand report of a police spy who recorded the address he gave at Bishop Bonners Fields in June 1848, Taylor, *Ernest Jones*, pp. 110-120.

political criticism during the turbulent Chartist years was remarkable.²⁸ Not only was the Lord Chief Justice able to persuade the Cabinet to commute the death sentences pronounced upon the Newport martyrs to transportation, the Whig Government did not use the full force of law to uproot Chartist organisational structures.²⁹ Radzinowicz, however, underestimates the impact of the petty repression by local magistrates and the disruptive nature of arrests, trials and imprisonments, which involved Chartist activists in ‘time consuming and morale-sapping legal proceedings’.³⁰

During the early Chartist years it was the magistrates in the localities who cried out for Government repression. The Home Office was bombarded by letters from local magistrates fearful that the Chartists were mobilising in their area. Sir Charles Napier, the Commander-in-Chief of the army in the north of England, became increasingly frustrated at the frequent requests for troops and inflated accounts of Chartist disturbances.³¹ Part of this over reaction was due to the uncertainty over the legal position of free assembly and speech, and, in particular, what constituted a seditious meeting.³² In response to this uncertainty, as Chartist meetings grew in numbers and their tone became increasingly provocative, the Home Secretary, Lord John Russell, was moved to insert a notice in the *Justice of the Peace* in August 1839, which clarified for magistrates the definition of a seditious meeting.³³

To hold a meeting for the purpose of formulating a petition expressing political grievances was perceived to be an unalienable constitutional right and one of the few avenues for redress open to the un-enfranchised.³⁴ Petitioning, as Dorothy Thompson notes, was ‘the oldest form of peaceful political action available to the non-electors’.³⁵ The anti-slavery movement, from the late eighteenth century, used the petition as a pretext for

²⁸ Jennifer Mori, *William Pitt and the French Revolution, 1785-1795* (New York, 1997), especially pp. 252-5. Radzinowicz, ‘*New Departures*’, p. 52.

²⁹ Sir Charles Napier commented on the leniency shown during 1839-40: ‘Half the land has been openly in arms and not a drop of blood spilt on the scaffold’, *Ibid*, p. 69.

³⁰ Chase, *Chartism*, p. 85.

³¹ Radzinowicz noted Napier’s frustration with the local magistracy who called for the troops ‘on the slightest pretence’, Radzinowicz, ‘*New Departures*’, p. 75.

³² Magistrates were still asking the Home Office for advice on prosecutions for seditious speech in 1848, see Saville *1848*, pp. 141-2. For a legal definition of seditious assembly see Sir Sebag Shaw and Judge E. Dennis, *The Law of Meetings: their conduct and procedure* (Plymouth, 1947, 5th ed., 1979), pp. 10-11.

³³ Thompson, *Chartists*, p. 70.

³⁴ Petitioning, unlike the abstract customary right of assembly and free speech, enjoyed constitutional protection under the 1689 Bill of Rights. Handley ‘Public Order, Petitioning and Freedom of Assembly’, pp. 142-7.

³⁵ Thompson, *Chartists*, p. 57. Handley ‘Public Order, Petitioning and Freedom of Assembly’, p. 138.

convening countless public meetings to garner publicity for its cause; so much so that the gathering and presentation of anti-slavery petitions to Parliament became ‘an elaborate ceremony for the creation and expression of public opinion’ and ‘a symbol of the people mobilised’.³⁶ By the 1830s the petition was widely used by reform groups. Between 1838 and 1843 alone, a total of 94,000 petitions were delivered to Parliament.³⁷ Petitioning had the advantage of stimulating grass-roots organisation and provided itinerant lecturers and local organisers with a specific task.³⁸ Moreover, the right of signing a petition was also prized as a political act open to the disenfranchised.³⁹ Part-printed petition sheets made the job less onerous, and for organisations with few resources collecting petitions kept excitement and interest high in the localities. The actual presentation of the petition also offered opportunities for spectacle and display, as the Chartists were well aware when delivering their successive monster petitions.⁴⁰ From the language used by petitioners it is clear that petitions were intended for a larger audience than Parliament, and reform bodies naturally sought newspaper coverage to extend impact. January was a popular month for petitions primarily because more newspaper column space was available during the parliamentary recess.⁴¹

After 1839, ostensibly owing to the vast amount of petitions received by Parliament, the House prohibited all debate on the presentations of petitions as ‘its continuance became incompatible with good government’.⁴² Despite the fact that Chartist, temperance and free trade movements could no longer rely upon petitioning as a mechanism for serious parliamentary debate there was no marked decline in petitioning, which suggests that reform groups valued the petition for other reasons.⁴³ Aside from stimulating organisation and publicity, the petitions’ most significant role was to legitimise public assembly. The editor of the *Northern Star*, William Hill, told his readers that petitioning was a right which should be prized by Britons as ‘it legalises our meetings, and

³⁶ Charles Tilly, *Popular Contention in Great Britain, 1753-1834* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995), pp. 357- 360. Seymour Drescher, ‘Public Opinion and the Destruction of British Colonial Slavery’, in *Walvin Slavery and British Society*, especially pp. 25-30.

³⁷ Prior to 1850 the Corn Laws generated the most petitions, Pickering, ‘And Your petitioners &c’ p. 369.

³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 380.

³⁹ Pickering, ‘And Your petitioners &c’, p. 376.

⁴⁰ Chase, *Chartism*, pp. 73; 205-6; 302.

⁴¹ Peter Fraser, ‘Public Petitioning and Parliament before 1832, *History*, Vol. XLVI, (1961), pp. 207-8.

⁴² Thomas Erskine May, *The Constitutional History of England since the Accession of George Third 1760-1860* (2 Vols., Boston, 1862) Vol. 1, p. 417. See also Colin Leys, ‘Petitioning in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries’ *Political Studies*, Vol. III (1955), pp. 45-64.

⁴³ See p. 115 below.

gives assurances of safety in our attempts to spread our principles'.⁴⁴ Indeed for radical groups operating on the edges of legality the petition itself was far less important than the pretext for a legitimate public meeting. As a speaker at a Halifax Chartist meeting in January 1838 put it, 'they had no confidence in the success of the present petition' and yet they continued to meet to petition as it was the 'only constitutional mode' open to them.⁴⁵

Such was the conviction that political meetings held openly with the professed purpose of organising petitions were legal and constitutional, several delegates at the 1839 Chartist Convention made their support conditional on the body remaining a unit for co-ordinating a monster petition rather than acting as an alternative Parliament or as a national organizing body.⁴⁶ The 'Jacobin posturings' of physical force advocates like George Julian Harney was viewed with distrust by many delegates, who sought to reform, not overthrow, the existing constitution.⁴⁷ Indeed the Chartist leadership during the first Convention took great pains to remain openly constitutional and operate within the boundaries of the law. Hence delegates to the 1839 Chartist Convention were elected at open public meetings, observers and newspaper reporters were allowed to attend its deliberations, and the Convention sought professional advice on the legality of sending out Convention missionaries.⁴⁸ Similarly the painstaking deliberations on the structure of the National Charter Association in 1840-1 were to avoid falling foul of the Corresponding Societies Act (1799), which made it illegal to form local societies that were branches of a national society or to communicate via correspondence or exchange of delegates.⁴⁹

Alongside petitioning the Chartist movement placed great importance on the public meeting as a mechanism for influencing public opinion and countering political ignorance. The 1839 *Manifesto of the General Convention of the Industrious Classes* advocated simultaneous public meetings to be held across the land for the purpose of petitioning the Queen. Yet, as the petition was complete by this time, these meetings were primarily a means of addressing the people on the aims and direction of the Chartist Convention.⁵⁰ The

⁴⁴ Pickering, 'And Your petitioners &c', p. 375.

⁴⁵ Thompson, *The Early Chartists* (London, 1971), p. 69.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 64.

⁴⁷ According to Epstein most delegates regarded such behaviour as being 'inimical to the cause of British freedom', Epstein, 'Constitutional Idiom', p. 563.

⁴⁸ Yeo, 'Some practices and problems', pp. 360-7. Chase, *Chartism*, pp. 58-69. Leon Radzinowicz also notes that the Chartists avoided activities liable to prosecution, Radzinowicz 'New Departures', p. 52.

⁴⁹ Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, p. 675.

⁵⁰ The manifesto set out eight specific points which were to be submitted to the assembled people, William Lovett, *Manifesto of the General Convention of the Industrious Classes* (London, 1839), pp. 7-8.

National Charter Association's (NCA) plan of organisation (1840) also emphasised the use of public meetings to spread the aims of Chartism by encouraging its members to:

attend all public Political Meetings, and there, either by moving amendments, or by other means, enforce a discussion of our rights and claims, so that none may remain in ignorance of what we want, nor have an opportunity of propagating or perpetuating political ignorance or delusion.⁵¹

This recommendation, while encouraging Chartists to adopt constitutional means of being heard at a public meeting, did not rule out less conventional ways of making their views known. The vagueness of the conjoiner 'by other means' was perhaps deliberate, allowing Chartists in several localities to adopt the less than democratic practice of deliberately disrupting the meetings of the ACLL and those held by the anti-slavery movement.⁵²

Convening meetings and gathering an audience

Formal public meetings, unlike lectures called by itinerant speakers at short notice, were convened by a complex process of negotiation with local government officers responsible for maintaining order; generally either the local magistrates or the town constable.⁵³ Typically the intention to hold a meeting would be announced a week or so in advance and a requisition, signed by as many people as possible, would be sent to the magistrates requesting permission.⁵⁴ On receipt of a requisition it was the magistrates or constables who were ostensibly responsible for convening the meeting. The origins of these elaborate procedures lay in the gagging acts of the 1795 and the Six Acts passed in the wake of Peterloo, all of which imposed stringent conditions on political discussion. The Seditious Meetings Act (1795), for example, held that all meetings of more than fifty persons had to be authorised by the local magistrates and that prior notice had to be given of the time, place and purpose of the meeting signed by a minimum of seven local householders. Technically, throughout the 1840s, rooms used for political lectures had

⁵¹ *NS*, 1 August 1840. Chase, *Chartism*, pp. 71-2.

⁵² Brown, 'Chartists and the Anti-Corn Law League', 342-71.

⁵³ See *NS*, 15 February 1840, which describes how, in February 1840, the Constable of Skircoat, refused to convene a meeting requested by local Chartists. County meetings were formally convened by requisitioning the High Sheriff.

⁵⁴ The highest profile signature would generally be at the top of the list and requisitions were commonly announced in the local press. The *Bradford Observer* noted when S. C. Lister was first to sign for a public meeting to debate the Municipal Corporation Reform Bill, that 'with so good a commencement the signatures rapidly accumulated', *BO*, 6 August 1835. Requisitions sometimes bore similarities to petitions. See, for example, a requisition signed by 1,600 inhabitants sent to the Huddersfield Town Constable requesting that he call a public meeting to consider the question of free trade, *BO*, 4 December 1845.

first to be licensed by two magistrates.⁵⁵ Although this legislation was not routinely enforced, the protocols introduced for calling ‘authorised’ political discussion endured, serving to underline the legitimacy of a meeting or, conversely, the political marginalisation of those denied the privilege by local oligarchies.⁵⁶

The process of gathering signatures and applying to the magistrates for permission might take several weeks and was thus not suited to the itinerant lecturer, unless invited by resident activists to participate in local political discussion. A letter sent by Ebenezer Elliott, requesting that the illustrious League lecturer Sidney Smith address working men at Sheffield Town Hall, illustrates how itinerant speakers were at times limited by the requisitioning process. Elliott noted that he had delayed replying to Smith’s letter for several days ‘in the hope that a requisition from our artisans for a public meeting might appear in this day’s paper’.⁵⁷ Even when itinerant lecturers had been specifically invited, objections could potentially be raised to prevent a non-resident from speaking. While the *Bradford Observer* gives plenty of examples of itinerant speakers being allowed to address local public meetings, it is significant that they spoke only after the permission of the meeting was requested and obtained - presumably, had their presence been against the collective mood of the meeting, the itinerant speaker could not have insisted on his right to be heard.⁵⁸ As the requisitioning process was so cumbersome and time-consuming itinerant lecturers either relied on local activists to organise signed requisitions prior to their arrival or, more commonly, they called their meetings by placard or via the bellman. Indeed alongside the formal channels authorising political meetings, customary mechanisms for gathering the people to hear announcements and speeches continued.

From time immemorial meetings were customarily announced by the ringing of a bell.⁵⁹ The town crier or bellman, in towns and villages across the country, performed a crucial communicative role. His announcements on a wide range of issues from civic

⁵⁵ Martin Hewitt, ‘Ralph Waldo Emerson, George Dawson, and the Control of the Lecture Platform in Mid-Nineteenth Century Manchester’, *Nineteenth Century Prose*, Vol. 25 (1998), p. 2.

⁵⁶ The attendance of a town constable or mayor at a political meeting was considered quite a coup, for example, at a dinner to mark anniversary of the Dewsbury Radical Association (attended by O’Connor) the High Constable attended and sat on the top table with O’Connor and Pitkeithley – the constable was toasted and displayed as evidence of the righteousness of Chartism, *NS*, 28 September 1839.

⁵⁷ ACLL letter book, f. 287, 11 Nov 1839.

⁵⁸ Samuel Kydd, for example, was permitted to address a public meeting as was G. J. Holyoake, but both men spoke by popular consent. Holyoake specifically thanked the chair for his courtesy in allowing himself, ‘a stranger to Bradford’, to speak, *BO*, 21 November 1850; 2 May 1850.

⁵⁹ Shaw and Dennis, *Law of Meetings*, p. 66.

notices and stolen property to proclaiming the arrival of an itinerant speaker, were accompanied by a noisy ringing of a bell to capture attention of those passing by. The services of the local bellman could be bought for a few pence and, combined with extensive posting of placards and handbills, his verbal announcements provided itinerant speakers with an important entry into a new locality. For residents without basic literacy the town crier's announcement were vital sources of information.⁶⁰ Contemporary reports of political meetings and autobiographical accounts of itinerant lecturers illustrate the importance of crying a meeting, which makes it all the more surprising that the town crier has been largely overlooked by cultural and political historians.⁶¹ Town criers, as local government employees, were not neutral. They might refuse to call a meeting, either because they personally disliked the topic or due to pressure from their political paymasters. Chartist, temperance and free trade lecturers all at times complained that the town crier had withheld his services.⁶²

One way around this problem was for itinerant speakers to carry their own bell or rattle. The temperance advocate, Thomas Whittaker, was probably the first temperance speaker to carry his own rattle, a sound which before long became closely identified with the temperance lecturer.⁶³ The Miner's Association lecturer, Thomas Ramsey while touring colliery villages similarly summoned miners to his meetings with the aid of a corn crake.⁶⁴ More flamboyant speakers combined noise with visual displays. The arrival of the Bradford temperance lecturer, Thomas Worsnop,⁶⁵ was accompanied by the noise of a rattle, the spectacle of an unfurled red flag and often a raggle-taggle procession of local children.⁶⁶ Chartists too might eschew the services of a hostile town crier and call their

⁶⁰ The town crier continued to communicate civic matters until well into the twentieth century, see Muriel Arber, *Lyme Landscape with Figures* (Exeter, 1988).

⁶¹ James Vernon included two photographs of town criers in *Politics and the People* but has nothing to say on their role in calling meetings. Aside from antiquarian references to town criers in nineteenth century municipal histories and hagiographic accounts of individual criers such as Arthur Beckett, 'The Town Crier', *Sussex County Magazine*, Vol. 8, issue 2 (1934) 87-91 and Anne Swift, *George Cooper: Stockport's Last Town Crier* (Stockport, 1974), nothing has been written on the communicative role of the town crier.

⁶² The mayor of Newark forbade the crier to announce Chartist meetings, while in Forfar, magistrates forbade the calling of meetings of 'itinerating orators and demagogues'. *NS*, 1 February 1840; 15 January 1842.

⁶³ Bellmen had a reputation for drunkenness and were often reluctant to cry temperance meetings, for this reason Thomas Whittaker carried his own rattle, Whittaker, *Life's Battles*, p. 104.

⁶⁴ Flanagan, 'Workplace Protest and Popular Politics', p. 95.

⁶⁵ Thomas Worsnop (1799-1869) was a reclaimed drunkard who turned itinerant lecturer. Harrison, *Dictionary*, pp. 138-9. Francis Butterfield, *The Life and Sayings of Thomas Worsnop* (Bingley, 1870).

⁶⁶ WYAS: Bradford, A. H. Robinson, 'The Flag and Rattle Man' an article on Thomas Worsnop extracted from the *Band of Hope Chronicle*, Jan/Feb 1974. Worsnop had long flowing hair, a beard and eccentric dress, his comical ways often attracted a retinue of children, see *BO*, 26 April 1855.

own meetings. In Llanidloes, Wales the Chartists had their own crier in the shape of a local Chartist, Lewis Baxter.⁶⁷ Baxter played a crucial role gathering Chartists for an outdoor meeting which culminated in a pitched battle with the authorities outside the Trewythen Arms, an event subsequently known as the Llanidloes riot.⁶⁸ The way in which the Chartists were assembled that day illustrates the significant role played by noise and verbal announcements in political mobilisation. Baxter, on the morning of 30 April 1839, paraded the streets, sounding his tin horn: ‘after each flourish of this musical instrument, he announced the fact that an assembly of the members of the [Chartist] Union would be held on the "Long Bridge,"’⁶⁹

In a similar fashion, groups of musicians and town bands provided a visual and aural call to a meeting. The noise and spectacle of a parading band captured attention, drawing people into forming an audience or joining the campaign. A late nineteenth-century history of the factory movement by W. R. Croft describes how in 1832 several mill workers near Holmfirth ‘when they heard the strains of the Holmfirth Band’ spontaneously decided not to work that day and instead joined those on Richard Oastler’s Great York Pilgrimage, following the musicians to York, ‘to see “Old Oastler Righted.”’⁷⁰ Several years later the Huddersfield Anti-Poor Law Association gathered a large audience to protest at the appearance of the pro-poor law lecturer, James Acland, by sending a band around the main thoroughfares of Huddersfield accompanied by the infamous ‘Paddock Bastille’ banner.⁷¹ Processions and bands continued to be used extensively to draw attention and attract followers throughout the nineteenth century, in particular, being a popular element of the temperance and trade union movements.⁷²

Alongside verbal and visual publicity itinerant speakers depended heavily upon printed handbills and placards. The League lecturer James Acland relied upon placards and

⁶⁷ I’d like to thank Professor Owen Ashton for allowing me access to a paper prepared for Llafur Chartism Day conference, Llanidloes, 16 May 2009 entitled ‘Chartism in Llanidloes: the ‘Riot’ of 1839 Revisited’.

⁶⁸ For overview of Llanidloes riot see Chase, *Chartism*, pp. 74-75. Deptford Chartists also paraded the town ‘with bells and boards’ to announce a petitioning meeting in August 1842, *NS*, 6 August 1842.

⁶⁹ According to Edward Hamer ‘the tin horn, which is still preserved as a sacred relic in the family of the “bugler”, was styled by the Chartists the “Horn of Liberty.” Edward Hamer, *A Brief Account of the Chartist Outbreak at Llanidloes in the Year 1839* (Llanidloes, 1867), pp. 15-16.

⁷⁰ W. R. Croft, *The History of the Factory Movement, or Oastler and his Times* (Huddersfield, 1888), p. 62. For recent work on this theme see Kate Bowan and Paul A. Pickering, “Songs for the Millions’: Chartist Music and Popular Aural Tradition.” *Labour History Review*, Vol. 74, Issue 3, (April, 2009), 44-63.

⁷¹ The procession also carried a great number of flaming torches, *Leeds Mercury*, 17 November 1838.

⁷² Processions were also a key element of civic ritual which reached its zenith in the 1870s, Simon Gunn, ‘Ritual and Civic Culture in the English Industrial city, c. 1835-1914’, in Robert J Morris and Richard J Trainer (eds.), *Urban Governance, Britain and Beyond since 1750* (Aldershot, 2000), 226-241.

handbills to call meetings while touring the agricultural districts. One such notice, dated the 3 May 1839, is preserved in the League letter book. This particular placard was addressed to the farmers of Tavistock informing them that a meeting on the Corn Laws will take place ‘this day’, which suggests both the ephemeral nature of street literature and illustrates the short turn around time for itinerant lecturers in the field. Of course controversial figures like Acland might deliberately chose to call their meetings at short notice to prevent their opponents from mobilising arguments and muscle.⁷³ Ambiguous publicity served a similar purpose. To wrong-foot their enemies and maximise their audiences, some itinerant speakers deliberately did not reveal where their sympathies lay. In April 1839, the League lecturer, John Shearman, placarded the streets of Doncaster alerting local farmers to a three pm discussion on the advantages and disadvantages of the Corn Laws in the market place that day. Shearman deliberately did not say which side of the question he would take: a sensible strategy in districts where the League was not popular.⁷⁴

The etiquette and protocols of political discussion

Having discussed how meetings were convened we shall now turn to how meetings were governed and organised. For reasons of space I will primarily focus on public meetings, lectures and debates. However, it should be noted that the hustings were also significant arenas for popular political oratory and a place where non-electors were active participants.⁷⁵ Husting speeches were customarily held outdoors and were typically noisy affairs where parliamentary candidates were heckled and challenged.⁷⁶ By participating in the customary show of hands the non-electors of a town or borough played a part in electing the moral victor if not the actual parliamentary successor of an election campaign. As Malcolm Chase has shown, Chartist candidates were fielded at parliamentary elections on a regularly basis, as much for the opportunity of making political addresses as in hope of winning a seat.⁷⁷ Reform bodies and pressure groups were also quick to recognise the

⁷³ ACLL letter book, f. 186, letter 3 May 1839.

⁷⁴ A strategy that paid off, Shearman attracted a ‘large and attentive audience’, ACLL letter book, f. 158, letter 13 April 1839.

⁷⁵ For the continuing importance of the democratic ‘spirit of the hustings’ see Lawrence, *Electing Our Masters*.

⁷⁶ Gorman, ‘Campaign Rituals’, pp. 109;112-113. Lawrence, *Electing Our Masters*, pp. 16-23.

⁷⁷ Malcolm Chase, ‘Labour’s Candidates’: Chartist Challenges at the Parliamentary Polls, 1839-1860, *Labour History Review*, Vol. 74, No. 1 (April 2009), 64-89; Taylor, ‘The Six Points’ esp. pp. 16-17.

propaganda value of a politically motivated trial, a subject discussed further in chapter five.⁷⁸

The English prized the public meeting as a both a democratic right and as an expression of a towns' collective opinion.⁷⁹ Large town hall meetings on controversial political topics were often widely reported in both national and regional newspapers. In this way mid-Victorian Bradford, Leeds, Wakefield, Sunderland and Newcastle made their collective voice heard at Westminster.⁸⁰ In the Chartist era such meetings were primarily deliberative: the audience came not to listen and agree but to debate and pronounce judgement. Alongside parliamentary etiquette, the conventions and practices of the public meeting also borrowed from the judicial system. The British adversarial system of law relies on the skill of opposing advocates each representing their party's position: each side is allowed time to speak and then cross-examine the other party.⁸¹ The public meeting, to a certain extent, mimics this form with successive speakers challenging the sentiments of their opponents. Finally, at the close of the meeting, the audience, in the manner of a jury, determines the winning argument. While this might appear to be an overly grandiose interpretation, contemporaries took the deliberative nature of public meetings very seriously indeed. For example, in July 1855, when a public meeting was called in Bradford to discuss the Crimean war, a question of great national importance, those present self-consciously billed themselves as 'arbiters of justice'. The preamble to the reported meeting made this clear: 'A public meeting was held in the Temperance Hall on Thursday evening last, to consider the conduct of the government in reference to the present war, and to pronounce an opinion thereon.' The ensuing petition left Westminster in no doubt where the sympathies of Bradford lay.⁸²

⁷⁸ See pp. 202-6 below

⁷⁹ Iorwerth Prothero, who has compared public meetings in the UK with those in France, notes that the public meeting was seen to be a very English expression of liberty, and one which French Liberals saw as a force for order and stability, Iorwerth Prothero, *Radical Artisans in England and France, 1830-1870* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 208.

⁸⁰ For example, at a public meeting in Bradford to discuss the merits of a secular education system, George Jacob Holyoake made a specific reference to the fact that 'their decision would exert an influence upon the government', *BO*, 2 May 1850.

⁸¹ Interestingly the temperance movement called its missionaries 'advocates', which is both a legal term for a lawyer who pleads a case in court and also a person who pleads on behalf of a cause or propounds an idea.

⁸² The meeting was called under the auspices of the Foreign Affairs Committee and addressed by David Urquhart, *BO*, 2 July 1855. For the activities of the Foreign Affairs Committees in the Bradford area see Briggs, 'David Urquhart'. Miles Taylor, 'The old radicalism and the new: David Urquhart and the politics of opposition, 1832-1867', in Eugenio F. Biagini and Alastair J. Reid (eds.), *Currents of Radicalism: Popular Radicalism, Organised Labour and Party Politics in Britain, 1850-1914* (Cambridge, 1991), 23-43.

Public meetings were governed by elaborate rules and procedures, from how the chair was elected to how resolutions were put and carried. They were also dependent upon the audience and speakers adhering to specific forms of etiquette and behaviour, in particularly subscribing to the notion of fair-play and gentlemanly conduct and genuine discussion. Such codes of conduct also applied to the political lecture delivered by one speaker, which in many respects was a sub-genre of the larger public meeting.⁸³ Indeed many meetings by itinerant lecturers were chaired and it was general practice for speakers to answer their opponents and invite discussion at the end of their lectures. Some less scrupulous political lecturers did, however, try to avoid discussion by claiming that it was merely a lecture and not public meeting or debate. The League, in particular, was fond of this strategy, as a meeting addressed by George Grieg⁸⁴ in Newcastle illustrates. According to the *Northern Liberator* at the start of the meeting held in May 1839 the mayor informed the audience that as it ‘was a free lecture: no man had a right to express an opinion that evening, save and except the lecturer himself’.⁸⁵ James Acland pulled a similar stunt in Halifax in July 1842, much to the disgust of local Chartists who refused to listen until he had appointed a chairman, claiming that, as they had paid to enter the room, they had ‘an equal right’.⁸⁶

Most rules governing public meetings had their origins in parliamentary procedures or were based upon the customary practice of the vestry or poor law meeting.⁸⁷ Local town council meetings self-consciously aped the Westminster Parliament in their strict adherence to protocol and procedure.⁸⁸ Other influential models for procedural and organisational rules were provided by friendly and trade societies, anti-slavery societies, religious organisations, temperance bodies and the law courts. As the number of meetings grew there was a need for procedural clarification, and by the second half of the nineteenth

⁸³ A point made by Ernest Jones in the quote given at the start of this chapter.

⁸⁴ George Grieg (dates unknown) was the Secretary of the Leeds ACLA and later worked as freelance lecturer. Some correspondence from George Grieg dating from 1851 is held within the National Public School Association archive (M136/2/3/1290-1293) held at Manchester Local Studies and Archives.

⁸⁵ *Northern Liberator*, 11 May 1839.

⁸⁶ *NS*, 9 July 1842. It seems likely this was a strategy deliberately employed by League lecturers to counter the Chartist tactic of passing amendments and resolutions for ‘the Charter and nothing more’.

⁸⁷ Magistrates also consulted guides such as John Frederick Archbold, *The Justice of the Peace and Parish Officer* (1840, London) and Samuel Stone, *The Justices Manual: or a guide to the ordinary duties of a justice of the peace* (9th ed. London, 1862). ‘Stones’ was first published 1842 and has been regularly revised and reissued to this present day.

⁸⁸ Vernon, *Politics and the People*, p. 146.

century guidelines, such as *The Chairman's Handbook* (1877) were widely available.⁸⁹ The legal and procedural niceties of the public meeting continued to preoccupy lawyers and practitioners into the twentieth century. In 1939 Walter Citrine published the *A.B.C. of Chairmanship* which became the bible of the trade union and political activist.⁹⁰ The following decade two eminent judges, Sir Sebag Shaw and Judge E. Dennis compiled the authoritative, *Law of Meetings: their conduct and procedure*. Shaw and Dennis drew upon precedents and procedures established in the nineteenth century, providing a useful insight into the conventions and protocols of nineteenth-century meetings and assemblies.⁹¹

What is clear from these works is that the 'public' meeting was clearly defined by both its procedural rules and its democratic and open nature which protected the right of anyone to attend and speak.⁹² In return for these 'liberties' its authority was greater and its deliberations more conclusive than a meeting held in private. Obviously under contemporary sedition legislation radical groups did not have the option of meeting privately without running the risk of transportation or other punishments. For Chartists, Owenites and (to a lesser extent) free traders, open public political debate in the context of the public meeting offered a measure of indemnity from prosecution. Tory and patriotic groups were less restricted by fear of prosecution. Indeed many of their meetings took the form of dinners which were open only to those subscribing to the same principles. The political dinner, while beyond the scope of this research, offers an interestingly ambiguous arena which was both public (often reported in press) and private.⁹³ Pressure groups advocating moral reform were also unlikely to be the target of Government repression which meant that they were less committed to the concept of open public meetings. When the Bradford auxiliary of the UKA, in spring 1855, found that its campaign in support of the Permissive Bill met concerted local opposition it abruptly decided that its meetings

⁸⁹ Reginald F. D. Palgrave, *The Chairman's Handbook: suggestions and Rules for the conduct of chairmen of public and other meetings, based upon the procedures and practice of Parliament* (1877, 12th ed. London, 1896.) Its widespread use is indicated by the fact that 26 copies of various editions are held at the British Library. Palgrave was a Parliamentary clerk, William McKay, 'Palgrave, Sir Reginald Francis Douce (1829–1904)', *ODNB* (Oxford, 2004).

⁹⁰ Walter Citrine, *A.B.C. of Chairmanship: all about Meetings and conferences* (London, 1939).

⁹¹ Shaw and Dennis, *Law of Meetings*, pp. 54 - 62.

⁹² *Ibid*, pp. 4 -5 gives legal definition of what constitutes a private and public meeting.

⁹³ Peter Brett, 'Political Dinners in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain: Platform, Meeting Place and Battleground', *History*, Vol., 81, Issue 264, (1996), 527-552. Radicals also participated in political dinners but these tended to be commemorative events rather than opportunities for discussing policies or strategies; see Epstein, *Radical Expression*, pp. 147-166.

were no longer public but ‘private’, thereby excluding vocal objectors from its deliberations.⁹⁴

The most significant agent for controlling a meeting was the Chairman. His role (I have found no example of a Chairwoman presiding over mixed audiences)⁹⁵ was to maintain order and ensure fair proceedings by governing audience interventions, keeping speakers to their allocated time slots and the topic in hand, and ensuring that all those who wished to address the meeting were given a fair hearing. Public meetings in this period were generally chaired by the mayor or a leading magistrate. The chairman was expected to be neutral, articulate and of good character, thus to be called to the chair was a mark of honour and esteem.⁹⁶ If a magistrate were not available the chair generally went to the vicar or another local worthy.⁹⁷ At working-class radical meetings, convened without magisterial sanction, the chair was generally occupied by an established local leader of some importance to the movement.⁹⁸ Typically, the chairman opened the proceedings with generic remarks on his duty as chairman. The opening words of councillor Rawson⁹⁹ at a meeting called to hear David Urquhart speak on the Eastern Question at Bradford in the summer of 1855 were typical:

The duty of a chairman – was simply to take care that the proceedings of the meeting were conducted *with fairness and in order*, and he would do his best to attain this end in the post to which they had appointed him. He hoped that the meeting would *hear every gentleman who might address them with patience and candour*, whatever might be the views advanced ... He concluded by reading the placard by which the meeting had been convened.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁴ After a stormy public meeting in February 1855 the Bradford UKA billed its meetings as ‘private meetings of friends’ rather than public meetings. A strategy which prevented an opponent from addressing the audience at a meeting held in November that year, *BO*, 15 February 1855; 15 March 1855; 15 November 1855.

⁹⁵ Women did however chair meetings that were open only to women. For a female Chartist meeting presided over by a women see *NS*, 17 February 1838; *London Dispatch*, 25 February 1838; *Preston Chronicle*, 24 February 1838.

⁹⁶ For the procedures of electing a chairman see Shaw and Dennis, *Law of Public Meetings*, pp. 54-62.

⁹⁷ Clergymen were generally reluctant to chair radical meetings the exception being Rev. G. S. Bull who chaired numerous anti-poor law meetings in Bradford, see *BO*, 14 December 1837; 7 June 1838.

⁹⁸ The prominent local Chartist, Benjamin Rushton, for example, chaired numerous meetings in Halifax over his long involvement with radicalism, John A. Hargreaves, *Benjamin Ruston: Handloom Weaver and Chartist* (Halifax, 2006).

⁹⁹ Probably John Rawson. Theodore Koditschek refers to a councillor called John Rawson who is described as a ‘neo-Chartist’, exactly the kind of person to chair a meeting for Urquhart! See Theodore Koditschek, *Class formation and urban industrial society: Bradford, 1750-1850* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 538.

¹⁰⁰ [my italics] *BO*, 2 July 1855.

In addition to outlining his duties and appealing for order and decorum the chairman introduced the nature of the meeting and the scope of the discussion. Often this was done by reading out loud the meeting's original requisition or the placard used to convene the gathering: a practice which crucially reiterated the parameters of the debate.

Resolutions or motions were used at public meetings as a mechanism for organising arguments in support of, or against, the debated issue. At highly contentious meetings rival factions would pit resolution against resolution. George Thompson's lectures in the West Riding in May 1855 during the height of the Crimean War provide a good example of the way in which amendments to resolutions could be used to subvert the lecturer's views and arguments. At meetings in Bradford, Halifax and Leeds, Thompson, after lecturing for several hours against the war, gave the audience scope to express their views, stating that he was ready 'to listen to anyone who could demonstrate that he was wrong'.¹⁰¹ While he escaped direct challenge at Bradford, (although numerous heckles, and the fact that the customary thanks to speaker and chairman were drowned out by a noisy exit, suggest his audience were not entirely convinced) at Leeds he was defeated. At the close of the Leeds lecture a resolution was proposed, numerous seconded and carried by a large majority stating: 'that in the opinion of this meeting the war with Russia is a just and necessary war' and one that ought to be pursued with 'the greatest vigour'. Thompson's attempt to soften their hostility to peace by proposing an amendment to the effect that the meeting deplored 'the evils of war and the calamitous loss of life' fell on deaf ears and the original resolution stood. At Halifax the pacifists and war-mongers were more evenly matched and when a bloodthirsty resolution was met with a pacifist amendment deploring 'the fearful evils and miseries' of war, the greater number of hands was 'thought to be in favour of the amendment'.¹⁰²

Counter resolutions were also a popular Chartist tactic during the 1840s: the common motion for the 'for the Charter and nothing else', being submitted at meetings across the country. Lucy Brown has shown how the meetings of League lecturers, and to a lesser extent anti-slavery agents, were routinely packed with Chartists, whose presence ensured that the initial resolution (in favour of repealing the corn laws or abolishing slavery) was

¹⁰¹ *BO*, 10 May 1855.

¹⁰² *BO*, 10 May 1855; 22 March 1855.

lost to the Charter in the concluding show of hands.¹⁰³ Nor was it only political meetings which were manipulated by the unconstitutional tactic of packing an audience. At a meeting held in Bradford in 1845 to debate the merits of the West Riding Junction Railway many people could not gain admission to the room as it was packed with the Irish workman of a rival commercial faction, who had been given a day off work specifically for this purpose. As the indignant letter printed in the *Bradford Observer* made clear such underhand tactics were not considered 'fair-play'.¹⁰⁴

Resolutions required both a proposer and a seconder before they could be put to the vote of the meeting, a procedure which precluded diversions by those without supporters.¹⁰⁵ Often multiple resolutions would be passed by the meeting, some of which might concern future actions such as a petition or the formation of sub-committees. Resolutions were important as they were concise expressions of political opinion which often found their way into print, both in newspapers and on handbills calling further meetings.¹⁰⁶ But perhaps their greatest significance was in permitting the audience to participate democratically in the meeting by the show of hands. Like the petition and the show of hands at the hustings, the open vote in support or against motions proposed at a public meeting were one of the few democratic avenues open to working people. Its significance deserves emphasis. Edward Rymer (1835-1915), a mining trade union organiser, recalled in his autobiography how he sat near the platform at a public meeting addressed by Gladstone on the Disestablishment of the Irish Church. For Rymer the experience was seminal: 'that night I voted for the first time in my life on a great public question. From that hour I began to read and study politics.'¹⁰⁷

While the rules governing public meetings and set-piece debates were elaborate, even pedantic, they were far from being meaningless rituals. On the contrary the intricate procedures governing the lecture rooms and town halls protected democratic speech,

¹⁰³ Brown, 'Chartists and the Anti-Corn Law League', p. 361. Robert Gammage, while admitting that Chartists did attend League meetings in droves and pass counter resolutions, claimed to disapprove of deliberately disrupting a 'private' meeting, arguing that the Chartists attended only when there was an open appeal to the public. Gammage, *History*, p. 104.

¹⁰⁴ The letter also complained that controversial resolutions were carried while honest tradesmen with a genuine interest in the question were left outside in the snow, *BO*, 13 February 1845.

¹⁰⁵ Chapter 7 of Shaw and Dennis, *Law of Public meetings* deals with the protocols of discussion and debate, chapter 8 concerns taking a sense of the meeting and determining the majority decision.

¹⁰⁶ Often newspaper accounts merely summarised resolutions and made no attempt at reporting the actual speeches.

¹⁰⁷ Edward Allen Rymer and Robert G. Neville, 'The Martyrdom of the Mine', *History Workshop*, No. 1 (Spring 1976), 220-244, includes facsimile reprint of Rymer's autobiography, (quote taken from p. 16).

crucially providing the disenfranchised with a democratic space where political questions could be openly addressed and debated. Audiences played a key role in public lectures, meetings and debates in this period and their role in policing 'fair' behaviour deserves attention. Without the collective will of the meeting debate could not take place. The behaviour of itinerant lecturers and the conduct of audiences at political meetings in this period should be understood in the context of prevailing notions of 'fair-play' and 'gentlemanly conduct'. While it was perfectly acceptable for audiences to voice their dissent by jeers and hisses, and to encourage their favourites with cheers and applause, it was not acceptable to completely drown out the voice of opponents and deny them a fair hearing. The chair, the speakers and the audience were collectively responsible for enforcing fair-play.

Frustration at not being heard and outrage at inappropriate behaviour is a reoccurring feature of autobiographical, correspondence and newspaper accounts of public meetings.¹⁰⁸ The memoirs of the Chartist Robert Lowery show the great reverence in which public meetings were held by contemporaries and his disillusionment when others failed to play by the rules. At the end of 1839, while employed as a missionary by the Chartist Convention, his strategy for converting the inhabitants of Dublin to Chartism was to call 'at once ... a public meeting that I might explain our principles and objects that the public might judge for itself'.¹⁰⁹ Yet his confidence in the power of the public meeting was quickly shaken by the Dublin audiences he encountered. At his first attempt at addressing a meeting, before the Chairman had spoken more than a few words, a member of the audience stood up and announced that the Chartists were enemies of O'Connell and that the meeting should be abandoned. Utter chaos and disorder followed. Chairs and tables were hauled off the platform, some broken in the process and the lights were put out. A second meeting was called the next day with a 'charge of admittance [of] sixpence ... to insure an orderly audience' but a mob of coal porters forced themselves past the money taker and a speaker threatened to hand Lowery over to the Castle, while the audience

¹⁰⁸ Letter from Richard Cobden to Joseph Sturge, 1 Mar 1839, complaining that a League meeting had suffered serious disruption in Manchester the previous evening by 'raggamuffins', who disrupted proceedings and broke lamps and chairs, Anthony Howe (ed.) *The Letters of Richard Cobden, Vol. 1, 1815-1847* (Oxford, 2007), p. 157.

¹⁰⁹ Harrison and Hollis, *Robert Lowery*, p. 145.

yelled and cheered for O'Connell.¹¹⁰ Years later when composing his autobiography, Lowery's disgust was apparent:

I knew that the Irish were worshippers of O'Connell, and full of party spirit; but I still expected to get fair play, and be allowed to address a meeting, and did not care who opposed me. In our wildest Chartist meetings we always allowed either Whig or Tory to speak if they wished¹¹¹

Lowery's Dublin experience was extreme. But even in a properly functioning public meeting the audience was not expected to listen in silence: the Victorian audience, whether at a penny reading, melodrama or political lecture, was vocal and expressive.¹¹² Sentiments which met with widespread approval attracted applause and "hear hears," while unpopular controversial remarks were met with jeers, hoots and hisses. Heckles and jeers did not always signify the breakdown of fair-play and decorum but rather can be taken as evidence of a robust, democratic spirit.¹¹³ At great public meetings, where all shades of political and clerical opinion were present, the well-timed heckle was often the best way of turning the meeting's attention to a point glossed over by the speaker. A large noisy meeting, held in Bradford in April 1850, to hear W. E. Foster and to consider the pros and cons of a national education system illustrates this point nicely. During a speech by the Rev. D. Fraser, a staunch opponent of state education, his words were interrupted by shouts and confusion when he alluded to the additional tax burden on the middle-classes, as the *Observer* stated it was evident that many in the audience assumed 'that it was Mr Fraser's position as a "middle class" man which led him to object to the scheme'.¹¹⁴ The audience response, therefore, magnified his hypocrisy and parsimony.

This meeting was also remarkable for the sheer range of its speakers: from clergymen and magistrates to a recently imprisoned Chartist, David Lightowler and the itinerant

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 144-7.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 144. Lowery conveniently overlooked the treatment meted out to League and anti-slavery lecturers by Chartists.

¹¹² At Bradford Dickens told his audience at the start of his reading that he would like them 'to give expression to any emotion whether grave or gay' without constraint or in fear of disturbing him, *BO*, 4 January 1855. For the role of audiences in the United States see Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow Lowbrow: the emergence of cultural hierarchy in America* (Harvard, 1988).

¹¹³ The British Parliament continues this tradition of noisy debate where the opposition benches frequently indulge in boorish jeers and supporters signify their assent with 'hear hears'.

¹¹⁴ The audience interpreted his remarks as reluctance to pay for the education of the working man's children.

secularist lecturer, G. J. Holyoake.¹¹⁵ Lightowler (whose behaviour on this occasion was impeccable) humorously alluded to his recent imprisonment as ‘college’ stint and revelled in the fact that despite being an ex-felon he was able to share a platform with a magistrate and vicar. Holyoake’s presence on the platform was almost too much for the Protestant dissenter, John Glover, whose snide remarks on the vicar sitting ‘cheek by jowl’ with the infamous Holyoake caused much tumult and a perfect storm of hisses and hootings. Despite Glover’s misgivings, the sheer diversity of speakers and the vigour of audience participation made this particular meeting truly a democratic deliberation and a fair expression of the Bradford’s opinion on the education question. It offers a superb example of a public meeting at its best - where all shades of opinion are heard accompanied by laughter, cheers, confusion and noise.¹¹⁶

‘Moral boxing matches’ - the set-piece debate and the quest for the truth

Public debates, generally before large paying audiences, were a feature of the Chartist years and unlike the public meeting, which rarely occupied more than three or four hours, the set-piece debate might continue over several consecutive days or weeks allowing protagonists of opposing views to debate the great political, religious and moral issues of the day in a more rigorous manner. Strangely the public political debate, as a distinctive sub-genre of the political meeting, has not received much historical attention: which is an oversight as such meetings were a centre-piece of democratic discussion.¹¹⁷ Unlike the public meeting, staged discussions did not have their origins in eighteenth-century administration, nor did they originate with the anti-slavery movement, which had inspired so many of the strategies adopted by Victorian pressure groups.¹¹⁸ Instead their origins lie with the factory reformer Robert Owen (1771–1858). Owen had earlier acquired widespread recognition for the enlightened labour practices implemented at his cotton factory at New Lanark, which he publicised in speeches and pamphlet form.¹¹⁹ By 1828 he was living in America and it was here that he issued a challenge to the New

¹¹⁵ It is not clear whether Holyoake timed his Bradford lecture engagements to coincide with this important public meeting or whether he just happened to be in town.

¹¹⁶ *BO*, 2 May 1850.

¹¹⁷ The exception being Owenite and Secularist historians, for example Edward Royle, *Victorian Infidels*, pp. 202-8.

¹¹⁸ Although the anti-slavery orator George Thompson, during the early 1830s, mastered the format of the public debate, embarking upon numerous staged discussions with his arch detractor Peter Borthwick.

¹¹⁹ Robert Owen, *A New View of Society and other Writings*, Gregory Claeys (ed.) (Harmondsworth, 1991).

Orleans clergy to meet him in debate on the evidences of Christianity. His challenge was accepted by Alexander Campbell, a minister from Virginia, who had previously taken part in two highly publicised public debates on doctrinal issues in the 1820s. Campbell agreed to meet Owen the following year, allowing both parties ample time for rigorous preparation.

According to the English novelist, Frances Trollope, the ensuing discussion, which took place in Cincinnati in April 1829 before an audience of a 1,000, was ‘a spectacle unprecedented in any age or country’.¹²⁰ The Owen v Campbell debate was regulated by seven, previously agreed, terms and conditions. The protagonists were to commence their discussion at nine am on Monday 13 August and argue their case over successive days until each of the parties were ‘satisfied that he had nothing new to offer’ – Both parties had plenty to say and the debate continued for eight days, although, as Trollope noted, the debaters often failed to answer each other, preferring instead to stick to their prepared arguments.¹²¹ The agreed terms also stated that each party would speak for alternate half hour slots and, to ensure ‘fairness and decorum’, a board of seven moderators would supervise the debate (three chosen by each party and one joint nominee).¹²² A shorthand reporter was engaged so that the debate could be published and circulated to a wide audience.¹²³ At the close of the debate, Campbell asked all those convinced by his reasoning to rise (only three supporters of Owen remained seated). The Owen v Campbell encounter defined the emerging structure of the set-piece public debate; in particular, establishing its highly regulated and gentlemanly nature and the role of the audience in democratically determining the victor.

¹²⁰ Gregory Claeys, ‘Owen, Robert (1771–1858)’, *ODNB* (Oxford, 2004). Frances Milton Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (London, 1832 reprinted 1984), pp. 63-66.

¹²¹ ‘Neither appeared to me to answer the other; but to confine themselves to the utterance of what they had uppermost in their minds when the discussion began’. *Ibid*, p. 152.

¹²² Jesse James Haley, *Debates that Made History: The Story of Alexander Campbell's Debates with Rev. John Walker, Rev. W. L. McCallam, Mr. Robert Owen, Bishop Purcell and Rev. Nathan L. Rice* (St. Louis, Mo., 1920).

¹²³ *Debate on the evidences of Christianity: containing an examination of the social system and of all the systems of scepticism of ancient and modern times. Held in the city of Cincinnati, Ohio, from the 13th to the 21st of April 1829 between Robert Owen of New Lanark, Scotland and Alexander Campbell of Bethany, Virginia*, reported by Charles H Sims, 2 vols. (Bethany, 1829). See also Owen’s version which omits the speeches made by Campbell, *Robert Owen’s Opening Speech, and his reply to the Rev Alex. Campbell in the recent public discussion in Cincinnati to prove that the Principles of all Religions are erroneous, and that their Practice is injurious to the Human Race* (Cincinnati, 1829).

Back home, Owen and his followers made the public debate a 'standard Owenite practice'.¹²⁴ Indeed the baiting of evangelical ministers at public debates became the pre-eminent propaganda tool of the Owenite missionary. In April 1840, for example, 2,500 people witnessed a Leicester debate between the fanatical Christian defender, John Brindley, and a local Owenite missionary.¹²⁵ A decade later G. J. Holyoake repeatedly met the Rev. Brewin Grant in similar public spectacles; notably the Cowper Street debate of 1853 which is recounted in great detail in Holyoake's autobiography.¹²⁶ The publicity value of such encounters ensured that the set debate was more widely adopted - by the early 1840s debates were used by the Chartist, anti-slavery agents, League lecturers, teetotallers and anyone else with a contentious case to make. In the weeks preceding the debate, notices would be placed in the local press and handbills posted throughout the town. Controversial topics, such as those which were relevant to significant portions of the local residents, or the appearance of a lecturer with a national reputation, would ensure a good turnout. Some lecturers, notably Peter Borthwick and John Brindley, pursued their opponents across the country, repeatedly meeting their arch rivals, accruing publicity and larger audiences as their tours progressed.¹²⁷ The impact of the debate was extended by the use of print. Debates were often published as tracts, while antagonists might insert open letters in the local press, simultaneously conducting their exchanges both on the platform and on the page.¹²⁸

Notions of character and gentlemanly conduct featured prominently in the political debate. Owen, for example, was careful to treat Campbell with the greatest respect and, as in parliamentary debate, there is a real sense that bad language, slander and foul temper had no place on the public platform.¹²⁹ Indeed those who failed to comply would be reprimanded by the chair and perhaps removed entirely. Seasoned debaters perpetuated the

¹²⁴ Royle, *Victorian Infidels*, p. 203.

¹²⁵ *Public discussion on Socialism held at the new Theatre Leicester, 14th and 15th April 1840 between Mr Brindley, and Mr Hollick, Socialist Missionary* (Leicester, 1840), p. 6.

¹²⁶ Royle, *Victorian Infidels*, see pp. 202-213 for a discussion of secularist debates. Holyoake, *Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life*, Vol. I, pp. 254-264. During the 1850s Brewin Grant operated in a similar fashion to his predecessor, John Brindley who had debated widely during the previous decade.

¹²⁷ John Brindley, pledged himself to challenge Robert Owen in: 'London, Manchester, Leeds, Halifax, and Glasgow; and not to leave him till he had held up his principles to derision throughout the country.' *New Moral World*, 9 February 1839, p. 249. Peter Borthwick, whose was employed by the pro slavery interest similarly pursued George Thompson across the country, Gifford, 'George Thompson', pp. 68-76.

¹²⁸ Many printed debates had significant afterlives. A tract edition of the Cowper Street debates sold 45,000 copies earning Holyoake and Grant healthy royalties, Royle, *Victorian Infidels*, p. 204.

¹²⁹ According to Frances Trollope, neither Owen nor Campbell ever lost their temper, and, during their eight day debate, they often dined together and expressed their mutual esteem, *Domestic Manners*, p. 153.

notion of gentlemanly discussion, for example during Holyoake's debates with the Rev. Brewin Grant in the 1850s Holyoake was remarkably tolerant and courteous despite provocation.¹³⁰ Those who were unable to remain courteous during the heat of the argument were rebuked. John Brindley, for example in a debate against the Sheffield Owenites in 1840, was criticised by the moderator for exhibiting 'a great deficiency of government over his own enthusiasm, temper and decorum'.¹³¹ The Rev. Brewin Grant also exhibited similar character flaws: at times, his failure to control his emotions detracted from his Christian message.¹³² At a meeting in Bradford in the autumn of 1855 Grant lectured on the 'ignorance and absurdities of Infidelity as presented in a text book by Robert Cooper'. Secularists in the audience protested at Grant's flippant, sarcastic and scornful manner and noted his unwillingness to meet Cooper in fair argument at a public debate.¹³³

Oratory was considered a manly virtue and the political platform was largely a masculine space.¹³⁴ This was particularly true of the high profile set-piece public debate. Rhetorical encounters between exponents of rival political groups harboured distinctly macho undertones and were billed as occasions where political honour and integrity were to be publicly defended. Rather like a duel, if a speaker declined to meet a challenge his status as a public man was undermined and there was a danger that his opponent's arguments would be perceived as superior. During the early 1830s the anti-slavery lecturer George Thompson, and Peter Borthwick, paid agent of the pro-slavery interest, met for public discussions on the slavery question at crowded town halls across the country.¹³⁵ Interestingly, these debates were reported in the macho language of the duel or fist fight in which words acquired the qualities of weapons.¹³⁶

¹³⁰ Holyoake recalled the importance of courteous at all times less outburst of temper be 'attributed to the viciousness of my principles', a consideration which did not impinge upon his clerical opponents for whom any outbursts would be excused as 'holy wrath', Holyoake, *Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life*, Vol. I, p. 260.

¹³¹ John Brindley, *A report of the discussion on socialism, held in the theatre, Sheffield... between Mr. Brindley, the advocate of Christianity, and Mr. Campbell, socialist missionary...*(Sheffield, 1840), p. 30.

¹³² The Rev. Brewin Grant undertook a paid "three years' mission" to check the spread of Secularism at the behest of Congregationalist leaders. Holyoake, *Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life*, Vol. I, p. 255.

¹³³ *BO*, 4 October 1855.

¹³⁴ The role of professional female orators and the masculinity of the platform will be considered further in the chapter six, see pp. 236-246.

¹³⁵ H. C. G. Matthew, 'Borthwick, Peter (1804–1852)', *ODNB* (Oxford, 2004).

¹³⁶ Similarly when Feargus O'Connor debated with James Acland in Halifax in the summer of 1842 the *Northern Star's* reporter adopted a pugilist tone, designating sections of the debate as round one, round two and so forth, *NS*, 9 July 1842.

They measured swords on many a field in the presence of thousands ... most unflinchingly and right gallantly did Borthwick bear himself in these conflicts. He was a foeman worthy of the glittering blade of his antagonist, and many a time did he feel its piercing point and excoriating edge.¹³⁷

By the 1840s there was a broad consensus as to how debates were called and governed. Terms, whether agreed verbally at a lecture in response to a challenge, or via private negotiations sometimes by a specially created 'debate committee', were generally set out on widely displayed placards in advance of the encounter.¹³⁸ Such placards established the topic of debate, who would speak first, for how long, which party would conclude etc. At the start of the meeting the placard would be read by the chair to reiterate the terms of the discussion.¹³⁹ That was the ideal - of course in practice terms were not always honoured. A debate between the League lecturer, Sidney Smith, and the Chartist, Jonathan Bairstow, in Bradford in August 1840 got off to a bad footing when Bairstow showed up an hour and a half late. Bairstow's placard had clearly stated that his lecture would commence at seven pm and last for an hour and a half, his opponents would then have fifteen minutes for the first response and ten minutes alternate debate thereafter and that the meeting would end at ten o'clock precisely. Whether Bairstow's lateness was a devious ploy to prevent discussion or unavoidable, it had the effect of enraging his opponent. Sidney Smith, immediately on Bairstow's arrival, stood up and read the terms of the placard to prove that the meeting was invalid. Eventually the lecture was allowed to proceed, but at the end, after much noise and hooting and disagreement on who got to speak when, and for how long, the chair was forced to reprimand the conduct of both men and it was agreed that discussion would be abandoned that night and they would meet again under revised terms.

The use of debate to settle local opinion on a controversial topic can be demonstrated by one further example. In the summer of 1842 the free trade lecturer, James Acland met the Chartist leader, Feargus O'Connor in a debate on whether repeal of the Corn Laws or the Charter would be the best means of emancipating the labouring

¹³⁷ Henry Brewster Stanton, *Sketches of Reforms and Reformers* (New York, 1849), p. 241.

¹³⁸ Holyoake delegated arrangements to a specially formed committee, *Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life*, Vol. I, p. 256.

¹³⁹ The placard headed "Challenge to the Corn Law Repealers" stated that two lectures would be given on labour, capital and the corn laws, after each would be an opportunity for discussion, *BO*, 13 August 1840.

classes.¹⁴⁰ The issue was to be resolved at a public meeting at the newly opened Halifax Oddfellows Hall.¹⁴¹ Prior to the debate the terms of engagement were agreed and these were reiterated at the start of the meeting: both parties would have their own chairman; Acland would open the debate; each speaker would talk for fifteen minutes before handing over to his opponent and the debate would end at eleven pm.¹⁴² At the conclusion of the lively three hour debate, the audience unanimously passed a resolution in favour of the Charter and nothing else. This meeting was triumphantly reported in the *Northern Star* as ‘the lion devoured’ Mr Acland, and ‘finished forever the Corn Law question in Halifax’, (“the lion” being the popular nickname for Feargus O’Connor).¹⁴³ Allowing for the *Star*’s hyperbole, such comments illustrates the way in which the formal public debate (often between itinerant orators) could determine political questions in the locality. One of the more striking aspects of the Acland v O’Connor debate was its gentlemanly nature.¹⁴⁴ The speakers kept to their time slots and refrained from insult or slander. Indeed even the Halifax audience (which was packed with local Chartists eager to see their hero, O’Connor, speak) was notable for its good conduct. So much so that a reporter from the Liberal *Bradford Observer* complimented the audience for ‘behaving with great decorum’ and for giving each side ‘a fair hearing’.¹⁴⁵

Not everybody liked the set debate. By the 1850s there was a backlash against show piece encounters particularly between itinerant secularist lecturers and clerical opponents. Some of these objections centred on the commercial aspect of the set debate and the profits made by the speakers. Hence the *Bradford Observer*, under a heading ‘The Discussion Nuisance’, attacked Messrs Holyoake and Bowes for their public debates, claiming that their presence in Bradford during April 1850 was purely to whip up a controversy and make money. The article went on to say that no good could come of such an encounter, nor could such a discussion lead to truth, yet (as the editorial snidely

¹⁴⁰ The Halifax Chartists had rather deviously, at the eleventh hour, replaced the initial Chartist speaker, Rev. W. V. Jackson, with the ferociously eloquent Feargus O’Connor, *NS*, 9 July 1842.

¹⁴¹ The majestic Halifax Oddfellows Hall (fronted by four giant Corinthian columns) opened on 9 June 1840. The opening ceremony concluded with a dinner for 1,300 people, which indicates the size of its main hall, *Leeds Mercury*, 13 June 1840, see also press cutting file held at Halifax Local Studies Library.

¹⁴² Mr Martin, a local freetrader, was the chairman for Acland and the Chartist Benjamin Rushton for O’Connor.

¹⁴³ *NS*, 9 July 1842, even the Liberal *Bradford Observer* felt obliged to report Acland’s defeat, *BO*, 14 July 1842.

¹⁴⁴ Acland was treated well, especially considering that many of the Chartists present would have recalled his advocacy of the new poor law some four years earlier.

¹⁴⁵ *BO*, 14 July 1842.

concluded) it was worth the disputants' time as if they play to full houses at '1d, 2d, and 3d, of course they have not disputed in Bradford *for nothing!*'¹⁴⁶ A similar reluctance to use the platform for public theological debates was expressed by a Halifax minister five years later, the Rev. E. Mellor spoke of the futility of 'moral boxing matches' and placing faith in 'gladiatorship'. Instead Mellor advocated that visiting infidel lecturers should be countered in print by deluging a town with 'suitable publications'.¹⁴⁷ Mellor's reaction might be seen as evidence of the growing importance of print in the propaganda war. However, I think a more likely explanation is that Owenite and later secularist lecturers were simply better at public debate than local vicars, an argument which I shall return to later in this chapter when we look at the talented Owenite debater, Emma Martin.

Barriers to fair discussion and democratic speech

An effective way of keeping working-class opponents outside the meeting hall was to restrict access by ticketing. High prices were a useful deterrent and vendors could use subterfuge to prevent too many tickets from falling into the hands of their opponents.¹⁴⁸ When James Acland, as a freelance lecturer, toured the factory towns of Lancashire and the West Riding speaking in support of the New Poor Law, he acquired notoriety not only for his views but also his tendency to approach the task as a commercial endeavour. During his tour he hired large music halls and theatres and offered a range of ticket prices, while his advertisements and handbills resembled those used in the acting profession.¹⁴⁹ Acland was given a stormy reception in Huddersfield (a leading centre of the Anti-Poor Law Movement) where he was widely attacked for his unwillingness to pay the profits of his lecture to a Huddersfield charity or indeed to abandon ticketing all together to allow free and fair debate by those most likely to come into contact with the new act.¹⁵⁰ Conversely, Chartist meetings were rarely ticketed (except for celebratory events involving food and

¹⁴⁶ *BO*, 25 April 1850. Holyoake's attitude to the morality of payment is discussed in chapter six, p. 221.

¹⁴⁷ *BO*, 13 December 1860.

¹⁴⁸ Even when tickets were *gratis*, it was common for them to be available only on application allowing organisers some control over who could attend. For example, an advertisement for a Bradford lecture by Mr Grieg of the Leeds Anti-Corn Law Association noted, that in order to meet costs, the first row of seats would attract an admission cost of threepence and sixpence respectively. The rest of the seats in the body of the hall were to be free although still subject to ticketing, on application to Mr William Byles (who was the editor of the *Bradford Observer* and Secretary of the Bradford ACLL), *BO*, 23 January 1840.

¹⁴⁹ See advert in the *Northern Star* for a lecture to be discussed at Walton's Music-saloon, Leeds at which the orchestra cost 1s 6d, saloon 1s and the gallery 6d, *NS*, 1 December 1838.

¹⁵⁰ *Preston Chronicle*, 17 November 1838. Four years later when Acland, now a League employee, lectured in Halifax, the *Northern Star* berated him for charging sixpence to keep out 'the naughty Chartists', *NS*, 9 July 1842.

entertainment), instead there was usually a collection at the close of the meetings to pay towards the cost of hiring a room and paying a lecturer. This practice was in part a reflection of the poverty of its supporters, but more importantly an assertion of the movement's democratic principles – a public meeting was not public if attendance was denied to the poorest people.

Acland's ill-fated lecture in support of the New Poor Law at the Huddersfield Philosophical Hall in November 1838 culminated in a riot. An angry mob holding lighted torches gathered outside the hall, some of whom battered the door panels so fearfully that the doorman was forced to abandon his post and seek the help of chief Constable.¹⁵¹ Doormen, as the experience of Robert Lowery in Dublin cited earlier illustrates, could be overpowered by a determined mob and there are plenty of examples of those without tickets occupying seats reserved for those who had paid in advance.¹⁵² Taking payment on the door could also be fraught with legal difficulties. Overzealous magistrates did on occasion prosecute organisers who took money on the door. In Hull in 1844, two Owenites, Richard Johnson and James Watson were prosecuted and fined for letting a room to the lecturer, Emma Martin, and for taking money on the door.¹⁵³

The Hull case also illustrates how the actions of the magistrates might divide local inhabitants and raise the question of how far free and fair debate was tolerated in a specific town. Emma Martin's lectures in Hull were well attended: the cross examination of witnesses showed that the audience included two Baptist ministers and a member of the Hull Town Council and that it was orderly and quiet.¹⁵⁴ Johnson (the defendant prosecuted for taking money) used his day in court to eloquently plead for the right of free speech, pointing out that elsewhere in the country such discussions were permitted and reminding the judges that, if Hull Owenites were to be prosecuted, 'what then was to be said respecting the Chartist and free trade meetings, for which the authorities had granted the use of the Town Hall?' Johnson concluded that if the bench convicted him, in Hull all 'political and religious discussion would be at an end'. It is interesting that both the

¹⁵¹ The Huddersfield riot was widely reported see: *The Times*, 20 November 1838; *Leeds Mercury*, 17 November 1838; *NS*, 17 November 1838; *Halifax Guardian*, 17 November 1838; *Liverpool Mercury*, 30 November 1838; *Hull Packet*, 23 November 1838; *Morning Chronicle*, 19 November 1838.

¹⁵² At the Emma Martin debate held at Hull Temperance Hall, the police superintendent intervened in the surge for seats to allow entry of those who had paid in advance, *Hull Packet*, 11 October 1844.

¹⁵³ Johnson acted as doorman and Watson was the landlord of the premises hired by Mrs Martin, *Hull Packet*, 11 October 1844; *NS*, 23 November 1844.

¹⁵⁴ Judge Firbank snobbily commented that Baptist clergy were no proof of an orderly meeting as they 'were not clergymen, in common parlance', *Hull Packet*, 11 October 1844.

defendants and Town Clerk drew their arguments from the same source, Archbold's *Justice of the Peace and Parish Officer*, a widely circulated practical guide to magisterial duties and local government, which first appeared in 1840.¹⁵⁵ The judges were not moved by Johnson's eloquence or his familiarity with Archbold and both defendants were found guilty and fined.¹⁵⁶ Owenite lecturers, unlike Chartist and temperance speakers, faced the additional weapon of the blasphemy laws. The Hull mayor made a point of alerting the Attorney-General to the blasphemous content of Emma Martin's lectures, leaving it 'optional' whether he wished to adopt proceedings.¹⁵⁷

While the heavy-handed approach of the Hull magistrates in prosecuting the door keeper was unusual, the strategy of applying pressure upon landlords to prevent meetings was widespread. For example, magistrates in South Church, near Bishop Auckland, threatened to withdraw the licenses of those renting rooms to the Chartist missionary John Deegan.¹⁵⁸ Another more sinister approach was to allow meetings to continue unimpeded while operating a system of spies and informers.¹⁵⁹ Plain clothes police officers attended many Chartist meetings in the West Riding and the North East and closely watched the movements of leading Chartists.¹⁶⁰ Feargus O'Connor at Manchester in spring 1848 made a public reference to 'two government officials' who had stalked him since leaving London that morning, offering to save their expenses by giving their masters 'a verbatim report' of his speeches.¹⁶¹ Chartist organisations, aware that their large public meetings were watched, tailored their rhetoric accordingly. More sensitive issues would be discussed at smaller class meetings which were less open to police surveillance, although as the abortive risings in Bradford and Sheffield proved, the class structure was not immune from

¹⁵⁵ Johnson directed the court's attention to a paragraph in *Archbold's* which showed that he was not liable to which the town clerk replied he would point to a passage which showed he was. *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ Johnson received the full penalty of £20 and Watson, after changing his plea to guilty and promising never to let the room again for similar purpose, was fined twenty shillings and nine shillings cost, *Hull Packet* 11 October 1844. The Anti-Persecution Union convened a public meeting in London condemning the conduct of the Hull magistrates and in the hope of revoking the fines imposed, *NS*, 24 November 1844.

¹⁵⁷ *Hull Packet*, 11 October 1844.

¹⁵⁸ *NS*, 31 October 1840.

¹⁵⁹ Mather, *Public Order*, esp. chapter six. John Belchem, 'The Spy System in 1848: Chartists and Informers - an Australian connection', *Labour History*, Vol. 39 (1980), pp. 15-27. Radzinowicz, 'New Departures', especially pp. 62-3. The metropolitan police compiled extensive reports of the 1839 Chartist Convention, see TNA, HO 44/52/f. 231-240.

¹⁶⁰ Radzinowicz, 'New Departures', p. 63 deals with use of reporters. Saville, *1848*, pp. 125; 141-2.

¹⁶¹ *NS*, 25 March 1848. See also 'A Policeman's Reminiscences', *Manchester Times*, 2 September 1876.

spies and *agent provocateurs*.¹⁶² Where a case for seditious libel could be made against Chartist speakers, verbatim accounts might be obtained from subpoenaed newspaper reporters present at the meeting.¹⁶³ The correspondence of leading agitators was also secretly opened before sending to the recipient, adding another layer to the Government's monitoring of potential troublemakers.¹⁶⁴

Whereas Chartist leaders were primarily subjected to legal action on the contents of their speeches, it was easier to harass less prominent travelling lecturers on more trivial matters. Breaches of the peace caused by unlawful assembly could be dealt with locally by magistrates and, as John Belchem notes, after Peterloo there was a shift away from prosecutions for seditious libel to unlawful assembly.¹⁶⁵ There are countless examples of itinerant Chartist, free trade and temperance lecturers being hauled before local magistrates charged with obstructing the Queen's highway or for infringing local bylaws.¹⁶⁶ The case against the teetotal advocate James Teare can be taken as typical. In early autumn 1851, Teare was summoned before the Sunderland magistrates for blocking the thoroughfare in Sunderland New Market. According to evidence heard in the police court Teare had assembled 800 people, which caused an obstruction to traffic and when he was asked to move he refused and continued to address his audience. Teare's defence centred on his claim that he had used the New Market site as it was regularly used for public speaking. The case concluded without charge on Teare's undertaking not to cause further obstruction.¹⁶⁷

Gender and class determined access to democratic discussion, particularly at large town hall meetings representing a cross section of the local population where the ruling oligarchies adopted a paternalistic approach to discussion. While working men were permitted to speak at such public meetings, it is notable that verbatim reports of their

¹⁶² Mather, *Public Order*, p. 206. Chase, *Chartism*, pp. 131-140. A recent article on Samuel Holberry's trial raises interesting questions concerning surveillance and the power of the state although the argument that Holberry was innocent is unconvincing. Catherine Lewis, 'Samuel Holberry: Chartist Conspirator or Victim of a State Conspiracy?' *Crimes and Misdemeanours* Vol. 3, Issue 1 (2009), 109-124.

¹⁶³ However, as Saville notes, it was difficult for reporters to gain access to the small indoor meetings where the 'greatest violence of language takes place', Saville, *1848*, p. 142.

¹⁶⁴ Radzinowicz, 'New Departures', p. 62; Mather, *Public Order*, pp. 218-225; Chapter two p. 56 above.

¹⁶⁵ Belchem, 'Radical Language, Meaning and Identity in the Age of the Chartists', p. 10.

¹⁶⁶ See also pp. 57 and 219 for further discussion of challenges and obstructions faced by lecturers.

¹⁶⁷ Allan William Harty, 'The Temperance Movement in Sunderland 1830-1855', (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Sunderland, 2007), pp. 255-6. For contemporary advice aimed at magistrates on open air preaching see Stone, *Justices Manual*, pp. 385-6 which, while noting that it was possible to prosecute for unlawful assembly, counselled that any such prosecution would 'be discountenanced by the spirit of the age'.

speeches were substantially shorter than those of their superiors. Take, for example, a meeting held in Bradford to discuss sanitary reform. While the *Bradford Observer* recorded the speeches of several working men, these were brief in comparison to those made by the town worthies. Unfortunately it is impossible to know whether they were abridged or whether operatives simply occupied less time addressing the meeting.¹⁶⁸ At large town meetings the chair was routinely occupied by a town worthy rather than a working man.¹⁶⁹ The cultural barriers preventing women from participating in public political debate were entrenched in this period. While women were active in collecting signatures and organising petitions they were not encouraged to speak publically in support of their cause before mixed audiences. The debacle concerning the American female delegates to the 1840 London Anti-slavery Convention and their right to address the meeting illustrates prevailing attitudes towards respectable women and public speaking. After much soul-searching the abolitionists decided that female delegates would not be permitted to speak as it was ‘contrary to the custom and usage of this country to admit ladies to a participation in public discussions’.¹⁷⁰

Antipathy to women on the public platform was most evident in political and irreligious matters.¹⁷¹ While women preachers might be frowned upon as a-scriptural they were more acceptable than those who expressed political opinions, or worse still, like Emma Martin and Harriet Law, directly challenged the bible.¹⁷² Perhaps too, gifted polemicists like Martin were heartily disliked because the men they defeated lost out not only to an infidel but also to a woman. At Hull in 1844, Emma Martin’s clerical opponent, after being utterly routed in public debate, refused to allow the customary show of hands. Even the sympathetic *Hull Packet* was forced to admit that the performance of the young Baptist minister, Mr Pulsford, had proved the folly of public discussion. As the debate proceeded, Pulsford was reported as raising his voice to a ‘ludicrous falsetto’ perhaps suggesting that being publicly defeated at the hands of a woman was both a humiliating

¹⁶⁸ *BO*, 5 June 1845.

¹⁶⁹ Women never chaired public meetings, except meetings held solely for female audiences and these can hardly be seen as public as they were not open to all.

¹⁷⁰ As the *Bradford Observer* pointed out even in America the rights of women to speak in public were ‘a matter of great discussion and of diversity of opinion’. *BO*, 18 June 1840. Simon Morgan, ‘Seen but not Heard? Women’s Platforms, Respectability, and Female Publics in the Mid-Nineteenth Century’, *Nineteenth-Century Prose*, Vol. 29, Issue 1 (2002), 50-66.

¹⁷¹ For a favourable review of a young female preacher see, *BO*, 14 May 1835.

¹⁷² Harriet Law was a Secularist lecturer, see H. C. G. Matthew, ‘Law [*née* Frost], Harriet Teresa (1831–1897), secularist’ *ODNB* (Oxford, 2004).

and emasculating experience.¹⁷³ The limited number of women who became professional itinerant lecturers and the cultural injunction against women participating in heated public argument is discussed in more detail in chapter six.

Continuity and change

Reports of controversial debates reached a much wider audience than those present at the actual event. Thanks to the widespread practice of near verbatim reporting, the foolish public remarks of local worthies and clergyman potentially had a humiliating afterlife. The expansion of the press and Pitman's shorthand allowed more comprehensive reporting and by the 1850s and 1860s meetings large and small were reported at length. The *Bradford Observer*, for its part, claimed to furnish its readers with impartial coverage of all political meetings in the Bradford vicinity 'in pursuance of our universal custom'.¹⁷⁴ The relationship between the platform and the press and the growth of reported local meetings will be discussed further in the next chapter. The interplay between verbal communication and printed propaganda is also illustrated by the practice of printing public meeting resolutions as advertisements. By the 1850s, some enterprising groups, not content with merely having their meetings reported on page six or seven, were advertising not only the dates and purposes of their public meetings but also printing resolutions and summaries of previous debates. Such advertisement on the front page enjoyed greater prominence than reports buried elsewhere in the issue. The Bradford auxiliary of the Society for the Liberation of Religion from State Patronage and Control disseminated the key outcomes of its meetings by printing full details of all resolutions passed (including who moved, who seconded and who supported) in the advertising columns on the front page of the *Bradford Observer*.¹⁷⁵ Of course such strategies were restricted to well-funded and middle-class associations.

By the 1850s and 1860s some of the more respectable reform organisations relied upon deputations rather than itinerant salaried speakers. Aided by the expanding railway network, deputations, typically comprising the key reformers of a specific cause, toured the localities visiting branch offices and generating publicity. Often their visits were by

¹⁷³ *Hull Packet*, 11 October 1844.

¹⁷⁴ In May 1850 the *Bradford Observer* noted that it sent a reporter to a strike meeting convened by the Bradford tailors not because it supported the strike but because it was their duty to report both master and men, *BO*, 2 May 1850.

¹⁷⁵ *BO*, 13 December 1860.

specific invitation and carefully timed to coincide with a large town hall meeting in which they would be expected to address the audience and play a prominent part in the proceedings. The British Anti-State Church Association (BASCA), a body founded by leading Nonconformists, favoured the deputation as a propaganda tool (as did the Northern Reform Union discussed later in this chapter). Bradford Nonconformists welcomed a BASCA deputation from Leicester headed by the Rev. J. P. Mursell¹⁷⁶ in spring 1850.¹⁷⁷ That autumn BASCA's net widened and it sent a deputation comprising the Rev. John Gordon, of Coventry, and Edward Miall to: 'Hull, York, Leeds, Darwen, Blackburn, Huddersfield, Halifax, Bradford and Wakefield'.¹⁷⁸ In November that same year, Bradford welcomed a deputation from the Manchester-based the National Public School Association, whose aim was to campaign for state funded non-denominational education.¹⁷⁹ Several locally inspired meetings called by Bradford groups to debate the education question were also held in this period, illustrating how a mixture of local, regional and national figures kept the education controversy in the minds of Bradfordians.

Deputations differed from the lecture tours pioneered by the reform organisations of the late 1830s and early 1840s in several respects. The social status of deputations was generally resolutely middle-class: speakers, whether parliamentarians, editors or clergymen, tended to be of independent means and thus could not be pilloried as professional agitators. The very word 'deputation' has a ring of authority and gravity lacking from say an agitating tour. Moreover the sheer number of deputations, whether from religious, moral or political pressure groups illustrates just how far lecturing had become an accepted mainstream campaign tool. Towards the end of the Chartist era the opprobrium directed toward travelling political lecturers was slowly diminishing.¹⁸⁰ This was partly because 'respectable' national politicians such as Bright, Cobden and Gladstone were now indulging in popular political oratory well away from the capital. But also

¹⁷⁶ Reverend James Philipppo Mursell was a preacher and a political radical who founded the Leicester and Leicestershire Political Union. Mursell is briefly mentioned in the *ODNB* see, Gordon Goodwin, revised L E Lauer 'Manning, Samuel (1821–1881), Particular Baptist minister and journal editor', *ODNB* (Oxford, 2004).

¹⁷⁷ *BO*, 14 March 1850.

¹⁷⁸ *BO*, 7 November 1850. In 1844 Edward Miall (1809–1881) founded the Anti-State Church Association, afterwards known as the Liberation Society, which along with the League was instrumental in launching John Bright into Parliamentary life. Miall was also involved the long fight for the abolition of compulsory church-rates and prominent in the discussions aroused by the 1870 Education Bill. D W Bebbington, 'Miall, Edward (1809–1881), politician, journalist, and Congregational minister', *ODNB* (Oxford, 2004).

¹⁷⁹ This meeting was addressed by a mixture of local and national speakers including William Rand, Revd W. M. Kerrow, Samuel Kydd, *BO*, 21 November 1850.

¹⁸⁰ A theme discussed further in chapter six.

because, increasingly during the 1850s and 1860s, addresses were delivered indoors, often in the context of a public meeting with multiple speakers, and thus could hardly be construed as samples of mob oratory. Joseph Meisel notes that by the late 1860s John Bright's platform campaigns were predominantly indoors: 'Bright had made it quite clear that he would not speak in the open air'.¹⁸¹

Besides improved transport, which assisted the circulation of wealthier speakers, another fundamental requirement for the growth of indoor lectures and public meetings was suitable space. The growth in political oratory was dependent upon the expansion of purpose-built lecture and concert halls.¹⁸² By the 1850s, most provincial towns had acquired several spacious indoor venues for public meetings and lectures. Cities and towns were also competing with each other over civic amenities, no more so than in the provision of magnificent town halls. Such buildings provided important venues for political meetings. Early radical activity in Bradford was hampered by lack of commodious indoor space. The Bradford Exchange Building, which opened in 1826, was the largest venue in Bradford until St George's Hall opened in 1853, but unfortunately for radicals it was dominated by a clique of tory elites who controlled which groups were allowed access to its facilities.¹⁸³ Hence in 1835, Bradford's middle-class reformers had little alternative but to meet in the warehouse of local factory magnate, Titus Salt.¹⁸⁴ Salt's warehouse was also used later that year as a venue for a public meeting to debate the Municipal Corporation Reform Bill.¹⁸⁵ At the other end of the social spectrum, Bradford Chartists, working class sanitary reformers and woolcombers, unable to hire indoor space, met on urban wasteland at Peckover's Walk or Thornton Road.¹⁸⁶ Such outdoor meetings, while exposed to the elements, did have the advantage of visually demonstrating the workingman's grievance, none more so that a poignant meeting of the Bradford unemployed handloom weavers in 1835 outside the courtroom.¹⁸⁷

Bradford in the 1840s and 1850s saw numerous meeting rooms springing up, from the grandeur of St George's Hall to more modest music halls and theatres, church halls,

¹⁸¹ Meisel, *Public Speech*, p. 238.

¹⁸² Prior to the development of purpose built halls and meeting rooms, lectures and meetings were often held in public houses and inns, Peter Clark, *The English Alehouse: a Social History 1200-1830* (Harlow, 1983).

¹⁸³ Koditschek, *Class formation and industrial society*, p. 149. Gary Firth, *Bradford and the Industrial Revolution: an economic history 1760-1840* (Halifax, 1990), p. 215.

¹⁸⁴ *BO*, 30 July 1835.

¹⁸⁵ *BO*, 6 August 1835.

¹⁸⁶ Peckovers Walk was used over the years by various pressure groups until presumably it was redeveloped.

¹⁸⁷ *BO*, 9 April 1835.

mechanics institutes and temperance rooms. Many of these had space which could be rented out to external bodies for meetings and discussions: a pattern of development mirrored in other provincial towns, cities and sizeable villages. By 1855 Shipley, a small township some three miles away from Bradford, could boast a purpose built lecture hall and newsroom with the capacity to hold 700 people resplendent with a much admired innovative lighting technology.¹⁸⁸ During the mid-Victorian period, in addition to hosting public meetings, town halls were hired out to commercial enterprises.¹⁸⁹ Some felt that the balance had swung too far towards commercial entertainment. In 1859 Joseph Cowen was outraged to find that the Northern Reform Union (NRU) was denied use of Newcastle town hall on the grounds that working men would dirty it. Cowen told a Newcastle meeting that:

The Town Hall was built by money belonging to the people, and it was therefore their property, and if it could be let for serenaders and blackamoors – for public dinners, from which he was sure not everybody would come away sober – and to father Gavazzi, for political sermons – why could they not let it to the working men of Newcastle, to preach their political rights.¹⁹⁰

The Northern Reform Union

Cowen as treasurer (and key financial backer) of the NRU was instrumental in refocusing efforts for political reform away from the mass platform, with its undertone of force and civil disorder, to the civilised indoor forum of the town hall public meeting. The NRU placed the constitutional public meeting at the heart of its campaign strategy. For this reason it is worth pausing to consider the NRU more closely. The NRU was officially founded in Newcastle in January 1858 and its political aims were to agitate for manhood suffrage, vote by ballot and abolition of the property qualification.¹⁹¹ The NRU employed a paid full-time secretary, Richard Bagnell Reed¹⁹² and towards the end of its existence, a designated lecturer, Charles Hadfield.¹⁹³ It was governed by a council composed of former

¹⁸⁸ It was reported that the room was 'lighted from the ceiling, after a novel plan, which has been much admired', *BO*, 22 November 1855.

¹⁸⁹ Colin Cunningham, *Victorian and Edwardian Town Halls* (London, 1981).

¹⁹⁰ *Newcastle Chronicle*, 14 January 1859.

¹⁹¹ The demands of the NRU encompassed three of the original points of the People's Charter. Joan Allen, *Joseph Cowen and Popular radicalism on Tyneside, 1829-1900* (Monmouth, 2007), especially pp. 45-49; Tyne and Wear Archives, Newcastle, Joseph Cowen papers, Northern Reform Union minute books.

¹⁹² Owen Ashton and Paul Pickering, *Friends of the People: uneasy radicals in the age of the Chartists* (London, 2002) chapt. 6, 'A Newspaper Genius': Richard Bagnall Reed (1831-1908); Maurice Milne, 'Reed, Richard Bagnall (1831-1908)' in Bellamy and Saville, *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, Vol. IV, 142-146.

¹⁹³ 'Hadfield, Charles (1821-1884), journalist' by G. C. Boase, rev. Joanne Potier, *ODNB* (Oxford 2004). Charles Hadfield cannot have been an industrious lecturer as I have been unable to find a single example of him addressing an audience.

Chartists, former members of the Northern Political Union (NPU) and local trade unionists.¹⁹⁴ The NRU despite its short-lived existence was important for a number of reasons.¹⁹⁵ The NRU illustrates the continuity in the North East between Chartist agitation and later radicalism. It furnishes, moreover, a case study of pressure group tactics in the late 1850s and early 1860s, thereby illustrating how public political discussion had evolved during the Chartist era and immediate aftermath. The NRU also underlines the significance of regional political mobilisation in this period.

The NRU was highly constitutional and preferred educating the public on the need for parliamentary reform and universal manhood suffrage rather than indulging in veiled threats of disorder.¹⁹⁶ As a report in the *Newcastle Chronicle* was careful to emphasise, its intention was to “educate” public opinion [rather] than to make a demonstration of its force’.¹⁹⁷ This sentiment was reiterated on the NRU platform by Thomas Gregson, who moved a resolution at one of the first NRU meetings in January 1858 expressing the wish that none might be foolish enough to ‘talk of physical force, or of any other weapon than intellectual ones’. This resolution was carried unanimously.¹⁹⁸ Such distancing from Chartist style agitation was important as several council members had strong Chartist connections which might have deterred potential middle-class supporters.¹⁹⁹

Its constitutional nature was also evident in its reliance on public meetings, petitioning and its tendency to eulogise ‘constitutional’ historical reformers like Major Cartwright rather than more recent radical reformers.²⁰⁰ Like the later tactics of the ACLL and the UKA, the NRU also exerted pressure on northern MPs, at one point even fielding its own candidate. The NRU also made overtures to the Financial Reform Movement, the Ballot Society and nationally prominent radical MPs including Col. T. Perronet Thompson

¹⁹⁴ Early meetings of the NRU were held in the Chartist Hall until larger premises could be found. Cowen made explicit reference to the Chartist origins of the NRU in a speech delivered in January 1858, *Newcastle Chronicle*, 15 January 1858.

¹⁹⁵ Joan Allen, citing Margot Finn’s dismissal of the NRU as ‘an anomaly within the wider middle-class reform movement’, says NRU has not received the attention from historians it deserves. Allen, *Joseph Cowen* p. 47. See also Taylor, *Decline of British Radicalism*, pp. 304-5. Thomas F. Gallagher, ‘The Second Reform Movement, 1848-1867’ *Albion: A Quarterly Journal concerned with British Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (Summer, 1980), p. 149.

¹⁹⁶ Allen, *Joseph Cowen*, p. 48.

¹⁹⁷ *Newcastle Chronicle* 15 January 1859.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁹⁹ NRU sought to foster cooperation between the middle and working classes ‘free from the personal and class declamations of the Chartist times, *Daily News*, 15 September 1858.

²⁰⁰ Cartwright is mentioned nineteen times in the NRU tract a *Hand-book for Reformers*, see James Paul Cobbett, *A Hand-book for Reformers: containing notes upon duration of Parliaments, the suffrage, mode of voting, etc etc.* (Newcastle, 1859).

and John Bright.²⁰¹ The NRU, while espousing the cause of universal male suffrage, emphasised its desire to co-operate with the middle-class reform bodies, supporting John Bright's moderate calls for reform in this period as instalments to its wider aim.²⁰² The NRU was operating in a very different context to the Chartists in the early 1840s. The appetite for reform across the country had waned. Indeed John Bright's speaking tour in the aftermath of the rejection of Lord Derby's Reform Bill was marked by apathy rather than riot. Yet this apathy could be turned to advantage. As the general condition of the working man was less precarious the NRU's demand for reform could not be dismissed as 'the cry of empty stomachs shouting politics owing to a deficiency of soup'. It was rather 'the demand of sensible men who ask for what they ought to have, and will continue to ask until they get it'.²⁰³ Clearly the tactic of small-scale public meetings where informed discussion and debate could take place rather than mass rallies was a deliberate strategy to emphasise the respectability and the worthiness of the politically engaged, rational working-man.

A key figure in the NRU was the industrious secretary R. B. Reed, who established and visited district organisations, liaised with the press, and joined Cowen on the NRU platform at numerous small village and town meetings in the North East. A network of forty branches of the NRU was eventually established across the North East. Rather than employing teams of itinerant speakers to lecture either indoor or outside as opportunity dictated, the NRU favoured the discipline of the indoor, officially convened public meeting gathered for the time honoured purpose of getting up a petition. Such meetings, while being called by local radicals, would be addressed by a deputation from the NRU usually composed of Cowen, Reed and one or two others.²⁰⁴ The NRU travelling road show (a beneficiary of the railway age) visited endless small towns and villages during 1858 and 1859. In the latter year alone Reed claimed that 220 meetings had taken place.²⁰⁵ The avoidance of mass outdoor rallies was significant; the NRU council did not wish to repeat the mistakes of their Chartist predecessors. While I have argued that Chartist meetings

²⁰¹ Both groups were referred to at the 1859 AGM, *Daily News*, 28 December 1859.

²⁰² Many NRU members were opposed to Bright's 'sham' radicalism but Cowen persuaded its council to accept all measures as instalments towards the greater objective, Allen, *Joseph Cowen*, p. 49.

²⁰³ *Daily News*, 26 November 1859. Milne, 'Reed', p. 143.

²⁰⁴ To cite a typical example, *Reynolds News* carried a report of a Sunderland public meeting held in November 1858 'to consider the propriety of petitioning Parliament in favour of a new Reform Bill'. Joseph Cowen junior and R. B. Reed attended as a deputation from the Northern Reform Union. The meeting was chaired by the mayor suggesting wider cross class support, *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 28 November 1858.

²⁰⁵ *Daily News*, 28 December 1859. For detailed itineraries of public meetings see NRU minute book.

strove to be democratic and orderly, public perception of Chartism was still marred by the spectre of drilling and torch light meetings.

Martin Hewitt argues that from the 1840s to 1860s the public meeting replaced the petition as the key mechanism for expressing public opinion.²⁰⁶ Yet surely it is impossible to disentangle the two: most public meetings in this period were still ostensibly called to petition Parliament. Indeed the volume of petitions received by Parliament remained consistently high until after the Crimean War.²⁰⁷ Aside from the monster Chartist petitions of 1839, 1842 and 1848 (which were gathered piecemeal over several months by a network of activists) most petitions were produced by a specific village, town or city and were formulated at one (or more) public meeting(s). An examination of the SDUK's *Companion to the Almanac: or Year Book of General Information* (which was printed as a supplement to its annual *British Almanac*), reveals the continuing strength of both petitioning and, by association, public meetings in the period 1837-1860.²⁰⁸ The *Companion* includes a list of petitions received during the previous parliamentary session (arranged by topic) with the number of individual petitions and the total number of signatories.²⁰⁹ If, as a bare minimum, every petition was generated by at least one public meeting we can roughly estimate the number of meetings in a given year. From this data it is clear that the number of public meetings (or more precisely the number of meetings which produced petitions) grew substantially during the Chartist period. In 1836, for example, there were 5,733 petitions received by Parliament; in 1842, 7,591; in 1848, 18,248 and by 1860, 24,386.²¹⁰

The NRU valued petitioning as it provided a convenient 'constitutional' context and was also an important mechanism for motivating the grass roots. The NRU took care to avoid the pitfalls evident in the Chartist monster petitions by ensuring that signatories

²⁰⁶ Hewitt, 'Aspects of Platform Culture', pp. 12-15.

²⁰⁷ Taylor, *Decline of English Radicalism*, pp. 158-9.

²⁰⁸ As the two volumes were often bound together they are generally treated as one publication for bibliographical purposes.

²⁰⁹ Subject categories used by the *Companion* include: Parliamentary, ecclesiastical, colonies, taxes, and miscellaneous. Within these overarching categories a diverse range of subjects are covered.

²¹⁰ *The British Almanac of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, for the year of Our Lord 1837* (London, 1837); *The British Almanac of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, for the year of Our Lord 1843* (London, 1843); *The British Almanac of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, for the year of Our Lord 1849* (London, 1849); *The British Almanac of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, for the year of Our Lord 1861* (London, 1861).

also supplied details of their address and professions.²¹¹ Nor did they rely on one large monster petition backed up with the physical presence of thousands of supporters. Of the 115 petitions presented to Parliament by the NRU, seventy-four petitions were the outcome of a single public meeting. Yet while eschewing the large dramatic single petition the NRU was well aware of the need to demonstrate mass support. Thus at their AGM, (which was widely reported in sympathetic national newspapers) they calculated that of the remaining forty-one petitions, the aggregate number of signatures was 34,676, a figure which equated to 'one-half of the adult male population of the district for which they were gathered'.²¹²

Like earlier political reform movements the NRU relied upon its grassroots organisation, but unlike the earlier Chartist, temperance and free trade movements it did not encourage local supporters to give *ad hoc* lectures on reform. It would appear that this strategy was deliberate and by confining speech-making to the NRU leadership and only within the context of carefully governed political meetings, rhetorical excesses could be avoided. Perhaps this desire to control the political message of the NRU also persuaded the leadership not to extend itself too widely across the country. Radicals elsewhere in the country bombarded the NRU with requests for a visit from the NRU deputation to boost their own flagging organisations. Cowen noted that he had received invitations from places as distant as Ayr, Sheffield, Birmingham and Blackpool but had concluded, after discussion with Reed that the NRU could not extend itself that far.²¹³ Instead Cowen defined the geographical remit of the Union as the district 'between York and Berwick and between Alston and the sea'.²¹⁴

Unlike the travelling NRU deputation, printed propaganda was not subject to geographical restrictions. Cowen and Reed had since the beginning of their campaign utilised both the platform and the pen. For example, in the spring of 1858, 2000 copies of an address setting out the Union's aims was published and circulated.²¹⁵ During the first fifteen months of its existence, the NRU also produced an in-house journal, the *Northern Reform Record* and, after this project was disbanded, concentrated its efforts on the circulation of cheap tracts and a national press campaign in which reports of key meetings

²¹¹ Milne, 'Reed', p. 243; *Daily News*, 28 December 1859.

²¹² *Daily News*, 28 December 1859.

²¹³ *Ibid.*

²¹⁴ Milne, Reed p. 143; *Daily News*, 28 December 1859.

²¹⁵ Joan Allen "Resurrecting Jerusalem": the late Chartist press in the North-East of England, 1852-1859', in Allen and Ashton (eds.), *Papers for the People*, p. 177.

and addresses were sent to sympathetic editors.²¹⁶ Its newspaper campaign was very productive. An address outlining the principles of the NRU was published in full in fifteen London newspapers, while a further forty published extracts.²¹⁷ The NRU also encouraged its sympathisers to publish supportive letters and articles in the national and regional press: Holyoake, writing under the pseudonym of Disque, sent a succession of letters to the *Daily News* outlining the honourable principles of the NRU.²¹⁸

The NRU declined and floundered after only four years of operation: a fate largely caused by ill-advisedly fielding its own controversial candidate at the 1859 Newcastle election and for becoming embroiled in litigation while exposing electoral corruption in Berwick.²¹⁹ Nevertheless during its brief existence it had, as Cowen himself claimed, educated ‘the masses in the work of self-government’²²⁰ The NRU bridged the gap between late Chartism and the Reform League, providing a politicised grassroots network of activists in the North East that could be readily summoned.²²¹ Its low key strategy of political education and highly controlled indoor discussion rather than large outdoor rallies proved to be a short-lived feature of radicalism. The interior ‘moral force’ campaigning of the NRU was to give way to more robust politicking as Newcastle reformers joined forces with local trade unionists. By the beginning of 1867, the NRU’s direct successor, the Northern Reform League (NRL) had returned to the politics of the large outdoor rally, with all the paraphernalia of banners, bands and processions.²²²

In the run up to the 1867 Reform Act radicals in the North East, and elsewhere, were beginning to move away from the small indoor public meeting where it was possible for everyone to hear and be heard: a shift which inexorably heralded a decline in deliberative democratic discussion. The NRL’s Newcastle Town Moor rally of January 1867, for example, had a total of six platforms, each with its own chairman. A trumpet sounding at platform number one signalled to the other platforms that it was the time to put

²¹⁶ Allen argues that the *Northern Reform Record* was not a big success as there was little humour or diversion to counterbalance the dry political commentary, *Ibid*, p. 183.

²¹⁷ Allen, *Joseph Cowen*, p. 177.

²¹⁸ Milne notes that Disque was a pen name of George Jacob Holyoake, Milne, ‘Reed’, p. 143. Holyoake was the London correspondent of the NRU and an occasional lecturer. For the letters to the editor written by Disque see *Daily News* 26 November 1859; 7 December 1859; 20 December 1859; 28 December 1859; January 18, 1860; 19 May 1860.

²¹⁹ See Allen, *Joseph Cowen*, pp. 49-50.

²²⁰ *Daily News*, 20 December 1859.

²²¹ Allen, *Joseph Cowen*, p. 47.

²²² For report of a NFL rally on Newcastle Town Moor see *Newcastle Courant*, 1 February 1867.

identical resolutions to their respective audiences, a mechanism which ensured that 'the resolutions at each place might be taken as nearly as possible at the same moment'.²²³ Ironically such synchronisation and stage management reduced the audience to mere listeners whose role was to acclaim not deliberate.²²⁴ As with the mass Chartist platform of the previous radical generation, the vast outdoor meeting did not lend itself to considered, interactive participation.

Conclusion

After a century in which the constitution appeared inviolate the late 1820s and early 1830s was a decade of tumultuous change. The Catholic Emancipation Act (1829) and the Great Reform Act (1832) extended political rights and commenced what many hoped was the first stage of more extensive parliamentary reform. At a local level the Municipal Reform Act (1835) replaced corrupt corporations with more democratic structures, breathing new life into local government and raising expectations. These profound political changes generated a renewed interest in constitutional politics, parliamentary procedures and democratic ideas.²²⁵ Parliamentary elections in this period were held infrequently and, moreover, were limited to a narrow pool of voters, approximately one in five men. Moreover the notoriously lengthy parliamentary recess meant that for five months of the year Parliament was not able to spontaneously debate social and political problems.²²⁶ In this vacuum the desire for political discussion and far reaching societal reform was met by public meetings, lectures and set-piece debates. For the disenfranchised the public meetings was an important democratic space where truth could be elucidated and public opinion measured, 'by a jury too large to be packed and too virtuous to be bribed'.²²⁷ The properly functioning public meeting could be remarkably democratic and representative of all shades of opinion, evident in the Bradford Education meeting discussed above.

²²³ *Newcastle Courant*, 1 February 1867. The NRL was basically a revival of the NRU the chief difference being that the NRL was more securely working class, with around a third of its governing body composed of miners, Ashton and Pickering, 'a newspaper genius', p. 139.

²²⁴ Prothero, *Radical Artisans in England and France*, pp. 207-8; 211-12.

²²⁵ Christopher Chalklin, *The Rise of the English Town, 1650-1850* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 58-65. For impact of municipal reform in Manchester, Leeds and Bradford, see Derek Fraser (ed.), *Municipal Reform and the Industrial City* (Leicester, 1982). Cunningham, *Victorian and Edwardian Town Halls*, p. 10. After the piecemeal implementation of municipal reforms, Whigs, Liberals, Nonconformists and Radicals were able to participate in local government, a privilege which had previously been the preserve of Tory oligarchies.

²²⁶ Henry Jephson noted how 'crises so great as to evoke the feelings of the people, and to impel them to utterance, frequently arose during this period of Parliamentary inaction'. Jephson, *Platform*, Vol II, p. 576

²²⁷ A quote taken from a letter written by Feargus O'Connor in January 1843 challenging James Acland to a public debate, *NS*, 21 January 1843.

Radicals favouring self-improvement and moral-force persuasion were the strongest supporters of the public meeting, lecture and discussion. Whether the shift from a noisy, visible outdoor political culture to a more highly regulated indoor culture resulted in a narrowing of democratic participation is debatable. James Vernon and Martin Hewitt argue that, thanks to the greater regulation of political meetings, the rise of political parties and the introduction of the secret ballot, by the 1870s the popular political platform had lost its deliberative character.²²⁸ But such views ignore the ways in which rules could and did benefit articulate and politicised working men.²²⁹ Moreover, as Jon Lawrence demonstrates, even after the hustings were abolished, electioneering and local political culture remained robust well into the Edwardian period.²³⁰ While this study ends in 1860 and thus cannot determine whether the deliberative political platform collapsed in the 1870s or in the interwar period, it does provide evidence that during the Chartist years at least, a move indoors to political discussion governed by widely agreed upon protocols promoted genuine democratic participation. In this respect radicalism's return to the mass outdoor rally, in the shape of the Reform League of the late 1860s, was a retrograde step.

The platform of a public meeting, whether occupied by an itinerant professional lecturer or a local citizen, was one of the few places where the articulate working-class man could publically challenge the opinions of his social superiors.²³¹ Most agitators were wise enough to recognise that meetings which degenerated into riots and chaos not only failed to get the message across but also alienated more respectable support. In this context the rules and etiquette governing popular political oratory were a crucial mechanism for equality: preserving the right of everyone to be heard and thereby nurturing an emerging sense of what constituted democracy. Without agreed rules of engagement the working-man could offer no political input beyond the inarticulate threat of rioting and civil disorder.

²²⁸ Vernon, *Politics and the People*, p. 9. Hewitt claims that by the 1870s the political platform was no longer truly deliberative and was instead an arena for 'ritualised battles of volume, not reason'. 'Aspects of platform culture', pp. 10-11.

²²⁹ I use the term 'man' deliberately - greater regulation was not conducive to the participation of women in politics, see pp. 236-246 below.

²³⁰ Lawrence, 'Decline of English Popular Politics?' and 'Transformation of British Public Politics'.

²³¹ Jon Lawrence has shown that, even today, much interaction between voter and politician remains in 'the spirit of the hustings', and politicians are still obliged to reply with great civility to all of their interrogators, Lawrence, *Electing our Masters*, p. 9.

Chapter 4: Orality and print culture in the Chartist era

"Oastler, this is not the speech you delivered at Huddersfield on the evening of January 14th 1837, the night the people of Huddersfield welcomed Feargus O'Connor."

"You are mistaken friend: it is"

"I heard you Oastler, and I am sure, you did not say all that is here printed."

"Now you are right: Friend, I'll tell you why, because the hour was late, ten o'clock at night; the people had been out five hours, and I feared I would tire and starve them; so I then gave the outline, now, I print, what, if circumstances had permitted, I should have spoken: - you will find all I said then in print, and something more."¹

'Historians', as Roy Porter noted in the preface to an innovative book on medical history based primarily upon visual sources, 'have always been Gutenberg's children'² Certainly nineteenth century print historians have tended to overplay the importance of the written word in the dissemination of political ideas at the expense of oral and visual forms of communication. This chapter moves beyond the mindset invoked by Porter to explore the interaction between orality and print and the complexities of how ideas were circulated and consumed. Besides providing evidence that oral culture retained its grip on political communication during the Chartist era, my contention is that if we are to understand the primacy of oral communication in the nineteenth century we need to appreciate how speeches were constructed, delivered, reported and subsequently consumed. In particular we must consider how oral culture operated at the interstices of print and the ways in which print culture fed upon orality and *vice versa*.³ Much oral communication was circulated and consumed via the mediations of the printing press and thus the historian must deal with two audiences: those present at the initial delivery, and those who subsequently read or heard the reported version. Early Victorian newspapers, in particular radical papers like the *Northern Star*, relied heavily on reports of speeches and meetings to fill their columns.⁴ Print culture, from novels, tracts and newspapers to placards and handbills, borrowed from oral culture in less obvious ways too: in terms of language, style, resonance and rhythm.

¹ Richard Oastler, *Damnation! Eternal Damnation to the fiend begotten "Coarser Food" New Poor Law. A Speech by Richard Oastler* (Leeds, 1837), preface.

² Roy Porter, *Bodies Politics: Disease, Death and Doctors in Britain, 1650-1900* (Ithaca, 2001), p. 9.

³ Walter Ong, *Orality and literacy: the technologising of the word* (London, 1991).

⁴ Cris Yelland has calculated that between a quarter and a half of column inches in the *Northern Star* in the early 1840s comprised reported speech, Cris Yelland, 'Speech and Writing in the Northern Star', in Roberts, *People's Charter*, p. 98.

This chapter is organised around three main themes: the relationship between print culture and oral communication; the limitations and complications of reported ‘verbatim’ speech; and finally the theoretical aspects of public speaking and the ways in which orators acquired their speaking skills. Preaching guides, speakers’ manuals, contemporary pamphlets, autobiographies, and correspondence will be examined to assess the mechanics of public speaking and the ways in which speeches were planned, composed and constructed in advance. Speeches subsequently reported in newspapers and those circulated in the form of published tracts will also be used to explore the interrelationship between print and oral culture. The vibrancy of oral communication was important, and it is clear that during the transition from a predominately oral society into one where literacy dominated ‘print had first to use the dynamics of orality before it could supersede them’.⁵ This chapter is also informed by an empirical study of the *Bradford Observer* 1835-1860 (see Appendix II), which demonstrates that the quantity of reported speech grew during the Chartist period and that the balance shifted from reports of parliamentary speeches to local oratory. An underlining theme of this chapter is change and transition.

After the successive reduction and finally repeal of the various ‘taxes on knowledge’ and technological improvements such as the steam press and improved paper making techniques, the cost of newspapers and printed material fell substantially. Literacy rates were rising too. There were also advances in reporting. Yet oral culture was not swamped by the printed word. Print initially served to promote the spoken word; endless columns of newspapers were devoted to reporting parliamentary and local speeches, ushering in a golden age of public speaking. The sheer range of speeches reported in this period is astonishing: from addresses delivered at testimonials, at the laying of foundation stones, and at horticultural shows to temperance festivals, public meetings and literary lectures by itinerant speakers.⁶ The number of books and pamphlets whose origins lay in a delivered lecture reflects this diversity. Martin Hewitt has calculated that in the mid-nineteenth century as much as ten percent of books was ‘derived directly from public speech’.⁷

⁵ Vernon, *Politics and the People*, p. 145.

⁶ W.E. Foster made a moving speech at the laying of the foundation stone of the new Bradford workhouse, *BO*, 15 August 1850. For ceremonial speech making see Simon Morgan, ‘The rewards of Public Service: nineteenth century testimonials in context’ *Historical Research*, Vol. 80, No. 208 (May 2007), 261-285.

⁷Hewitt, ‘Aspects of Platform Culture’, p. 6. Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help*, for example, was derived from a series of lectures delivered to Leeds working men, Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help with illustrations of Conduct*

During the 1840s and 1850s, the capacity for reporting grew with the invention of simpler forms of shorthand (epitomised by Pitman's system published in 1837) and the arrival of the railway, penny post and telegram. Yet the historian must remain vigilant. Prior to the invention of sound recording we can have no first-hand experience of what political speeches sounded like, or any way of measuring reported speech against what was actually delivered. The pitfalls of analysing reported speech loom large in this chapter. Reported speech was inevitably refracted through several mediators, whether in the shape of a newspaper reporter, his editor, the newspaper typesetter or, more sinisterly, via a Government spy or political enemy who might have cause to 'dress the speech up', rendering it more seditious.⁸ Orators too might deliberately improve and expand upon their speech prior to publication and, by supplying their copy directly to a newspaper, circumvent the need for a reporter entirely. It is imperative that historians are aware of how distortive such processes were and the drawbacks of uncritically using 'reported speech' as a fair representation of what was actually said.

The last section of this chapter will look at the mechanics of public speaking. As the previous chapter illustrates, during the Chartist era public meetings, speeches and discussion were central to the dissemination of political ideas and the formation of public opinion. Consequently the ability to speak eloquently in public became, for the first time, relevant to the politicised workingman and prized as an important mechanism for political emancipation. It can be no coincidence that the decades after the 1832 Great Reform Act saw a renewed interest in the mechanics of public speaking; as is evident in the number of debating and mutual improvements clubs established in this period. Many of these groups were founded and run by workingmen for the benefit of their class rather than being imposed and controlled by paternalistic middle-class reformers.⁹ A group which met at the house of Benjamin Barry in Bradford in spring 1835, for example, stated that the aim of their association was to acquire and communicate knowledge for the purpose of 'asserting and protecting the rights of the labouring classes:' a statement which links oratory to political struggle.¹⁰

and Perseverance, abridged by George Bull with introduction by Sir Keith Joseph (1st ed. 1859, Penguin edition 1986, Harmondsworth), preface.

⁸ Pickering, 'Class Without Words', pp. 146-8.

⁹ John Golby and A. W. Purdue, *The civilization of the crowd: popular culture in England 1750-1900* (1st ed. London, 1984, revised ed., Stroud, 1999), pp. 93-4.

¹⁰ *BO*, 12 March 1835.

To answer the question of how aspiring orators organised their thoughts and arguments three areas will be examined: classical oratory and nineteenth-century elocution guides; homiletics; and autodidact culture. Classical oratory still dominated the curriculum at public schools and Oxbridge in this era and for this reason the influence of classical oratory upon the popular political platform will be considered. Perhaps a more profound influence, given that the church service was an almost universal experience, was the pulpit. The nineteenth century saw a renewed interest in homiletics as the church realised that if religion was to maintain its grip it needed to be engaging and able to compete with secular lecturing. Autodidact culture and the plethora of grammar guides and public speaking manuals available to the workingman also played a part. Autodidact culture embraced both spoken and written communication and, as we shall see, the ability to communicate learning and effectively present arguments in public was encouraged in the rank and file membership of all of the leading reform groups of the period.

Orality and print culture

The effectiveness of natural speech in printed political propaganda was recognised by agitators in the generations prior to Chartism. Both William Cobbett and Thomas Paine have been credited with creating a new vernacular style of political engagement, which spoke in a simple accessible language.¹¹ Cobbett's 'two penny *Register*, like popular song, was adapted to auditory reception by means of lyrical phrases and the punctuating repetition of personal pronouns'.¹² Cobbett was undoubtedly aware that many would have heard rather than read *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register*. In such a context simple sentences, 'formulaic phrases and themes' worked well.¹³ Cobbett combined journalism with the popular political platform and during the tumultuous run up to the Great Reform Act, lectured across the agricultural south and the midland and northern counties. Cobbett's rhetoric, whether on the platform or the page, celebrated every-day speech and plain-speaking. The tradition of speaking with a voice that drew its metaphors from universal experiences and used simple, vivid imagery, gained momentum in the generation after Cobbett, as we shall see when we investigate the shift towards more 'democratic' speaking styles in the next chapter.

¹¹ Leonora Nattrass, *William Cobbett: The Politics of Style* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 136 citing Olivia Smith's work, *The Politics of Language, 1791-1819* (Oxford, 1984).

¹² Ian Dyck, *William Cobbett and Rural Popular Culture* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 84.

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 84.

Despite rising literacy rates and the increasing availability of cheap print, personal silent reading was not the norm: reading was primarily a communal activity and one in which discussion played an important role.¹⁴ Newspapers were often purchased collectively and read aloud by the most proficient reader in beer shops, workplaces or private houses. Indeed the *Northern Star's* circulation figures require significant upward revision: it has been calculated that each copy on average reached at least twenty people (whether read silently or heard).¹⁵ David Vincent's pioneering work on literacy and reading has emphasised the noise which accompanied the expansion of print, which saw, 'men and women reciting, singing, shouting, chanting, declaiming and narrating'.¹⁶ Victorian popular fiction was typically serialised and groups of friends, families and workmates would gather to hear the latest instalment read out loud.¹⁷ The entertainment value of public reading also requires emphasis. For example, Peter Bussey, the Bradford delegate to the 1839 Chartist convention, effectively funded his delegate expenses by sending reports to be read out loud in his Bradford Beer shop, at which 'like a theatre: there was a rush for early places, and all paid admission'.¹⁸ Even for the middle-classes communal reading was common, often in the form of a polite parlour entertainment: a practice which was successfully commercialised by Charles Dickens in the 1850s.

Newspapers like the *Northern Star*, aware that many of its subscribers would hear rather than read its columns, provided visual clues to its readers. Feargus O'Connor's printed addresses, for example, were helpfully broken up with italics and capitals indicating to the reader which words required special emphasis.¹⁹ The intricate links between public speaking and Chartist journalism has been highlighted by the work of the Russian scholar, Yuri V. Kovalev. Kovalev notes that 'if early journalistic articles were often reports of speeches at meetings, later ones retained much of the oratorical style (energetic expression, emotional appeal) characteristic of public speaking'.²⁰

¹⁴ Vernon, *Politics and the People*, p. 145. Matthew Rubery, 'Victorian Literature Out Loud: Digital Audio Resources for the Classroom', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, Vol. 14, (2009), especially pp. 138-9. Barker, *Newspapers, Politics and English Society*, pp. 53-5.

¹⁵ James Epstein, 'Feargus O'Connor and the Northern Star', *International Review of Social History*, Vol. XX1 (1976), p. 70.

¹⁶ David Vincent, *Literacy and Popular culture, England 1750-1914* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 201-2.

¹⁷ The practice of communal reading explains the popularity of the penny reading movement which began in the 1850s. Rose, *Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, p. 84.

¹⁸ Judge, 'Early Chartist Organisation', p. 383.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 70.

²⁰ Yuri V. Kovalev, 'Chartist Literature' in Lionel M. Munby (ed.), *The Luddites and other essays* (London, 1971), p. 61.

Such characteristics were also evident in non-Chartist radical newspapers of the period. The rhythm and emotionalism of the spoken address is certainly discernible in the prose of the radical journalist and orator James Acland. While engaged as the editor of the *North Cheshire Reformer* in 1837, Acland wrote an editorial in support of exclusive dealing in a language which was strikingly similar to that found on the mass platform: the right of eating untaxed bread – the right of breathing untaxed air – the right of keeping the parson’s paw on the outer side of our pocket – the right of equal and cheap justice!²¹ The short sentences, the massed repetitions and the use of homely metaphor (‘parson’s paw’) were techniques used extensively by political orators, as we shall see in the next chapter. Victorian newspapers, of all political persuasions, harnessed the dynamics of oral culture in other ways too. Not only did newspapers hold column after column of reported speech they also retained modes of address borrowed from oral culture. The editorial, for example, maintained the air of a personal conversation between editor and reader, while the letters page permitted a two-way conversation between a newspaper and its readership.

The historian Raymond Williams, writing in a collection on newspaper history, warned of the tendency to overemphasise the reading public in the Victorian era. True, literacy rates were rising rapidly, yet print culture remained a ‘minority culture’ and one that ‘was significantly interactive with a predominantly oral culture’. Williams suggests that, even in the emerging, urbanised culture of the cities, orality dominated and the explosion in popular lecturing and the prevalence of amateur debating societies, even music hall, demonstrates how older forms of communication were adapting to a modern urban society.²² Not everybody was a fluent reader, or possessed sufficient funds to buy printed material. Moreover listening to a lecturer was often a more enjoyable and sociable means of acquiring information than private reading. As the Bradford anti-slavery lecturer and Baptist minister, the Rev. Benjamin Godwin, put it, even ‘people who never read will hear a lecture’, and learn more in ‘an hour than by reading for a day. There is great power in the living voice’.²³

The charismatic celebrity orator had a major advantage over the printed page. As Dickens recognised, people attended his readings as much out of a strong desire to have

²¹ Acland dabbled in a variety of literary forms, from poetry and journalism, to statistical guides and pamphlets. His written style was as flamboyant as his oratory, *North Cheshire Reformer*, 31 August 1837.

²² Raymond Williams, ‘The press and popular culture: an historical perspective’, in George Boyce (ed.) *Newspaper History: from the 17th century to the present day* (London, 1978).

²³ Godwin, *Reminiscences of Three Score and Ten*, Vol. II, f. 817.

seen the great man himself as to hear him read. For leading political reformers too the personal appearance was crucial in garnering support in the localities: a fact demonstrated by Henry Vincent and Feargus O'Connor who, despite operating thriving Chartist newspapers, also felt it necessary to embark upon arduous lecture tours.²⁴ Being seen and heard was just as important as being read. Both print *and* oral communication was required for political mobilisation. Many orators were also gifted journalists, polemicists and writers. A sizeable number of Chartist lecturers (such as Ernest Jones, Thomas Cooper, David Ross) were also poets. The ACLL too was similarly blessed with poetical talent, most notably in the shape of the Corn Law Rhymer, Ebenezer Elliott, who was lauded both for his poetry and his lecturing prowess.²⁵ The sound of words and the effects which could be generated by patterns and rhythms of speech were preoccupations shared by both orators and poets.

The resonance and cadence of natural speech was important. Authors of popular Victorian fiction and prose took great pains to ensure their fictional conversations and speeches sounded as well as they read. Hence when Dickens composed dialogue for his fictional characters he said the words out loud as he wrote in order to check that they sounded right.²⁶ Dickens, as a former parliamentary reporter, had an ear that was tuned to the rhythm of speech. He was only too aware that everyone's speech, whether high or low born, had its own distinctive sound patterns and rhythm and, that when talking, the speaker selects words as much for their aural qualities as their semantic value. Such aural considerations can be lacking in prose. Indeed dialogue which looks effective on the page might fail to convince when read out loud. George Eliot was aware of this discrepancy and, when writing *Felix Holt: the Radical* and *Middlemarch*, she meticulously did her research by reading through reports of speeches delivered in the run up to the Great Reform Act.²⁷ In consequence, the detailed description of Felix Holt's platform speech has an authoritative air of realism.²⁸

²⁴ Pickering, 'Class Without Words', p. 145. Owen Ashton 'The *Western Vindicator* and Henry Vincent', in Allen and Ashton, *Papers for the People*, 54-81.

²⁵ Elliott estimated that he had made over £40 from lecturing at Mechanics Institutes in 1839, ACLL letter book, f. 287, 11 Nov 1839. Several of Elliott's poems were set to music and sung at Chartist camp meetings.

²⁶ Matthew Bevis, *The Art of Eloquence* (Oxford, 2007), p. 89. The preponderance of dialogue in cheap serialised literature has been attributed to the custom of paying hack writers per line, however; perhaps dialogue was also favoured as the Victorian novel was part of an oral tradition that was written to be heard.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 88.

²⁸ George Eliot, *Felix Holt, the Radical*, Vol. II (London, 1866, republished with introduction by Lynda Mugglesstone, 1995), Chapter XXX. Raymond Williams, *Culture & Society: 1780-1950* (London, 1958 revised 1983) especially pp. 102-9.

The conversation was a useful rhetorical device whose potential was not lost on propagandists. As the preface written by Richard Oastler (produced at the start of this chapter) demonstrates, the dialogue conveys a sense of intimacy and informality. Many polemical tracts adopted the literary style of a conversation which allowed a topic to be introduced in general laymen terms before pitching argument against counter argument as each participant takes one side of the question. The polemical tracts *Plenty and starvation: or, Who would gain by the repeal of the Corn Laws* (1839) *What is a Chartist Answered?*(1840) and *Dialogue between John and Thomas on the Corn Laws, the Charter, Teetotalism* (1842) all follow this format.²⁹ Moreover, dialogue is the key rhetorical strategy of the catechism, a structure familiar to even those whose education had been limited to rote learning at Sunday school.³⁰ The free trade movement, for example, utilised this format in a widely distributed tract by Col. T. Perronet Thompson, *Catechism on the Corn Laws*.³¹ Dialogue was also a useful mechanism for introducing realism into a printed tract and appealing directly to the workingman, particularly when, as in the case of the *Dialogue between John and Thomas* tract, there was an attempt to present the argument in local dialect.³²

Another example of how traditional oral culture was gradually incorporated into print culture can be seen in the person of the town crier, whose role was to disseminate civic information. Little primary source material on the role of the town crier exists; therefore a Lancashire example has been used on the assumption that the Preston experience was probably typical of Yorkshire and the North East more generally. By the 1850s and 1860s the verbal role of the town crier was beginning to lose its importance. In 1853, for example, the Preston Corporation decided to form a sub-committee to consider the duties of the town crier.³³ Yet significantly the committee did not discuss the crier's role in making verbal announcements instead the focus was upon his role in posting handbills and placards. The Corporation was clearly seeking to control the appearance of 'street literature' (bills, placards and posters) on the walls of Preston town centre.³⁴ The

²⁹ Anon, *Plenty and starvation: or, Who would gain by the repeal of the Corn Laws* (London, 1839); Anon, *What is a Chartist Answered?*(Bath, 1840); Anon, *Dialogue between John and Thomas on the corn laws, the Charter, teetotalism, and the probable remedy for the present disstresses* [sic] (Paisley, 1842).

³⁰ I would like to thank David Stack for this suggestion.

³¹ T. Perronet Thompson, *Catechism on the Corn Laws*. (21st ed., London, 1841).

³² In this example a phonetic representation of Scottish dialect is attempted.

³³ Lancashire Record Office, Preston, CBP 55/16, 'Committee on the Town Criers Duties, March 1853'.

³⁴ There was also a strong desire to supervise and control the town crier himself, both he and his deputy were now required to wear a badge at all times and report directly to the Watch Committee, *Ibid*, ff. 191-2.

report of the Committee on the Town Criers Duties set out in great detail the rates payable for various size, numbers and formats of printed bills and the timing of the town criers twice daily postings.³⁵ It seems likely that these print-based duties complemented the traditional, verbal rounds carried out by the town crier and were discharged in parallel. The changing nature of his duties were indicative of a wider cultural shift away from older, visual and oral patterns of communication to the eventual domination of print as the medium for town announcements.³⁶

The placard was an intermediary form which combined oral, visual and print information.³⁷ Placards, or smaller handbills, might include portions of rousing speeches made at previous meetings or take the form of conversations or addresses. Their layout and appearance worked within the conventions of the other popular print genres of ‘playbills, ballads, conversation’.³⁸ Placards, like theatre bills, were often printed upon eye-catching coloured paper and employed simple language with key words displayed in bold font; they were suited to be being read aloud to gathered people thereby drawing the illiterate into political controversies.³⁹ Street literature might also incorporate visual images which, like newspaper mast heads, performed a similar function in that their iconography incorporated symbolism which ‘spoke’ to those to whom the densely printed columns of print were beyond comprehension.⁴⁰

Handbills and placards could be produced quickly and cheaply in large quantities and were thus responsive to immediate events. Placards could be used to call meetings at short notice and to wage propaganda wars. Indeed some placards were in effect conversations which replied to earlier postings, and might be part of campaigns lasting days or even weeks. Dorothy Thompson has shown how in Newcastle, successive Chartist placards served as a conversation between the city’s working-class radicals and the corporation during the summer of 1839.⁴¹ A series of Birmingham Chartist placards created in August 1842, and now preserved at The National Archives, performed a similar role. These placards, some of which were issued on consecutive days, served multiple

³⁵ The times were specified as 6am and 3pm (summer) and 8am and 2pm (winter), *Ibid*, f. 190.

³⁶ When the office became vacant in 1856 it was advertised as ‘town crier and bill poster’, *Preston Guardian*, 25 October 1856.

³⁷ For a discussion of placards, orality and print see, Vernon, *Politics and the People*, pp. 133-137.

³⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 136;140.

³⁹ TNA HO 45/261, Birmingham Chartist placards, 1842. Some of these Chartist placards are printed on blue, pink and yellow paper, which cast doubts on James Vernon’s suggestion that coloured political placards were rare outside the metropolis in this period, *Ibid*, p. 134.

⁴⁰ Flanagan, ‘Workplace Protest and Popular Politics’, p. 97.

⁴¹ Thompson, *Early Chartists*, pp. 175-6.

functions: informing Chartist where and when the next meeting would take place and defiantly reminding them, in prose amply peppered with exclamation marks, that it was their constitutional duty to ‘preserve the right of public meeting!’⁴²

The entwining of print and oral culture is also evident in the use of political speeches as published propaganda tools. The Tory Radical, Richard Oastler, after serving over three years in prison for debt under a politically motivated action brought by his former employer, Thomas Thornhill, recognised the political capital offered by his first post-prison public speech. Prior to his imminent release from prison in February 1844, Oastler wrote seven letters to the Huddersfield radical Lawrence Pitkeithley (who was secretary of the Liberation Fund Central Committee), deliberating on the best way of managing his first public appearance. Oastler, knowing that his words would be widely reported, told Pitkeithley that it would help the cause if he ‘candidly & calmly stated [his] views of the causes & cures of England’s disorder’.⁴³ Despite suffering weak health as a consequence of his long confinement, Oastler was adamant that he wished to make his first speech in Huddersfield at a mass meeting ‘before all classes & all parties’, not at a private tea party for his supporters. He envisaged that his words should be delivered verbally and later published:

My object is to make my speech in the open air before all the people. Because it will have more weight ... As to Tea & Dinner, I think that will weaken the effect ... The great point at first is, a public exhibition of my principles to be published,⁴⁴ not as delivered in a room, to scores or hundreds - but, in the open air to thousands. That speech could then be put into the hands of any who ask - what are Oastler’s principles?⁴⁵

Oastler’s public entry into Huddersfield took place on Shrove Tuesday, 20 February 1844. He was met at Brighouse train station by crowds of people accompanied by numerous ‘rustic’ bands who followed the ‘factory king’s’ open carriage four miles to Huddersfield where, as planned, he addressed the people at length from a temporary hustings erected on waste land outside the Druids Hotel. It was estimated that his audience numbered between 12,000 to 15,000 people that afternoon all of whom listened in

⁴² TNA, HO 45/261/8-9.

⁴³ WYAS: Kirklees, Lawrence Pitkeithley Papers, KC 1040/5/6, 4 February 1844.

⁴⁴ Interestingly, Oastler used the term ‘publish’ to denote both an oral and a printed delivery of his principles. Publish also means ‘to announce formally or in public’, *The New Collins Concise English Dictionary* (London, 1982), p. 920.

⁴⁵ KC1040/5/5 and KC1040/5/6.

complete silence, anxious to hear his words.⁴⁶ As Oastler hoped, his address was reported extensively in the local and national press. Even the *Leeds Mercury*, a paper owned by his political enemy, Edwards Baines, published a near verbatim report of his address.⁴⁷ Thus while his immediate audience were thousands of working people in Huddersfield his words were also consumed in print by wealthy Londoners via the pages of *The Times*, and by readers of newspapers as varied as the *Aberdeen Journal*, *John Bull* and *Lloyds Weekly*.⁴⁸

The pitfalls of reported speech

Historians researching political oratory are heavily dependent on reported speech. Contemporaries too often consumed their speeches from the columns of a newspaper, indeed the subsequent 'reading' audience was often significantly larger than those present at the initial meeting.⁴⁹ Yet the accuracy of such reported speeches is questionable. A whole range of factors come into play when considering the limitations of reported speech: from the mechanics of reporting and the craft of the nineteenth century journalist to the technical and tax issues which impinged upon print production. During the period covered by this research, newspaper reporting, production and distribution underwent significant changes.⁵⁰ A notable feature of this period was the rise in shorthand. Technological improvements, such as steam powered presses, led to increased output of printed media.⁵¹ Transport underwent similarly rapid changes. The emerging railway network allowed editors to dispatch their reporters and distribute their newspapers ever more widely, while the penny post and telegraph speeded up the transmission of news.⁵² Finally the reduction and eventual repeal of the newspaper tax (1855) and paper duty (1861) stimulated the growth of the national and local press, particularly towards the end of the Chartist period.⁵³

It has been calculated that a fluent Victorian speaker could deliver on average 120 words per minute and over 7,000 words per hour. Hence accurate verbatim report was

⁴⁶ Alfred [Samuel Kydd], *The History of the Factory Movement* (2 Vols., London, 1857), Vol. II, pp. 204-6.

⁴⁷ *Leeds Mercury*, 24 February 1844.

⁴⁸ The *Northern Star* also gave a full report as did *The Times*, *The Times*, 22 February 1844. *NS*, 24 February 1844. Summaries were also given in *Lloyds Weekly Newspaper*, 25 February 1844; *Aberdeen Journal*, 28 February 1844; *John Bull*, 24 February 1844 and *Age and Argus*, 24 February 1844.

⁴⁹ H. C. G. Matthew, 'Rhetoric and Politics in Great Britain' in H. C. Waller (ed.), *Politics and Social Change in Modern Britain* (Sussex, 1987), p. 45.

⁵⁰ Lucy Brown, *Victorian News and Newspapers* (Oxford, 1985), esp. Chapters 1, 2 and 11.

⁵¹ *Lloyds Weekly News* installed the first rotary press in 1856, Vincent, *Literacy and Popular culture*, p. 210.

⁵² See editorial on the role of the telegraph in war reporting, *The Times*, 21 May 1855.

⁵³ Collett Dobson Collett, *History of the Taxes on Knowledge, with an introduction by George Jacob Holyoake* (1st ed. London, 1889, reissued 1933), pp. 133;179.

dependent upon shorthand.⁵⁴ While shorthand had been in existence for centuries, at the start of the Chartist era it was by no means widely used by reporters. In 1836 only a third of the reporters working in the parliamentary press gallery took down notes in shorthand. Less than thirty years later longhand reporters had all but disappeared.⁵⁵ During the early years of Victoria's reign shorthand was in vogue. Its rapid progress in the 1840s and 1850s fed off a political and commercial need for accurate reporting and information. Besides the public's appetite for the speeches of politicians and public men, the railway mania of the 1840s and 1850s saw spiralling demand for shorthand reporters to record parliamentary deliberations on proposed new lines and to report annual general meetings for the benefit of shareholders.⁵⁶ Between 1837 and 1841 alone, twenty-seven rival shorthand systems were published. These systems took the form of cheap manuals aimed at the aspiring clerk or educated workingman.⁵⁷ By far the most successful was that published by Isaac Pitman in 1837. Pitman energetically promoted his new shorthand system by hiring lecturers and forming local branches of enthusiasts.⁵⁸ He was particularly fortunate as his invention was made only three years before the arrival of the penny post which permitted light pamphlets such as *Pitman's 'Penny Plate'* to be sent cheaply, while also enabling shorthand 'masters' to instruct their pupils from a distance.⁵⁹

To a certain extent, the mechanics of Victorian newspaper production determined whether a speech would be published in full, condensed or held for the next edition.⁶⁰ A weekly radical publication such as the *Northern Star* would be typeset several days before publication. Later editions often carried different front pages, but technical restrictions meant that late submissions, which required extensive resetting, generally had to wait until the next edition. In most instances shorthand reports had to be transcribed into longhand

⁵⁴ James Hunt, *Manual of the Philosophy of Voice and Speech, especially in relation to the English Language and the Art of Public Speaking* (London, 1859), p. 366.

⁵⁵ H Donaldson Jordan, 'The Reports of Parliamentary Debates, 1803-1908', *Economica*, No. 34 (Nov. 1931), p. 445.

⁵⁶ Reports of a stormy railway meeting in Bristol led to a four-fold increase in sales of the local newspaper, Hannah Barker, *Newspapers, Politics and English Society 1695-1855* (Harlow, 2000), pp. 115-6.

⁵⁷ Such systems included: I. Nelson, *The Parliamentary and Forensic Short-hand Writer* (London, 1836); G. Bradley, *A Concise and Practical System of Stenography, or Shorthand Writing* (London, 1843) and Thompson Cooper, *Parliamentary Short hand* (London, 1858). See Isaac Pitman, *A History of Shorthand* (4th ed., revised and enlarged, London, 1884).

⁵⁸ Pitman's new system attracting almost religious fervour in its devotees: his biographer described shorthand as a 'new faith' with a 'bond of brotherhood ... established among its adherents'. Thomas Allen Reed, *A Biography of Isaac Pitman* (London, 1890), p. 33.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 29-31.

⁶⁰ Parliamentary debates which took place on Wednesdays were seriously under reported: 'two to three columns of type, as compared to about twenty on other days', John Robson, 'What did he say'? *Editing Nineteenth-Century Speeches from Hansard and the Newspapers* (Alberta, 1988), p. 51, n. 27.

before being sent to print. However, in times of urgency, shorthand writers might read their notes out loud while the typesetter set to work: a practice known colloquially as ‘setting to the stone’. Promoters of shorthand were keen to inculcate the art of stenography in printers to eliminate the need for reporters to translate their notes back into longhand. Hence when Isaac Pitman took down in shorthand a speech made by Richard Cobden at an ACLL meeting for the *Bath Journal* in December 1845, it was noted that its compositors were able to set up the print directly from Pitman’s notes. Pitman was complimented for the incredible feat of capturing an hour and a half speech, near verbatim, without the trouble of the reporters ‘deciphering and transcribing their notes for the press’.⁶¹

Recording verbatim speeches was taxing, and a bored or exhausted reporter could impact on the quality of the report. For this reason the leading newspapers operated a relay system. Robert Lowery’s description of how the 1839 Chartist Convention was reported conveys a sense of the professionalism and efficiency of the London Press in this period:

The leading daily press had a number of reporters there, and every arrangement had been made for their convenience. Each took notes for a quarter of an hour or so, and then was relieved by another. The speaking commenced at one o’clock pm., and continued until near six, and at half past four we had copies of the Sun, on the platform with a full report of the speeches up to within an hour of that time.⁶²

The appetite for public speeches of great men and reports of political debates led to designated areas for the press, illustrated by the creation of the press gallery in the rebuilt Parliament buildings of the mid-nineteenth century.⁶³ At hustings and outdoor meetings it was the usual practice to have seating for reporters next to the platform: if heckling and rowdiness became overwhelming the reporters were sometimes permitted to sit on the end of the platform.⁶⁴ At meetings which degenerated into noise and chaos some orators abandoned attempts at addressing the audience and instead spoke directly to the assembled reporters.⁶⁵ Indeed as we have seen in the previous chapter, at times more information could be learnt from the reported version than acquired by those actually present in the audience. A mutually supportive atmosphere existed amongst the parliamentary reporters

⁶¹ Reed, *Biography*, pp. 54-5.

⁶² Harrison and Hollis (eds.), *Robert Lowery*, p. 108.

⁶³ Barry’s new House of Commons (1852) had a designated press gallery, albeit with a disappointingly small number of seats. Jordan, ‘Reports of Parliamentary Debates’, pp. 443-4.

⁶⁴ Meisel, *Public Speech*, figure 10, “‘The General Election’: Mr Gladstone Addressing the Electors of Greenwich on Blackheath”.

⁶⁵ Lawrence, *Electing Our Masters*, pp. 55-6; Vernon, *Politics and the People*, pp.150-1.

who often compared and shared reports.⁶⁶ This collaboration was mirrored at a local level where copy was shared even between politically hostile newspapers.⁶⁷

Parliament, as usual, provided the template for reporting speeches in the localities. For this reason it will be useful to briefly consider how parliamentary speeches were reported in the nineteenth century. Hansard was compiled and collated from several newspaper reports and was never intended to be a verbatim account. Indeed it was not until 1909 that Hansard became an 'official' record of parliamentary proceedings.⁶⁸ Dror Wahrman and Olive Anderson's research on how parliamentary debates were recorded demonstrates the vagaries of parliamentary reporting and the inherent problems in treating nineteenth century Hansard as a true and accurate representation of parliamentary speeches.⁶⁹ John Robson, who has investigated reported speech in both Hansard and local and national newspapers, stresses that Victorian newspapers aimed for only 'a full and accurate report' not a verbatim account of every word uttered.⁷⁰ Reporters would take down a condensed version of a speech and then write it up for publication in a form which kept the sense of the speech but not necessarily identical words.⁷¹

When Thomas Curson Hansard in 1878 was summoned before a Parliamentary Select Committee investigating the standard of parliamentary reporting, his response illustrated the 'concocted' nature of so-called 'verbatim' speeches. When asked whether he put into members' mouths 'what he ought to have said, rather than what he said', he tellingly replied 'that would not be a very great evil'.⁷² Gallery reporters were agreed that a shorthand report was not enough and that a certain amount of composition was required to edit out the 'bad grammar, nonsense and iteration'.⁷³ Surely it can be no coincidence that many literary men, including Coleridge, Dickens and Hazlitt, served a stint as parliamentary reporters. Indeed many journalists viewed their profession as a literary

⁶⁶ Jordan notes the 'spirit of camaraderie and mutual helpfulness in the Gallery'. Jordan 'Reports of Parliamentary Debates', p. 443.

⁶⁷ William Hick, a reporter for the *Northern Star*, for example claimed to have lent his notes to a journalist on the *Leeds Intelligencer*, NS, 7 November 1840.

⁶⁸ Jordan, 'The Reports of Parliamentary Debates', p. 437.

⁶⁹ Dror Wahrman, 'Virtual Representation: Parliamentary Reporting and the Language of Class in the 1790s', *Past and Present*, 136 (August 1992), p. 85. Olive Anderson, 'Hansard's Hazards: An Illustration from recent Interpretations of Married Women's Property Law and the 1857 Divorce Act', *English Historical Review*, Vol. 112, No. 449 (Nov., 1997), 1202-1215.

⁷⁰ Robson 'What did he say?' p. 44.

⁷¹ Verbatim reporting rendered even the most inspiring orator inarticulate. Holyoake said for this reason *The Times* deliberately took to reporting Henry Hunt word for word to make him sound ridiculous, Holyoake, *Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life*, Vol. II, p. 159.

⁷² Bevis, *Art of Eloquence*, p. 89.

⁷³ Jordan, 'Reports of Parliamentary Debates', p. 445.

pursuit. As Mathew Bevis has argued, parliamentary reporting was ‘an apprenticeship in the art of constructing echoes that were complimentary as well as critical’.⁷⁴ At times the temptation to construct and improve must have been irresistible. It was said that a classically trained reporter, when transcribing his notes of a speech made by Lord Brougham, thought that the speech would be strengthened by inserting a passage from Cicero and duly added twenty lines straight from the classical orator. Brougham must have appreciated this discreet improvement, as when he himself prepared a collection of his best speeches the inserted paragraph was allowed to remain.⁷⁵

Reporting local meetings and municipal politics

Research into the *Bradford Observer* demonstrates that the Chartist era witnessed a steady expansion in public speechmaking. It was said of the era that no public man could so much as open his mouth without his utterance being reported.⁷⁶ This was certainly true of mid-nineteenth century Bradford where even relatively small meetings or lectures were generally reported over two or three columns, while entire pages would be devoted to verbatim accounts of large town hall public meetings.⁷⁷ As Fig. 19 (Appendix II) demonstrates, between 1835 and 1860 the number of column inches devoted to reported speech in the *Bradford Observer* increased, aside from a slight dip in 1855 when Crimean war reports temporarily replaced detailed reports of local meetings. This expansion in reported oratory cannot be entirely accounted for by technological advances and falling costs; rather, as Aled Jones argues, it reflected ‘the energies released by Victorian politics both high and low, central and local’.⁷⁸ The vibrancy of local political culture requires emphasis. A feature of the Chartist years was the vast number of town meetings lectures, debates and discussions held in provincial towns and large cities alike. Bradford was no exception. Whereas in 1835 the bulk of oratory reported in the *Bradford Observer* comprised parliamentary speeches, the balance quickly changed to reports of local speeches. By 1845 reports of local speeches had entirely outstripped reported parliamentary oratory in the pages of the *Observer* (see Appendix II, Fig. 18).⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Bevis, *Art of Eloquence*, p. 89.

⁷⁵ Robson, ‘What did he say?’ p. 29.

⁷⁶ *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Vol., XXIII, Cambridge, 11th ed., 1911), p. 107.

⁷⁷ For useful comments on reporting and local press see Joyce, *Visions of the People*, pp. 40-45.

⁷⁸ Aled Jones, ‘Investigating Victorian Journalism’, in Laura Brake, Aled Jones and Lionel Madden (eds.), *Local Journalism in Victorian Political Culture* (London, 1990), p. 63.

⁷⁹ For my purposes ‘local’ refers to where a speech was delivered and thus applied to itinerant as well as resident orators who addressed Bradford audiences. See Appendix II for further details.

It is worth stressing such speeches were not purely parochial. The people of Bradford had wide ranging interests and listened to addresses on topics ranging from the slavery, temperance, vegetarianism, free trade and political reform to the progress of the Crimean War, Garibaldi and the wisdom of capital punishment. A notable feature of these years was the increasing number of speeches delivered by professional speakers embarked on geographically wide lecture circuits. High profile national and international speakers who spoke in Bradford between 1835 and 1860 included: Louis Blanc, Richard Cobden Charles Dickens, Frederick Douglass, John Bright, William Lloyd Garrison, John Gough, Ernest Jones, Feargus O'Connor, George Thompson, Henry Vincent, along with a whole host of lesser orators representing a diverse range of causes. Such orators provided rich copy for local newspapers and were reported at length in the columns of the *Bradford Observer*.

The platform and the press were symbiotic: reform groups and commercial lecturers courted the attentions of the press as a means of extending their reach and in turn the press enjoyed plentiful copy. People like to see themselves in print and read reports of discussions and meetings they had attended. For newspaper editors anxious to fill their columns, the speech was wonderfully flexible: eminently suited to expansion or abridgment to fill available space as required. The *Bradford Observer's* devotion to reporting speech cannot however be dismissed as merely business acumen. Detailed coverage of lectures, debates and public meetings were also central to the *Observer's* sense of civic duty. The *Observer* repeatedly assured its readers that it would impartially report all public meetings in the Bradford vicinity even when it was not in sympathy with the object under discussion.⁸⁰

Besides reporting public meetings and lectures, local newspapers functioned as a 'civic Hansard', recording the weekly deliberations of the Town Council and Poor Law Guardians with the same gravitas as parliamentary debates.⁸¹ Such meetings were held behind closed doors and thus, without the mediation of the press, were inaccessible to the public. The *Observer*, by openly reporting the private deliberations of municipal

⁸⁰ *BO*, 11 April 1850; 2 May 1850.

⁸¹ Hewitt, 'Aspects of Platform Culture', p. 11. Vernon, *Politics and the People*, pp. 146-147. Bradford Poor Law Guardians likened their proceedings to those in Parliament, *BO*, 25 April 1850. While in Sheffield the desire for accountable municipal politics led to the publication of town council meetings, see *Reports of all the meetings of the Town Council of the borough of Sheffield, during the municipal year 1847-8: corrected and revised from the short-hand notes of the reporters of the Sheffield Times* (copy held at the Brotherton Library Special Collections, Leeds).

government, ensured that Bradford's public servants were kept under rigorous scrutiny. Not surprisingly, at times these attentions led to friction. Part of the problem centred on the issue of verbatim reporting. The *Observer's* reporters tended to produce 'verbatim' copy, painstakingly furnishing 'a warts and all' record of events, even when it would have been politic to have skirted over the less edifying remarks and behaviours of certain Guardians and Councillors.

At a meeting of the Bradford Poor Law Guardians in April 1845, for example, it was plain from the report printed in the *Observer* that the visiting sanitary lecturer, Mr Simpson, a native of Edinburgh, had been treated with great rudeness. Although Simpson had been specifically invited to address the meeting, not only did the Guardians exhibit exaggerated signs of fatigue while he was speaking, he was unequivocally told he was a bore. As he was being ushered out of the room the reporter recorded that one Guardian was heard to utter "it is well this movement had begun at Edinburgh, for it was the dirtiest hole anywhere."⁸² The repetition of these snide remarks in print aroused much resentment. At the next meeting one Guardian complained, in the presence of the reporter, that, as 'we find our own time ... if we do quarrel among ourselves, I do not think it is right for anyone to notice it'. The *Observer's* reporter, unabashed by this rebuke, mischievously went on to report at that very meeting that: 'Mr Glover gave utterance to an exclamation which we did not hear; his expression at the moment betokened displeasure'. Clearly the *Bradford Observer* was not going to be told what it could and could not say in its columns.⁸³

Five years later the friction between Bradford's municipal officers and the press was still in evidence. In June 1850 the *Observer* complained of the 'indecorous and personal tone of many observations' made at the last Town Council meeting, claiming that such exhibitions tended to 'lead our municipal institutions' into 'irreparable disgrace and ruin'. The *Observer* was referring to a recent discussion of the Town Improvement Bill when attempts were made to stop the reporter from taking down notes and to drown out the speaker, Mr Pollard. The editorial went on to claim that such contentions and strife are unseemly and 'neither essential to freedom of opinion nor to independence of speech'.⁸⁴ The controversy rumbled on and, several weeks later, another editorial appeared, in response to a letter received from a councillor, which set out the *Observer's* role in recording town council meetings and the issue of reporter integrity:

⁸² *BO*, 17 April 1840.

⁸³ *BO*, 24 April 1845.

⁸⁴ *BO*, 20 June 1850.

We do not ourselves attend the meetings of the Town Council, and are consequently dependent for our knowledge of its proceedings upon the notes of our reporter. His duty is to make a full and faithful transcript of everything spoken, and in so far as he is able, a correct portraiture of all that is done. He is a professional man, fully competent to the duty; and after some years experience, we cannot doubt his integrity. We read his entire notes and from the impression thence derived, shape our public opinions.⁸⁵

The *Observer's* dedication to reporting municipal government and public meetings raises interesting issues on speech-making and democratic accountability. It also illustrates that the appetite for politics was as much local as national. It has been argued that the Municipal Reform Act (1835), by opening up town councils and municipal bodies to democratic forces, did for local government what the Great Reform Act (1832) did for Parliament.⁸⁶ While eligibility for the municipal vote was at a lower threshold and therefore open to more people, arguably the local newspaper was also a significant element in local political reform. The *Observer's* determination to report municipal meetings in full was an assertion of the democratic authority of the so called fourth estate.

Conventions of reported speech

The representation of speech in printed form was subject to certain conventions and traditions. In upmarket publications and *Hansard*, a formal literary style was adopted which, all too often, removed colour and left a bland bowdlerization. 'Inappropriate utterances would be omitted or greatly condensed. Reactions in the chamber – 'Hear, hear' and the like – were very rarely noted; while lapses in clarity, mistakes and inelegant expressions were ironed out'.⁸⁷ Conversely lower class publications or those with a radical readership were more likely to record audience participation. Olive Anderson notes that the compilers of *Hansard* rarely used the *Daily News* as a source precisely because of its vulgar 'warts and all' coverage.

Its reporters regularly recorded the flow of 'Hear, hear,' punctuated with 'Laughter' and 'Cheers,' that conveys the response to a speaker and changing mood in the chamber as nothing else can do; they retailed a generous quota of telling phrases and changes of tone that could be the making of a speech, and they did not hesitate to report verbatim the

⁸⁵ *BO*, 5 September 1850.

⁸⁶ Cunningham, *Victorian and Edwardian Town Halls*, p. 10.

⁸⁷ Anderson, '*Hansards Hazards*' p. 1203.

lapses of eminent personages from common sense, comprehension, or good taste – lapses usually suppressed elsewhere.⁸⁸

The *Bradford Observer*, like most provincial newspapers, followed a middle path in which audience interjections were reported but speakers on the whole were rendered articulate and treated respectfully by the shorthand reporter.

First person reporting had greater authority and was generally used for fuller, near verbatim accounts or for speeches made by prominent leaders or at events of great political significance.⁸⁹ As Cris Yelland has shown, reported speech in the *Northern Star* sometimes favoured the use of back tensing and indirect speech to give printed speeches a more provisional and less threatening meaning. This was a sensible strategy given contemporary libel laws and the range of O'Connor's political enemies.⁹⁰ Interestingly dialect is generally ironed out of reported speech even in radical papers, perhaps as dialect suggested a lack of education and learning.⁹¹ The humblest of speakers at Chartist meetings were reported in standard English by the *Northern Star*. An elevating strategy not wasted upon Robert Gammage, who noted how even the mediocre were described as giving eloquent and argumentative speeches, that 'were dressed up with as much care as though they were parliamentary harangues fashioned to the columns of the daily press'.⁹² Conversely where speakers are rendered in dialect it is often to underline their stupidity and ignorance. Hence when the Liberal *Bradford Observer* reported speeches made by Conservative operatives they were rendered in a caricatured, semi-illiterate fashion, a style which was not used to report Chartist speakers.⁹³ Indeed it is noticeable that the Bradford Chartist, David Lightowler, whose presence was ubiquitous at Bradford public meetings, was generally reported fairly and without accent.⁹⁴

Given that meetings and speeches often lasted two or three hours, newspapers usually carried only a condensed summary of the highlights. Many lecturers complained that their abridged speeches were inaccurate, and that the reporter had deliberately misrepresented them but, in general, newspaper readers appeared content with only the essence of what

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 1205-6.

⁸⁹ Robson, 'What did he say?' p. 24.

⁹⁰ Yelland, 'Speech and Writing in the Northern Star', p. 101.

⁹¹ Mugglestone, *Talking Proper*, chapter 6.

⁹² Gammage, *History*, p. 17.

⁹³ *BO*, 4 October 1838.

⁹⁴ See report of speech made by Lightowler at a public meeting on education, *BO*, 2 May 1850.

was being said, not a blow-by-blow account.⁹⁵ Perhaps readers were less concerned with authenticity than we may think. George Jacob Holyoake recorded in his autobiography how, while engaged by a friend to report the speeches of local worthies at banquet, he manufactured their speeches based upon ‘the characteristics of the speakers, their manner of mind, peculiarity of expression and antecedents of family, public service, and other particulars’. While Holyoake’s employer was alarmed by the resulting concoctions, the town worthies were highly flattered to see themselves in print and, like Lord Brougham, did not disown their ‘speech’.⁹⁶

Reporting seditious speech

When reporting civic dignitaries and bland local speeches, accuracy was neither expected nor particularly required. Contentious political meetings were a different case entirely and during the Chartist unrest of the late 1830s and 1840s prosecutions could hinge upon the accuracy and veracity of a shorthand report. Police surveillance of radical meetings operated on various levels. As police officers were not skilled in recording and transcribing speeches they were usually only expected to report in generalised terms on the sentiments uttered, the composition of the audience and monies raised. As one former policeman who was sent in plain clothes to observe a Chartist meeting in Manchester recalled:

My business was not to misrepresent or distort the proceedings into treason, sedition, or conspiracy, but simply to note what was going on, such as numbers of people, conduct of the audience, financial support, &c., in fact to keep the authorities posted up in a sort of official manner of all that really took place. The newspapers reporters could be subpoenaed to give evidence from their authentic shorthand notes, without having to rely on the fallible impressions of a policeman’s memory, where much depended on spoken utterances.⁹⁷

However, it was not always easy to persuade local reporters to give evidence in court (hardly surprising since they would, in many cases, attract the wrath of their own community.) In Ashton-under-Lyne, for example, reporters were reluctant to give evidence against the Rev. J. R. Stephens and began to tone down their reports accordingly

⁹⁵ The Chartist Bronterre O’Brien, at his trial in spring 1840, claimed that the newspaper reports of speeches attributed to him were ‘no more like mine than the grinning skeleton to the living form’, *Manchester Times*, 11 April 1840. Holyoake noted that one of the most time consuming duties of a lecturer was correcting false reports in the press, Holyoake, *Public Speaking and Debate*, p. 113.

⁹⁶ Holyoake, *Sixty Years of an Agitator’s Life*, Vol. II, pp. 157-8.

⁹⁷ A Policeman’s Reminiscences, *Manchester Times*, 2 September 1876.

to prevent being subpoenaed.⁹⁸ Some newspaper reporters, however, had fewer scruples and were able to make good money acting as police spies.⁹⁹

Yet, as the Chartist Samuel Kydd recognised, Government reporters ironically offered radicals a measure of protection in times of great suspicion and hysteria. In July 1848, Kydd urged that Chartists encourage reporters to attend their meetings as he was convinced that had they not been present at the last sitting of the National Convention ‘in all probability he should now be in the walls of a prison’.¹⁰⁰ While verbatim reports of speeches captured in shorthand were used in political trials the practices used by shorthand reporters to capture and reproduce a speech were not infallible and could be effectively questioned in court. As mentioned previously it was accepted practice that reporters took down a condensed form of what was said, expanding or ‘dressing up’ the speech for publication. This meant that trials for seditious speech which rested on the reporters’ notebook were highly contentious. The Sunderland Chartists, George Binns and James Williams, during their trial in August 1840 for making seditious speeches on Town Moor, conducted their own defence which centred upon the accuracy of the shorthand notes taken during the meeting. In court, Henry Etherington, the hapless newspaper reporter, was interrogated at length by Binns and Williams and his stumbling answers published near verbatim in the *Northern Star*. The reported cross examination runs to five columns, giving an excellent insight into the mechanics of shorthand reporting and the distractions and difficulties faced by newspaper reporters.¹⁰¹

William and Binns contended that Etherington was specifically directed by his employers, the *Sunderland Herald*, to make the Chartist speeches as menacing as possible. Binns questioned why the reporter had inaccurately inserted bracketed ‘cheers’ after some of his sentences, which made his remarks appear more inflammatory. He also asked why when he had said ‘honest beggar’ it was rendered ‘meanest beggar’ if it were not with the intention of making his speeches more threatening.¹⁰² Without modern sound recording to prove otherwise, Chartist defendants could have great fun refuting words allegedly uttered. The Chartist, George Julian Harney, entertained supporters attending the Birmingham

⁹⁸ Mather, *Public Order*, pp. 190-1.

⁹⁹ Radzinowicz, ‘New Departures’, pp. 62-3.

¹⁰⁰ Mather, *Public Order*, p. 192.

¹⁰¹ *NS*, 15 August 1840.

¹⁰² *Ibid*

Magistrates Court in July 1839 by claiming to have been misreported – he had not, he claimed, urged his followers to carry muskets, but biscuits!¹⁰³

Hostile newspapers could also render comments more seditious by the addition of exclamation marks. When Feargus O'Connor gestured towards the flaming torches held aloft by a Rochdale audience in December 1838, and exclaimed: 'Look!! At that!!! It speaks a language so intelligible that no one can misunderstand, and those who are not within the hearing of my voice can comprehend the meaning of that silent monitor.'¹⁰⁴ It is significant that in the *Leeds Times* the menacing tones of 'Look at that' were heavily accentuated by the addition of two exclamation marks after 'Look' and a further three exclamation marks after 'at that'. Yet in reports of the same speech, printed in the *Caledonian Mercury* and the *Freeman's Journal*, the excessive punctuation, with its menacing connotations, were absent.¹⁰⁵

Polished 'literary' speeches

Not all speeches were captured by reporters and thus subject to journalistic distortion. It was common practice for itinerant lecturers to supply copy directly to the editors of local newspapers in the hope that they find space in their columns. For example in 1840, Jonathan Bairstow, the county missionary for the West Riding, sent copies of his 'verbatim' speeches to the editor of the *Northern Star*.¹⁰⁶ While this practice dispensed with accusations of inaccurate reporting, for the historian such speeches are less interesting as the audience participation is of course absent, and, unless the reporter also attended, the reception of the speech will not be recorded. Nor does the appearance of a speech in a newspaper actually denote that a speech was delivered. During the 1850 American speaking tour of the anti-slavery orator, George Thompson, his speech denouncing the Fugitive Slave Law in Boston, despite being printed as delivered in the *Liberator*, never actually took place as the threat of mob violence prevented Thompson from speaking.¹⁰⁷

Orators, particularly gentlemanly radicals or those with organisational backing, sometimes published their own speeches as pamphlets or tracts. The preface of Richard Oastler's printed speech (reproduced at the start of this chapter) welcoming Feargus

¹⁰³ Chase, *Chartism*, p. 84.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 38 as reported in the *Leeds Times*, 15 December 1838.

¹⁰⁵ *Caledonian Mercury* 12 December 1838; *Freeman's Journal*, 19 December 1838; *Newcastle Courant* 21 December 1838.

¹⁰⁶ *NS*, 21 November 1840. James Vernon also notes that it was common practice for speakers to supply copies of their address to newspapers, Vernon, *Politics and People*, p. 151.

¹⁰⁷ Gifford, 'George Thompson', p. 275.

O'Connor to the town of Huddersfield illustrates how representations of speech are often distinct from the spoken experience. The preface blatantly acknowledges that the printed version is quite different to that which was actually delivered: 'you will find all I *then* said in print, *and* something more'.¹⁰⁸ In such publications literary and oral representations of speech merged resulting in a distinctive literary genre. Hence published speeches tended to be polished, with the hesitations, repetitions and inelegant or nonsensical phrases characteristic of verbatim speech edited out. Oastler's printed 'speeches' were literary constructions and by no means reports of what he actually said.

It was accepted that speakers would edit and polish their speeches prior to publication and such changes were deemed perfectly acceptable so long as the general sense and thrust of the argument remained the same. However, accusations abounded that disreputable speakers redrafted their arguments to such an extent that it was 'an outrage to morality to persist in calling it the same work'.¹⁰⁹ Discrepancies between what was said and what was reported were particularly contentious in reports of set-piece political or religious debates. Often, as we have seen in the previous chapter, parties would agree prior to the discussion on how the subsequent shorthand report would be managed. Hence arrangements for the publication of a verbatim account of Robert Owen's pioneering debate against Alexander Campbell ensured that both parties were given access to the shorthand reporter's notes and allowed to correct and revise their speeches. Yet this did not prevent Owen from editing out his opponent's voice in his own publication which simply omitted the speeches made by Campbell.¹¹⁰

Perhaps one of the gravest limitations of working with reported speech is that printed representations of speaking are inevitably, in the words of Patrick Joyce, 'frozen rhetoric' disembodied from the wider experience.¹¹¹ While radical newspapers such as the *Northern Star* (and indeed the *Bradford Observer*) allowed the reader to 'hear' the audience by recording interjection of 'hisses' 'groans' and 'hurrahs', often we have only a limited sense of how it felt to be part of the audience. It is largely from other accounts, such as personal reminiscences and correspondence, that the crucial dynamic between the

¹⁰⁸ (My emphasis), Oastler, *Damnation! Eternal Damnation*, preface.

¹⁰⁹ According to the *Northern Star* a report of a lecture by Mr Giles of Leeds refuting Joshua Hobson's earlier lectures on Owenism bore little resemblance to the notes taken by the *Northern Star's* own reporter, 'never before did we see the license of a lecturer to *improve* a lecture, previous to publication, so literally interpreted'. Reprinted in the *New Moral World*, 16 March 1839.

¹¹⁰ See preface to Sims, *Debate on the evidences of Christianity* and the partial version of the debate, *Robert Owen's Opening Speech*, discussed in detail in chapter three pp. 99-101.

¹¹¹ Joyce, *Visions of the People*, p. 44.

speaker and the audience are evoked. It is also less easy to trace in reported accounts mannerism, gesture, changes in pitch, speed, etc.

Classical oratory, homiletics and autodidact culture

After examining the inter-connections between print and oral culture and the dangers of relying upon reported speech, the remainder of this chapter will look at the influences on platform oratory and how speeches were constructed by orators. Classical and nineteenth century teachings on oratory and elocution, the revived nineteenth century interest in the art of sermon writing, and manuals and guides on public speaking produced by working-class autodidact culture all played a part in shaping platform oratory. Some political agitators were born orators, with a natural gift for speaking and debate. However for most men and women eloquence was a skill acquired only after a long, and sometimes painful, apprenticeship.¹¹² The letters written by the anti-slavery orator, George Thompson, to his wife at the start of his public speaking career, and the autobiography of the Chartist and temperance lecturer Robert Lowery reveal how both men initially battled with stage fright and nerves.¹¹³ The struggle for eloquence was linked in the minds of many activists to the wider battle for liberty and democratic reform and to the recognition that ‘no disenfranchised people would be emancipated unless they created an autonomous intellectual life’.¹¹⁴ Men like the former Chartists Robert Lowery and Henry Vincent, or the anti-slavery campaigner the Rev. Benjamin Godwin, were also convinced that if arguments were expressed with truth and clarity the case for reform would be unstoppable.¹¹⁵ This study contends that the ways in which orators organised their thoughts and presented their arguments began to change over the Chartist era in response to profound social and economic changes and the pressure for democratic reform.

¹¹² Even the most celebrated orators of the nineteenth century such as John Thelwall and Disraeli had to overcome great obstacles at the start of their speaking careers, Thelwall’s early attempts at oratory were blighted by a lisp, while Disraeli’s maiden speech was so bad it was widely ridiculed, Frederick William Haberman ‘The elocutionary movement in England, 1750-1850 (unpublished PhD thesis, Cornell University, 1947), p. 230. J. A. Froude, *Lord Beaconsfield* (1890, republished Stroud, 2007), pp. 59-60.

¹¹³ Harrison and Hollis, *Robert Lowery*, pp. 72-74; 78-80. George Thompson described in a letter to his wife at the start of his speaking career how ‘just previous to lecturing I felt as if it would be hardly possible to utter a word’, REAS/2/1/4, letter sent from Margate, October 1831.

¹¹⁴ Rose, *Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, p. 7.

¹¹⁵ Benjamin Godwin, for example, wrote in his memoirs that ‘it seemed to me that it was only necessary to state fairly the monstrous injustice of our slave system and the almost incredible cruelties which it inflicted, to receive the full co-operation of every human and Christian mind in attempting its abolition’, Godwin, *Reminiscences*, Vol. I, f. 498.

Classical oratory and nineteenth century elocution

The art of public speaking has preoccupied mankind since early recorded civilisation. The study of rhetoric and oratory began in ancient Greece, notably by Aristotle and Demosthenes, and was extended by Roman philosophers such as Cicero and Quintilian. During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, rhetoric (which dealt with both written composition and spoken argument) was a staple of the humanist curriculum taught at Oxford and Cambridge universities and was particularly relevant to those aiming for a career in the church or the law. Traditionally rhetoric concerned three major branches: the senate (Parliament), the bar and the pulpit.¹¹⁶ Classical rhetoric emphasised composition over delivery and prescribed detailed rules on how a text should be constructed. Cicero, for example, stipulated that speeches should be arranged into: exordium, explication and text, proposition and partition, argument, application, and epilogue.¹¹⁷ Classical oratory was not a practical tool for communicating facts; rather it was an elite art form which depended upon sophistry and rhetorical flourish.

It was not until the mid-eighteenth century that theorists shifted emphasis away from composition towards the actual delivery of a speech. The elocutionists, under the influence of Hugh Blair, George Campbell, Thomas Sheridan, John Walker and James Burgh, argued that the practical problems of oratory lay with sub-standard delivery. The very title of James Burgh's influential book, the *Art of Speaking* (1761), exemplified this new direction.¹¹⁸ By the early nineteenth century elocution continued to hold sway and, as the later career of John Thelwall (1764-1834) illustrated, a good living could be made instructing others in the art of speaking.¹¹⁹ During this period elocution classes were widely available at Mechanics Institutes and, for higher-class audiences, at Literary and Philosophical Societies. Elocution was also a staple on the curriculum of middle and upper class schools and, as a cursory glance at newspaper advertisement columns indicates, an

¹¹⁶ As exemplified by Aristotle's classic text, *Rhetoric*. See also Andrea Deacon, "The Storm, the Whirlwind, and the Earthquake": Re-assessing Frederick Douglass the orator, *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (2003), pp. 66-67.

¹¹⁷ For brief discussions of Cicero's teachings see, Vicki Tolar Burton, 'John Wesley and the Liberty to speak: the Rhetorical and Literacy Practices of Early Methodism', *College Composition and Communication*, Vol. 53, No. 1, Sept 2001, p. 69 and Robert H. Ellison, *The Victorian Pulpit: Spoken and Written Sermons in Nineteenth-century Britain* (Susquehanna, 1998), p. 20.

¹¹⁸ Carla H. Hay, 'Burgh, James (1714-1775)', *ODNB* (Oxford, 2004).

¹¹⁹ Nicholas Roe, 'Thelwall, John (1764-1834)', *ODNB* (Oxford, 2004).

essential qualification for tutors and governesses. Success in public life, in particular, in politics depended upon mastering public speaking.¹²⁰

Being able to speak well was not enough: elocutionary theorists and teachers believed that the successful orator should be trained in expressing the key human passions. Elocutionists often had connections to the stage and the prevalence of Shakespearean extracts in elocution manuals of the period underlines the theatrical nature of oratory.¹²¹ For the classically trained orator, matching appropriate gesture to speech was not merely a matter of moving ones' head or arms randomly, but was a learned technique involving head, face, eyes, arms, hands, body and lower limbs. Guides to elocution were emphatic in the need for speakers to demonstrate passion and human emotion by their tone, pitch, facial expressions and other mannerisms. For example the Rev. Gilbert Austin's *Chironomia* (1806), an early nineteenth century guide to elocution, held that the key to a good speech lay in movement, expression and gesture. Austin's guide helpfully included plates (see Figs. 2 & 3) which illustrated how the feet should move during rhetorical delivery and the facial expressions and gestures used by professional orators to convey a range of emotions.¹²²

It is evident that the dramatic expressions and stylised movements recommended by elocutionists shared affinities with the traditions of tragic acting. Concern with clarity, enunciation, gesture, expression and movement characterised both professions. *Chironomia* was not dissimilar to contemporary guides to the stage such as that written by Lemman Thomas Rede, the *Guide to the Stage* (1827).¹²³ Rede interestingly left the stage for a subsequent career as an elocution teacher and also wrote a guide to public speaking.¹²⁴ Acting shared obvious similarities with itinerant lecturing, from performance

¹²⁰ Matthew McCormack highlights the role of rhetorical manuals in educating Georgian school boys desirous of a political career, *The Independent Man: citizenship and gender politics in Georgian England* (Manchester, 2005), pp. 35-39.

¹²¹ Paul C. Edwards, 'Elocution and Shakespeare: An Episode in the History of Literary Taste', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (Autumn, 1984), 305-314.

¹²² Gilbert Austin, *Chironomia: or a treatise on rhetorical delivery* (London, 1806). Haberman notes that *Chironomia* had only one English edition and was not widely read at the time but it was extensively plagiarised by later elocutionists, Haberman, 'Elocutionary movement', p. 220.

¹²³ Lemman Thomas Rede, *The road to the stage, or, The performer's preceptor: containing clear and ample instructions for obtaining theatrical engagements, with a list of all the provincial theatres ... and a complete explanation of all the technicalities of the histrionic art* (London, 1827). Rede's guide was later extensively reprinted for an American market as Lemman Thomas Rede, *The guide to the stage: containing clear and ample instructions for obtaining theatrical engagements ...with additional information, making it applicable to the American stage*, edited by Francis C. Wemyss (New York, 1858).

¹²⁴ W. P. Courtney, 'Rede, Lemman Thomas Tertius (1799-1832)', rev. Klaus Stierstorfer, *ODNB* (Oxford, 2004).

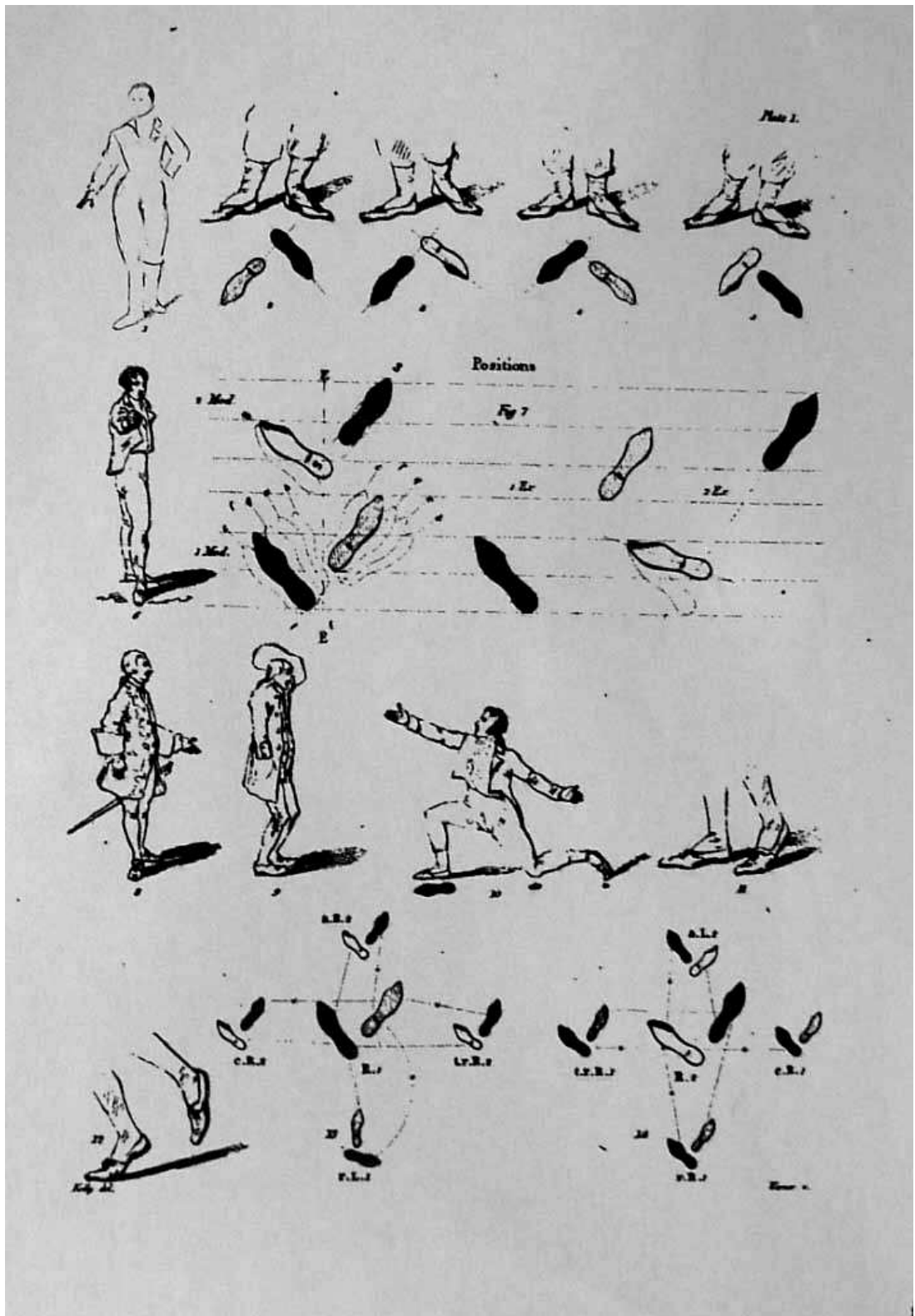


Fig. 2: Movement of the feet, Gilbert Austin, *Chironomia*.

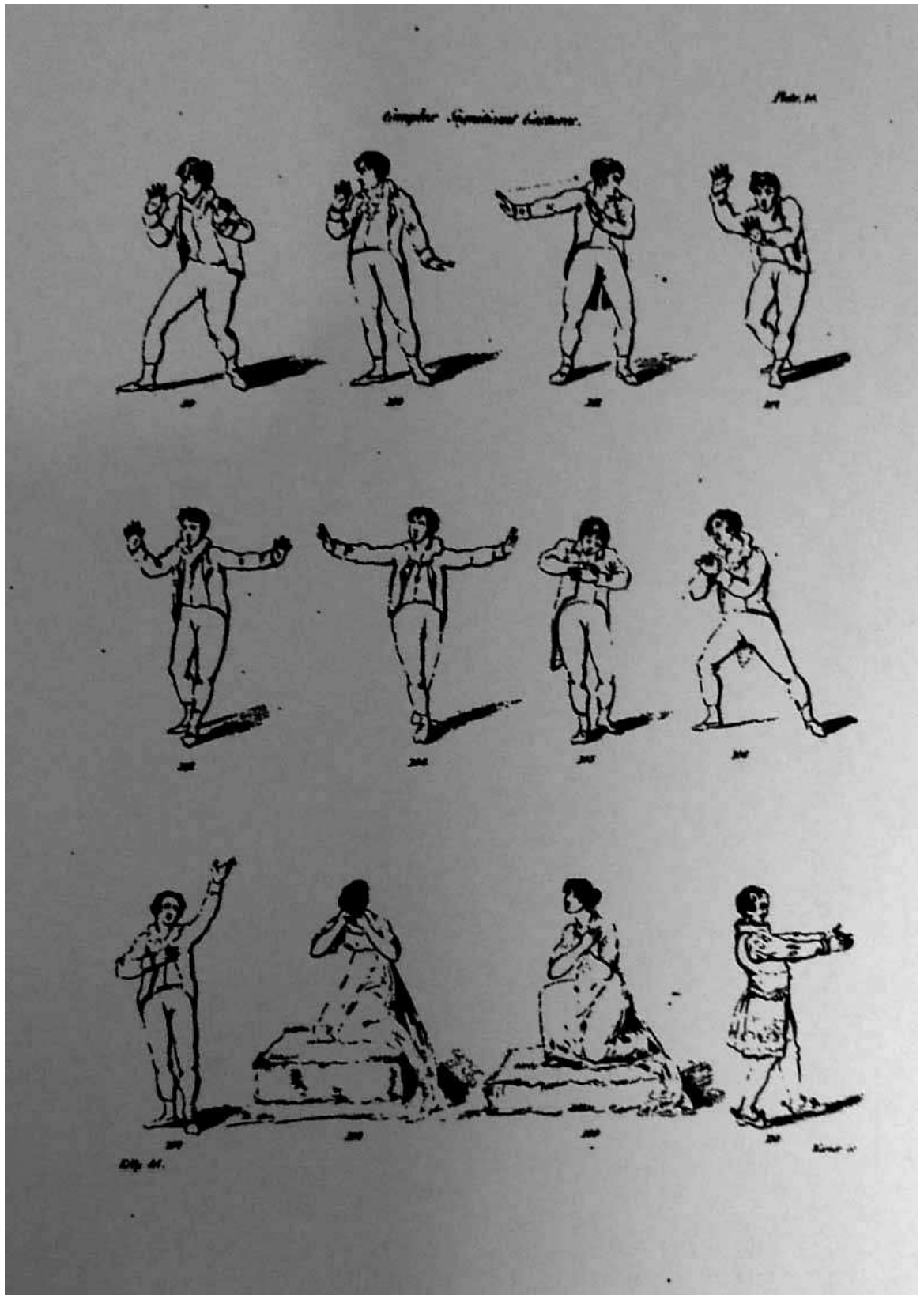


Fig. 3: Facial expressions and gestures, Gilbert Austin, *Chironomia*.

to managing publicity and securing venues. Addressing a crowd, as contemporaries themselves acknowledged, was in itself a performance and it can be no surprise that several radical orators had links to the stage. The Rev. J. R. Stephens played the part of the bandit in a play staged during his childhood while the free trade lecturer James Acland and the celebrated temperance orator John Gough had both spent several years working as professional actors.¹²⁵ As a young man Acland had walked the boards of a leading London tragedian theatre, and also worked under the management of William Macready (1755–1829) at the Bristol Theatre Royal.¹²⁶ With such a pedigree it seems likely that his temperance and free trade oratory utilised the tricks of the stage in a performances which combined language with spectacle.

Throughout the nineteenth century the trade for elocution manuals thrived. Anyone could set themselves up as an expert on public speaking; actors and clergymen in particular could draw upon their professional experience to provide practical guidance. Take for example Alexander Bell, a struggling actor, who in the mid-1830s spotted the demand for practical instruction in public speaking and oratory and swapped the stage for a much more successful career as a teacher of elocution. Bell's first volume *The Practical Elocutionist* (1835) was the first of many guides to speaking, pronunciation, shorthand, and speech disorders in what became a family enterprise.¹²⁷ It has been estimated that his son's later work, *Bell's Standard Elocutionist* (1860), which was extensively revised and reissued throughout the nineteenth century, went through almost 200 English editions.¹²⁸ Like *Chironomia*, *Bell's Standard Elocutionist*, placed considerable emphasise on the movement of the arms and hands to signify key emotions. Yet unlike the overly melodramatic gestures and expressions depicted in the *Chironomia*, these were of more

¹²⁵ Kitson Clark, 'The Romantic Element', p. 223. As a youth Acland ran away and joined a band of itinerant actors, F. Adams, *John Jackson Eyes for the Blind; or an insight into the Character and Principles of James Acland* (Hull, 1832), p. 5. Mark Clement, 'Gough, John Bartholomew (1817–1886)', *ODNB* (Oxford, 2004).

¹²⁶ Acland, Neville, *Memoirs and Correspondence of James Acland from 1799-1829, compiled and edited from Letters, Journals and Newspapers of the Author* (Colchester, 1996), pp. 13-7. Richard Foulkes, 'Macready, William (1755–1829)', *ODNB* (Oxford, 2004). Richard W. Schoch, *Shakespeare's Victorian stage: performing history in the theatre of Charles Kean* (Cambridge, 1998).

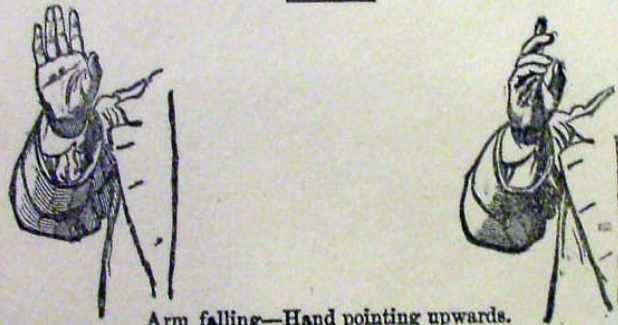
¹²⁷ *The Practical Elocutionist* was advertised in the *Leeds Mercury*, 22 April 1837. For details of his son, Alexander Melville Bell and grandson, Alexander Graham Bell subsequent elocutionary careers, see R. W. Burns, 'Bell, Alexander Graham (1847–1922)', *ODNB* (Oxford, 2004).

¹²⁸ Alexander Melville Bell, *Bell's standard elocutionist: the principles of elocution and relative exercises: followed by an extensive collection of classified extracts in prose and poetry, adapted for reading and recitation* (Edinburgh, 1860). For details of the longevity of this publication see Alexander Graham Bell, in *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Retrieved May 20, 2009, from Encyclopædia Britannica Online: <http://O-search.eb.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/eb/article-9015220>.

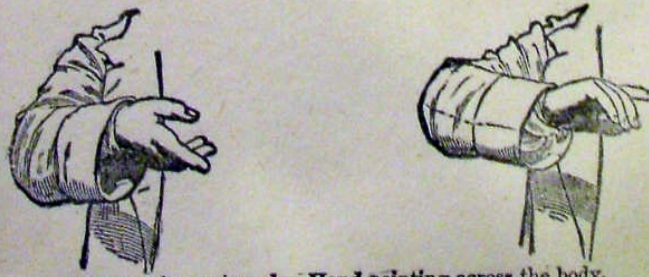
RELATIVE POSITIONS OF THE HAND AND ARM IN MOTION.—(See Par. 104-6, and Page vi.)



Arm rising—Hand hanging downwards.



Arm falling—Hand pointing upwards.



Arm moving outwards—Hand pointing across the body.



Fig 4: Movement of the arm, *Bell's Standard Elocutionist*, frontispiece.

PRINCIPAL "POSITIONS" OF THE HANDS.
 (FOR MODES OF "MOTION," SEE FRONTISPIECE.)

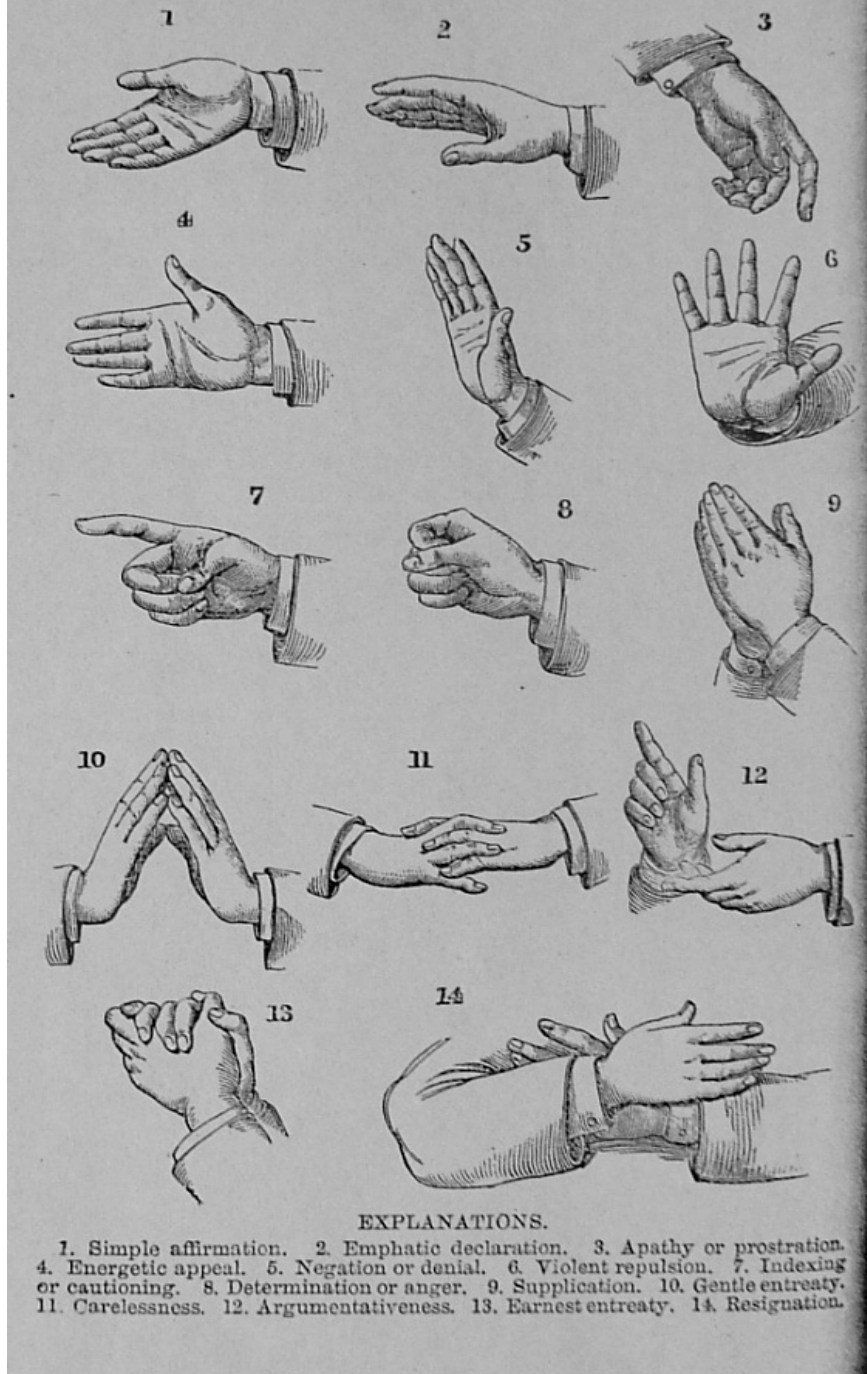


Fig. 5: Movement of the hands, *Bell's Standard Elocutionist*, p 30.

conceivable use to the political orator and serious platform speaker. Fig. 4 and Fig. 5, for example, illustrates how the position and movement of the arm and the hand could be used to signify ‘emphatic declaration’, ‘energetic appeal’, or ‘gentle entreaty’.

The longevity of Bell’s publishing career suggests there was a great deal of interest in teaching oneself to speak. Yet while middle-class orators like the League lecturers, James Acland and Sidney Smith, were likely to have acquired some appreciation of classical oratory at school and could have afforded speaking manuals, it is unlikely that political lecturers employed by the more humble reform movements of the Chartist period would have been schooled in the gestures proscribed by leading elocutionists.¹²⁹ Nor can we say with confidence that such stylised deliveries were found on the political platform. Certainly, as we shall see in the next chapter, celebrity temperance orators like the American John Gough were immersed in theatricality, a style which attracted admiration and distrust in equal measures. Yet it seems less likely that ‘serious professionals’ such as anti-slavery or free trade speakers would have engaged so readily with exaggerated movements and melodramatic expressions, although the gestures of itinerant lecturers of all movements, were likely to have looked, peculiarly animated to the modern eye.

Despite the prevalence of elocutionary teachings there is evidence that the tastes of popular audiences were changing. By the middle of the nineteenth century even some elocutionists expressed their fear that studied postures and artificial movement made the speaker look awkward and contemptible. James Hunt’s *Manual of the Philosophy of Voice and Speech* (1859), for example, warned against over gesticulation, which can offend the audience.¹³⁰ In practice those who had been trained in classical oratory and elocution were not always well received by working-class audiences who were suspicious of calculated artifice and stylised rhetoric. The next chapter argues that during the mid-nineteenth century the speaking style of the educated upper and middle class speaker began to diverge from that of populist self-taught orator. Within elite and parliamentary circles classical oratory continued to hold sway, but the same was not true of the popular political platform where humble-born orators with natural talent pioneered an emerging popularist style.

The supercilious manner in which George Stephens, a leading light in the anti-slavery movement, treated the paid anti-slavery orator George Thompson, is a measure of the divergence between popular and classical styles of speaking. Of the seven paid

¹²⁹ The cost of elocution guides generally put them beyond the means of the working man, for example, in 1839 a copy of Bell’s *Practical Elocutionist*, cost 5s 6d, *John Bull*, 5 May 1839.

¹³⁰ Hunt, *Manual*, p. 386.

speakers employed by the anti-slavery agency in 1831, George Thompson's origins were the most humble yet he was by far the most influential. Despite his great successes Stephens dismissed Thompson's oratory as that of a 'platform speaker', primarily on the grounds that he had not 'enjoyed the advantages of academical education and early introduction to good society'.¹³¹ Fundamentally, Stephens believed that only those who have studied the classics (and who had impeccable upper class origins) could aspire to true oratory.¹³² By the end of the Chartist period, such views were increasingly out-dated as oratory became an increasingly professional component of commercialised popular culture.

That is not to say that knowledge of classical oratory was confined to the cultural elite. Alongside literary giants like Shakespeare and Milton, there is plenty of evidence to show that popular audiences were familiar with Cicero, Demosthenes and Aristotle. Of course being able to recognise and identify the names of classical orators did not imply an in depth knowledge of rhetorical treatise, but it does indicate that the classics had to some degree permeated downwards to those who were self-taught or who had enjoyed only a rudimentary education. It is striking how often rank-and-file Chartists routinely referred to classical orators in their speeches in the expectation that such references would be understood by their audience.¹³³ The Chartist press too likened its own missionaries to prominent classical orators, particularly Demosthenes. Henry Vincent was known as the 'Demosthenes of the English Democracy', while Ernest Jones during the 1847 election was dubbed the 'Demosthenes of Halifax' and the following year, Thomas Francis Meagher was referred to as 'the Demosthenes of Young Ireland'.¹³⁴ Interestingly classical orators were lauded by radical speakers not only for their public speaking prowess but also for their courage in championing the oppressed and in speaking out for freedom. The Chartist missionary, Jonathan Bairstow, during a speech delivered in Derby market place, compared the present day struggles of the Chartists to the trials endured by Roman orators:

Look at the great men in the Roman [era] did not they suffer persecution in the cause of liberty? Cicero the first orator in those days, was beheaded, and his head stuck in the very place where he had pleaded for the rights of the people ...- and the same continues to the present day. Demosthenes fell a victim to the same cause- Look at Feargus O'Connor,

¹³¹ Stephen, *Anti-Slavery Recollections*, p. 151.

¹³² However it is important to note that many Chartist radicals, including Thomas Cooper, were well-versed in the classics, and neo classical poets such as Milton.

¹³³ For example, at a meeting held at Skircoat Green, near Halifax in July 1839, a local Chartist, said that they sought not orators but honest men, which was more important than whether a man 'possessed the eloquence of Cicero and the thunder of Demosthenes', *NS*, 27 July 1839.

¹³⁴ Gammage, *History*, p. 11. *NS*, 7 August 1847; 26 February 1848.

Vincent and many other Reformers, are not they suffering all the tortures it is possible to endure?¹³⁵

In such an analysis the orator is both political activist and martyr to the cause. Leaving Bairstow's blatant melodrama aside it was broadly agreed by contemporaries that oratory flourished in a climate of liberty and freedom. The elocutionist James Hunt, for example, explicitly linked eloquence to democracy, claiming that oratory could only flourish in 'representative and democratic governments'.¹³⁶ This perhaps offers an intriguing explanation as to why the burgeoning popularity of oratory and public discourse in Britain coincided with the age of democratic reform.

Homiletics

Christianity was another influence upon the style and content of the popular political oratory. Methodism, in particular, had a profound influence upon political oratory. The office of lay preacher had for generations equipped gifted working-class orators with the training and confidence to become public speakers and many Chartist, Owenite and temperance lecturers had formerly served as lay preachers.¹³⁷ It has been estimated that by 1850 nearly 20,000 Methodists had performed the duties of lay preacher: such interaction between the laity and the clergy invigorated Methodist preaching and kept it in touch with the people.¹³⁸ Unlike the established church, the Methodists had since the eighteenth century favoured plain and unpretentious styles of speaking: a preference that can be traced to John Wesley's encouragement of simple and unpretentious preaching.

Wesley studied at Oxford in the 1720s and thus experienced rhetorical training in the Cicero tradition. Yet his preaching moved away from the artificial constraints of classical oratory and he advised his lay preachers to tell of their own experience in simple, clear and straightforward language.¹³⁹ In doing so, Wesley was continuing in a long tradition of religious writing, typified by Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), which presented allegorical truths in a simple accessible style. Wesley encouraged his preachers to study the techniques of delivery to improve their sermons. In 1749 he wrote a fifteen

¹³⁵ TNA, HO 45/45 ff. 3-5a, 'Account of proceedings in Derby marketplace on Sunday March 21, 1841'. See also Derbyshire Local Studies Library, MS BA/909/16186, item 3, 21 Mar 1841.

¹³⁶ Hunt, *Manual*, p. 399.

¹³⁷ Chartist orators who first acquired their speaking skills as lay preachers include Abram Hanson of Elland, Benjamin Rushton and William Thornton both of Halifax, Owen Ashton 'Orators and Oratory in the Chartist Movement, 1840-1848', in Ashton, Fyson and Roberts (eds.), *Chartist Legacy*, 48-79.

¹³⁸ Burton, 'John Wesley', p. 78.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 82. See also Haberman, 'Elocutionary movement', pp. 399-401.

page pamphlet called *Directions concerning Pronunciations and Gesture*, in which he cautioned preachers against speaking too loud, too low, too fast, too slow, or mumbling, and advised ‘speakers to pattern their public speech after common conversation’, see Fig 6.¹⁴⁰ *Directions* continued to be published cheaply under various titles until the early decades of the nineteenth century and it is plausible that radicals who acquired their speaking skills as lay preachers were influenced by manuals and speaking traditions established by Wesley himself.

For most people living in the nineteenth century, the Sunday church sermon was their first and most enduring experience of public oratory. It was at church or chapel where contemporaries learned to sit (often for great lengths of time) and listen to the spoken word. Within the Anglican Church lamentations on the appalling state of pulpit oratory and advice on sermon writing are found throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. James Burgh, for example, condemned the dull, cold apathetic styles of pulpit oratory and urged preachers to work ‘upon the human passions’¹⁴¹ Over a hundred years later in 1868 the *Contemporary Review* published a scathing attack on the fact that: ‘whether a man can read intelligently or intelligibly or not, whether he has little or no voice, whether he stammer or has an impediment in his speech, write and preach a sermon or two he must every week of his life.’¹⁴² A particular bugbear was the so called ‘traffic in sermons’, in which lazy or incompetent clergymen bought printed sermons rather than composing their own which led to dull preaching. Instead of buying sermons, preachers were urged to compose their own short sermons, based on unusual texts and enlivened by anecdote, simile or proverb and written in plain, accessible language. Calls for higher standards of pulpit oratory to reach out to the people gained impetus after the 1851 census which showed, in stark terms, the unpopularity of Sunday worship in many urban areas. Clearly clergymen needed to compete with the other diversions available on Sundays and borrow from more popular styles of public speaking.

Broader social, cultural and commercial trends influenced preaching in the mid-Victorian period. The church paid particular attention to the ways in which some reforming movements employed religious arguments in innovative ways. Since the 1830s,

¹⁴⁰ John Wesley, *Directions Concerning Pronunciation and Gesture* (London, 1793). Based on information from *English Short Title Catalogue. Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Gale Group. <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO>. Burton, ‘John Wesley’, p. 77.

¹⁴¹ Donald E. Hargis, ‘James Burgh and the Art of Speaking’, *Speech Monographs*, Vol. XXIV (1957), p. 276.

¹⁴² B. G. Johns, ‘The Manufacture of Sermons’, *Contemporary Review*, Vol. 8 (May-Aug., 1868), p. 263.

this, but the looking-glass, or a friend, who will deal faithfully with you. You should adapt all its movements to the subject you treat of, the passions you would raise, and the persons to whom you speak. Let love or joy spread a cheerfulness over your face; hatred, sorrow, or fear a gloominess. Look with gravity and authority on your inferiors; on your superiors with boldness mixt with respect.

7. You should always be casting your eyes upon some or other of your auditors, and moving them from one side to the other, with an air of affection and regard: looking them decently in the face, one after another, as we do in familiar conversation. Your aspect should always be pleasant, and your looks direct neither severe nor askew: unless you design to express contempt or scorn, which may require that particular aspect.

8. If you speak of heaven or things above, lift up your eyes: if of things beneath, cast them down: and so if you speak of things of disgrace; but raise them, in swearing, or speaking of Things wherein you glory.

9. The mouth must never be turned awry: neither must you bite or lick your lips, or shrug up your shoulders; or lean upon your elbow; all which give just offence to the spectators.

10. We make use of the hand a thousand different ways; only very little at the beginning of a discourse. Concerning this, you may observe the rules following: 1. Never clap your hands, nor thump the pulpit: 2. Use the right-hand most, and when you use the left, let it be only to accompany the other: 3. The right-hand may be gently applied to the breast, when you speak of your own faculties, heart or conscience: 4. You must begin your action with your speech, and end it when you make an end of speaking: 5. The hands should seldom be lifted up higher than the eyes, nor let down lower than the breast: 6. Your eyes should always have your hands in view, so that they you speak to may see your eyes, your mouth and your hands, all moving
in

Fig 6: John Wesley, *Directions concerning pronunciation and gesture*.

temperance lecturers had blended religious arguments for avoiding alcohol with anecdotes and illustration, delivering their message in an entertaining and lively manner in which everyday metaphors and homely language featured prominently. Some of the more astute preachers began to mimic such popular lecturing styles, realising that if religious doctrines were wrapped in amusing stories the message might be more readily and pleasurably absorbed. Some preachers became so good at combining religion with edifying entertainment they acquired near celebrity status. Indeed during the later Chartist years ‘Sermon tasting’, whereby people attended the church services of famous preachers out of curiosity became a popular Sunday morning entertainment.¹⁴³ Two of the most celebrated charismatic preachers of the day, whose sermons attracted large audiences, were the Baptist preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–1892) and the Nonconformist preacher and political activist, George Dawson (1821–1876).¹⁴⁴

Charles Haddon Spurgeon is interesting as his sermons functioned at the interstices of oral and literary culture: thousands of people attended Spurgeon’s sermons but hundreds of thousands more regularly consumed his sermons in print. Spurgeon’s lectures were delivered extempore and were recorded by a shorthand writer as delivered and carefully edited and polished by Spurgeon himself prior to publication.¹⁴⁵ Novice preachers, hoping to absorb Spurgeon’s charismatic preaching style, had literally hundreds of printed sermons to choose from.¹⁴⁶ He also wrote specific homiletic advice. Spurgeon’s influential guide for preachers *Commenting and Commentaries*, (1876) stressed the need for a natural, more direct style of speaking. He seldom inserted classical quotations or referred to Latin authors; instead he encouraged preachers to write their own sermons in their own words as the expositions of others ‘can never be a substitute for our own meditations’.¹⁴⁷

Spurgeon’s critics condemned him for vulgarity, sensationalism, and irreverence, yet his speaking style chimed with the era. Spurgeon had the capacity to speak directly to his congregation in accessible language and ‘a talent for making hearers feel that his message was directed at them personally’.¹⁴⁸ He used everyday metaphors and vivid imagery to great effect. Indeed rather than lose his congregation in the finer points of theology he

¹⁴³ Maurice Davies, *Unorthodox London: or Phases of Religious Life in the Metropolis* (London, 1876).

¹⁴⁴ For more on the Victorian appetite for sermons see Hewitt, ‘Aspects of Platform Culture’, pp. 3-4.

¹⁴⁵ Ellison, *Victorian Pulpit*, p. 59. C. H. Spurgeon’s *autobiography compiled from his diary, letters, and records, by his wife and his private secretary, Vol. IV, 1878-1892* (London, 1900), pp. 74-6.

¹⁴⁶ Robert Ellison has calculated that Spurgeon sold approximately 56,025,000 copies of his sermons during his forty year preaching career. Ellison, *Victorian Pulpit*, p. 47.

¹⁴⁷ *Spurgeon’s Autobiography*, Vol. IV, pp. 269-70, Ellison, *Victorian Pulpit*, pp. 67-8.

¹⁴⁸ Rosemary Chadwick, ‘Spurgeon, Charles Haddon (1834–1892)’, *ODNB* (Oxford, 2004).

conjured up images that were accessible to all. For example, his sermon on the 1857 election employed the metaphor of an express train which cannot be stopped though the points could be turned to facilitate a change in direction.¹⁴⁹

In October 1856, Spurgeon controversially began addressing his congregation at the Surrey Gardens Music Hall, which was located within the grounds of a famous London pleasure ground.¹⁵⁰ A contemporary engraving of Spurgeon preaching at Surrey Gardens Music Hall is suggestive of a speaking style which combined preacher and performer.¹⁵¹ The pulpit is placed on a raised platform and the audience is arranged along a central hall and in tiers of galleries which direct all eyes to the stage. Spurgeon's sermons were advertised in the London press in much the same way as diversions offered by professional entertainers were listed. He recognised that to draw in the crowds religion needed to compete with other popular forms of entertainment. Spurgeon had an innate sense that the people wanted both religion and diversion. In June 1858, for example, he preached at Epsom racecourse wittily taking for his theme the biblical text 'so run that ye may obtain'.¹⁵² *Vanity Fair*, commenting on his dynamic combination of religion and entertainment, described how: 'to widen the fold ... theatres and concert-rooms were converted into meeting-houses, the pulpit was exchanged for the platform, and a row of reporters below the footlights gave the utterances of this original and powerful preacher to the press'.¹⁵³

The charismatic Birmingham preacher and political activist, George Dawson, was similarly adept at blending religion with entertainment. Traditionally sermons were highly stylised literary edifices, which were carved into multiple divisions called heads, which were sometimes formally announced at the start.¹⁵⁴ Dawson rejected this practice altogether and from his Birmingham pulpit he addressed his congregation as if he were engaged in a new kind of conversation, 'the conversation of a brilliant man speaking to his

¹⁴⁹ 'A Particular Election', delivered on Sabbath Morning, March 22, 1857, at the Music Hall, Royal Surrey Gardens, *The New Park Street Pulpit: containing sermons preached and revised by C H Spurgeon, minister of the chapel during the years 1855-1860* (London, 1858), Vol.3, pp. 129-136. See also p.178 below

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.* Spurgeon used the music hall while he waited for the London Tabernacle to be completed.

¹⁵¹ See Spurgeon engraving available at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:SpurgeonSurrey.jpg>. [accessed 9 May 2008]. The image has been copied from *Spurgeon's Sermons Fifth Series*; (New York, 1858).

¹⁵² Chadwick, 'Spurgeon', *ODNB*.

¹⁵³ 'Men of the Day. No. 16. The Rev. Charles Spurgeon'. *Vanity Fair*, 10 December 1870.

¹⁵⁴ Interestingly Spurgeon still retained heads as a mnemonic device to structure his extempore delivery. Spurgeon generally used 'four of the six components set forth by secular and sacred rhetoricians from Cicero to George Campbell', Ellison, *Victorian Pulpit*, pp. 60-61.

friends from a platform'.¹⁵⁵ Dawson was also an itinerant public lecturer and from 1845 he travelled regularly across the country addressing audiences on topics ranging from religion, biography and literature to his pet subjects, Shakespeare, Emerson and Carlyle.¹⁵⁶ Unlike Spurgeon he did not publish preaching advice. However, given the widespread reporting of Dawson's sermons and lectures in newspapers and anthologies, admirers were able to emulate his speaking style. Dawson's pulpit oratory and secular lectures won popular acclaim because they used simple, clear language, and homely metaphors based on universal human experiences.¹⁵⁷ A report of Dawson's lecture on John Calvin delivered in Bradford in March 1850, illustrates the extent to which his speech differed from traditional styles of oratory. The frustrated reporter had to content himself with giving only a précis of what was said as the speed and manner of delivery rendered him particularly difficult to capture:

The usual characteristics of Mr Dawson's lectures were borne by this one. Altogether unsuitable for reporting, it was racy, satirical, witty, outspoken, with plenty of strong denunciation and abounding with intense admiration, merciless on cant, sometimes verging on profane, and with far too much repetition.¹⁵⁸

Given his chaotic speaking style it is not surprising therefore that while Dawson excelled at oral communication, several brief spells as a newspaper editor failed.¹⁵⁹

George Dawson's informal style of preaching was heightened by his physical appearance: rather than appearing as an aloft figure in clerical attire, Dawson, at the start of his preaching career, looked like a romantic poet with long dark curling hair.¹⁶⁰ Before leaving Dawson one further point is striking. The Church of the New Saviour, which was purpose built under Dawson's guidance in August 1848, was modelled on a lecture theatre in the University of London, 'with benches instead of pews and a platform to take the place

¹⁵⁵ Wright Wilson, *The Life of George Dawson* (Birmingham, 1905), p. 155.

¹⁵⁶ Alexander Ireland, a director of the Manchester Athenaeum, after hearing Dawson speak in Birmingham was so impressed that he helped to launch his lecturing career by arranging for Dawson to give four lectures on 'the genius and writing of Thomas Carlyle' in Manchester in January 1846'. Ireland was also instrumental in organising Emerson's lecture tours. Alexander Ireland, *Recollections of George Dawson and his lectures in Manchester in 1846-7* (Birmingham, 1882), p. 8.

¹⁵⁷ Howard M. Wach, 'Culture and the Middle Classes: Popular Knowledge in Industrial Manchester', *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (Oct., 1988), pp. 395-8.

¹⁵⁸ *BO*, 22 November 1860.

¹⁵⁹ Wilson, *Life of George Dawson*, p. 212.

¹⁶⁰ E. P. Hennock, *Fit and Proper Persons: Ideal and Reality in Nineteenth-Century Urban Government, ideal and reality in nineteenth-century urban government* (London, 1973), p. 64. Ireland, *Recollections*, p. 21.

of the pulpit'. Such a design symbolised a more engaged style of preaching and was quite revolutionary for a period which held the pulpit to be the key piece of ecclesiastical furniture.¹⁶¹ The interior of Dawson's church underlined his own self-perception as both preacher and public lecturer. The great popularity of the 'lecture' format in the mid and later Victorian period encouraged mainstream clergyman to offer lectures, often in large commercial halls, in addition to their regular church services. Indeed Dawson and Spurgeon's blend of religious lecturing was copied by clergymen at provincial towns and cities across the country.¹⁶² In 1850s and 1860s Bradford, for example, the Rev. J. P. Chown offered numerous lecture series which were a subtle mix of edifying entertainment and religious teachings.¹⁶³

Ideas, language, and styles of speaking flowed in both direction between the lecture platform and the pulpit during the Chartist era. Even movements like Owenism, which attacked conventional Christianity, relied on their audience having the necessary grasp of Christian doctrines to engage in the polemical debate. As Laura Schwartz's work on infidel feminism illustrates, the propaganda war waged between evangelical clergymen and secularist lecturers was dependent on all parties having a detailed knowledge of Christian teaching. Each side engaged with and fed off the others polemics and tailored their strategies to match those of their opponents.¹⁶⁴ The Anglican Church, for example, responded to London socialist infidel preachers and Chartist stump orators by re-embracing street preaching in a bid to reclaim the people for God.¹⁶⁵

Autodidact culture

The final section of this chapter will look at what influences, besides lay preaching and classical oratory, shaped self-taught orators. The writings of William Cobbett held a special place within working-class intellectual endeavour.¹⁶⁶ Perhaps one of his most important legacies was a practical and readable guide to writing and speaking English. Cobbett's *A Grammar of the English Language* (1819) acquired text book status and

¹⁶¹ Hennock, *Fit and Proper Persons*, pp. 73-4. Ian Sellers, 'Dawson, George (1821-1876)', *ODNB* (Oxford 2004).

¹⁶² Hewitt, 'Popular Platform Religion', pp. 29-39.

¹⁶³ See chapter six, p. 249 or a further discussion of this theme.

¹⁶⁴ Laura Schwartz, 'Infidel Feminism: Religion, Secularism and Women's Rights in England c. 1830 to 1889' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of East London, 2008)

¹⁶⁵ Anna Davin 'Socialist Infidels and Messengers of Light: Street Preaching and Debates in Mid-Nineteenth Century London, in Tim Hitchcock and Heather Shore (eds.) *The Streets of London from the Great Fire of London to the Great Stink* (London, 2003), pp.165-182.

¹⁶⁶ Ian Dyck, 'Cobbett, William (1763-1835)', *ODNB* (Oxford, 2004).

continued in print throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Cobbett's *Grammar* was persistently scathing about classical scholars who applied their knowledge of Latin to the rules of grammar, unnecessarily complicating what was innately simple.¹⁶⁷ His central argument was liberating. He claimed that not only was a good grasp of grammar available to all, but that if the workingman acquired the ability to write and speak without ambiguities he would 'be able to assert with effect the rights and liberties of his country'.¹⁶⁸ To this end Cobbett advised his students to use words in common usage and to avoid foreign words. Most importantly of all Cobbett's *Grammar* was fun. Cobbett mischievously selected his examples of 'poor' grammar from prominent writers and the ruling elite: Lord High Chancellor and Doctor Johnson, for example, were shown to be lacking in grammatical prowess.¹⁶⁹ Unlike contemporary elocution teachers Cobbett held that speakers should not be overly concerned over regional pronunciation as 'hearers whose approbation is worth having will pay very little attention to the accent'.¹⁷⁰

The art of elocution, much like grammar and shorthand, could be acquired by self-directed study. Several prominent orators did learn their trade from a book. The former slave and renowned orator, Frederick Douglass (1818-1895), acquired his speaking skills by assiduously studying the *Columbian Orator*, a textbook which set out the basic rules of public speaking and supplied a large selection of sample speeches.¹⁷¹ Yet as George Jacob Holyoake recognised, many of the existing guides to oratory were aimed at literary readings and not the public political platform. They also adhered to the older classical traditions of oratory and were thus unsuited to those addressing an audience of ill-educated working people. Holyoake, as befitting one of the first professional freelance lecturers, used his experience of public lecturing to write a speakers' manual. His aim, as stated in the preface of *Rudiments of Public Speaking and Debate* (1849), was to raise ladders for 'the use of those who had yet to rise', by providing a guide to speaking that was written to be understood.¹⁷² Holyoake's *Public speaking and Debate* went through numerous editions in England, America and Australia and its merits were such that, despite

¹⁶⁷ William Cobbett's *A Grammar of the English Language*, (1819, reprinted with introduction by Lord Hattersley, Oxford, 2003).

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, Letter XXI, 'Specimens of false grammar taken from the writings of Doctor Johnson and from those of Doctor Watts;' Letter XXII, 'Errors and Nonsense in a King's Speech'.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

¹⁷¹ William S McFeely, *Frederick Douglass* (New York, 1991), pp. 34-5. See also Deacon, "The Storm, the Whirlwind, and the Earthquake," pp. 65-81.

¹⁷² See preface, Holyoake, *Public Speaking and Debate* (1852 edn.), p. 4.

Holyoake's notorious atheism, the Rev. Dr. Joseph Parker recommended it heartily to young preachers as a guide 'full of wise and practical counsel'.¹⁷³ Both Holyoake's *Public Speaking and Debate* and Cobbett's *Grammar* can be seen as a broader trend towards the democratisation of knowledge.¹⁷⁴

Elocution teachers also played a useful, albeit more limited, role. The radical, John Thelwall, was reputed to have trained the anti-slavery orator, George Thompson in public speaking which, if correct, suggests an interesting link between the late eighteenth and 1830s radicalism.¹⁷⁵ Thelwall, who toured the country giving lectures on elocution and oratory at primarily middle class literary and philosophical societies, also influenced the Bradford Baptist minister, Benjamin Godwin, who heard him lecture when he visited Bradford in 1830.¹⁷⁶ The Chartist lecturer, David Ross, as we shall see in chapter six, had a successful sideline teaching oratory; which illustrates how interest in oratory during this period was manifest even amongst working people.

The best polemical debaters, whether on the page or the platform, would leaven dry political arguments with illustrations drawn from great works of literature and poetry. Autodidact working-class culture, as illustrated by Jonathan Rose's impressive study of the British working classes's reading habits, was rich and diverse.¹⁷⁷ Significant numbers of people from all walks of life in this period could recite large chunks of poetry and lines from great works of literature from heart. Nineteenth century oratory was peppered with quotations drawn from the literary cannon. Indeed Holyoake's *Public Speaking and Debate* devoted a whole chapter to the effective use of poetry by public speakers.¹⁷⁸ Interest in literature, history, elocution, oratory and grammar was part of a broader quest for political and civil equality. If working people could prove by their accomplishments they had equal intellectual and moral capacities as their 'superiors' it would become increasingly difficult to deny them the vote on financial grounds alone.

Many aspiring working-class orators learned to speak eloquently and effectively via mutual improvements and debating societies. The autobiography of Robert Lowery, a

¹⁷³ See preface to George Jacob Holyoake, *Public Speaking and Debate: A Manual for Advocates and Agitators* (Boston, 1897), p. 2.

¹⁷⁴ Richard Altick claims that the progression to a mass reading audience was 'the history of English democracy seen from a new angle'. Altick, *English Common Reader*, p. 3.

¹⁷⁵ Stephen, *Anti-Slavery Recollections*, p. 150.

¹⁷⁶ Godwin, *Reminiscences*, Vol. II, f. 502.

¹⁷⁷ Rose, *Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, p. 7. See also Louis James, *Fiction for the Working man*; Altick, *English Common Reader*.

¹⁷⁸ Holyoake, *Public Speaking and Debate*, Chapter XXIV.

former Chartist and later temperance lecturer, illustrates the importance of such groups in training working-class speakers. Lowery described the incremental stages by which he acquired confidence at addressing a public meeting: first speaking for ten to fifteen minutes at discussions held at his mutual improvement society, then seconding motions at public meetings, before being capable delivering a lecture on his own.¹⁷⁹ Reform movements encouraged their activists to not only gain political knowledge but also to confidently expound their knowledge in public discussion. As the Chartist *Dundee Herald* proclaimed in spring 1842:

Every working man should study to acquire sufficient confidence in his own ability to express his opinions freely at all times, and in all places, and before all men. Let debating societies start into existence everywhere ...until every hamlet, village and town in Scotland can produce a Demosthenes and a Cicero.¹⁸⁰

Undoubtedly the key to a good speech was preparation and practice. Men and women who depended upon lecturing for their livelihood devoted a considerable amount of time to researching their subject and honing their rhetorical skills. George Jacob Holyoake, who was hardly a natural-born orator, became a respected and competent lecturer by virtue of arduous preparation. An early pamphlet written by Holyoake on lecturing describes how he could easily spend six weeks verifying and preparing his argument on one point that would take only fifteen minutes to explain in a lecture.¹⁸¹ Clearly Holyoake was not alone: from the complex arguments and detailed rendition of facts and figures beloved of temperance, Chartist and League lecturers it is evident that many professional agents undertook similarly rigorous preparation.¹⁸²

All orators whether paid professionals or local enthusiasts, required factual evidence to substantiate their arguments. Indeed lack of knowledge at times hampered those with public speaking aspirations as a letter from the secretary of the Barnard Castle Mechanics Institute to the League headquarters illustrates:

¹⁷⁹ Harrison and Hollis, *Robert Lowery*, pp. 72-80; 105. For the culture of mutual improvement societies see Rose, *Intellectual Life*, pp. 62-70.

¹⁸⁰ *NS*, 9 April 1842.

¹⁸¹ Holyoake, *On Lecturing: Its Conditions and Character* (undated c. 1851, printed for private circulation: George Jacob Holyoake collection, National Co-operative Archive, Manchester), p. 2.

¹⁸² George Thompson's diary for 1860 recorded that for him to write 30 lectures on India it would take nine months, working for 6 hours and writing on average 13 pages per day, which indicates the level of preparation which undertaken by itinerant political lecturers. JRUL, REAS/7/4.

Some of us, who are used to public speaking ... are deterred from a consciousness that should we meet with any opponents ... we should be unable, from a dearth of information, to do proper justice to the Question.¹⁸³

In response to such demand the key reform movements of the period began to produce statistical handbooks and speakers notes. *The Corn Law Repealer's Hand-book* (1841), for example, promised to furnish speakers with comprehensive statistical evidence on the 'Corn Law question'.¹⁸⁴ Similarly professional Chartist speakers extracted statistical information from publications such as *Richardson's Black Book* or the *Socialist Almanac* both of which were advertised in the Chartist press and conveniently proportioned to fit into a speaker's waistcoat pocket.¹⁸⁵ Material for speeches could also be taken from tracts such as *What is a Chartist? Answered*, or *Catechism on the Corn Laws*, which were printed and circulated in large numbers.¹⁸⁶ Chartist, free trade, Owenite and temperance newspapers were other obvious sources for information. They routinely carried arguments, facts and figures which could be easily learnt and used as ammunition at public meetings and discussions.

Conclusion

Public political discourse existed both at the ephemeral point of delivery and in the subsequent report. The oral-cum-print nature of many speeches in this period is interesting. Speeches whose afterlife was prolonged by being transcribed into print operated at the intersection between oral and print culture. They could be read silently or out loud, but their structure, logic and rhythms singled them out as speeches and not prose. True, not all speeches were reported in print, yet good speeches would usually be summarised and repeated. It is easy to forget that much political argument functioned at the level of the conversation. Hence the arguments and phrases of inspiring orators would be paraphrased and orally circulated during conversations and exchanges with workmates, family and friends. Perhaps it is simplistic to divide propaganda into oral and printed media – after all the same 'text' might be recorded, disseminated and consumed in a

¹⁸³ ACLL letter book, f. 406, letter 4 Mar 1840.

¹⁸⁴ Thomas Ballantyne, *The Corn Law Repealer's Hand-book; A complete manual for the use of those who wish to make themselves familiar with the statistics of the Corn Law Question* (London, 1841). Ballantyne was the editor of the editor of the *Bolton Free Press*, see advert in *ACLC*, 7 January 1840.

¹⁸⁵ *NS*, 28 November 1840; *NS* 21 November 1840. *Richardson's Black Book* boasted a range of political facts including an exposé of the Taxation system, and a 'valuable Tell-tale Table for Political Lecturers'. It followed in a long radical tradition of black books as a source of damning evidence on the 'Old Corruption'.

¹⁸⁶ Banbury Chartists reported in the *Star* that they had had 600 of this particular tract, *NS*, 21 November 1840.

variety of ways. The words spoken by the Chartist lecturer, Thomas Cooper, during the plug plot riots in the summer of 1842, which led to his subsequent trial and imprisonment, were refracted and represented in several forms. They were heard by the initial audience, captured ‘verbatim’ by police spies, repeated by Cooper himself during his trial and from thence transformed into verse in the first few stanzas of his epic prison poem the *Purgatory of Suicides*. Each version was different and each was, to some degree, a poetic reconstruction.

Given the dominance of public speaking it is not surprising that people from all walks of life were eager to study elocution, rhetoric and oratory. As we have seen there was a thriving trade in elocutionary guides. Yet as the historian of English elocutionary movement Frederick Haberman has argued, guides based upon classical tenets were not aimed at hustings or platform speakers; instead they tacitly assumed that oratory was more closely associated to literature and that fundamentally ‘elocution was a fine art, not a practical art’.¹⁸⁷ A preoccupation that was also evident in *Bell’s Practical Elocutionist*, whose target market was those interested in literary accomplishments rather than political advancement. In this respect Holyoake’s *Public Speaking and Debate* was revolutionary in that the onus was on practical discourse and political discussion. This preference was abundantly evident in a later, heavily revised version, which carried the subtitle ‘*A manual for Advocates and Agitators*’.¹⁸⁸

During the early and mid-Victorian period, the fashion was for lengthy ‘verbatim’ reporting of speeches and meetings. In the *Bradford Observer* the number of column inches devoted to verbatim speeches peaked in the 1850s (Appendix II, Fig. 19). By the end of the nineteenth century, the column after column of unmediated speeches that characterised local and national newspapers was superseded by new investigative styles of reporting pioneered by W. T. Stead. Stead’s ‘new journalism’ introduced journalistic innovations such as ‘bold headlines, pictorial illustrations, special interviews, [and]

¹⁸⁷ Haberman, ‘Elocutionary movement’, p. 392.

¹⁸⁸ George Jacob Holyoake, *Public Speaking and Debate: A Manual for Advocates and Agitators* (Boston, 1897). This edition, although retaining the title, key paragraphs, phrases and illustrations, was quite different from the 1852 version. It was rewritten in a much simpler style, undoubtedly reflecting the changes that had taken place in public speaking during the forty year interim. It would be interesting to review all the available editions of *Public Speaking and Debate* in the UK, America and Australasia, the British Library alone holds eleven different editions.

provocative leading articles'.¹⁸⁹ After 1870 mediated news stories replaced the older practice of verbatim reportage and formerly well-reported meeting and platform events now attracted only sketchy summaries.¹⁹⁰ Instead of giving the reader everything and allowing them to weigh up the argument for themselves – as if the reader were present in the audience – new styles of journalism favoured analysis and opinion.¹⁹¹ This marked changed in reporting styles signalled the end of a close relationship between press and platform. Writing in the early 1890s George Jacob Holyoake, whose public career spanned the entirety of Victoria reign, lamented the decline in verbatim reporting:

Only one paper gives a full Parliamentary report. Once five papers did it. On the great debate when the Taxes on Knowledge was the question before the House, five daily papers gave full reports. So marvellously accurate were they, that there was scarcely a variation of a word in them.¹⁹²

The mid-Victorian golden age of verbatim reporting was a product of its time. The political turbulence generated by reform movements and the climatic changes precipitated by urbanisation and industrialisation engendered an appetite for political discussion, which, thanks to technological advances, could for the first time be reported fully and widely disseminated. It is possible that the advent of fuller, near verbatim reporting influenced how orators constructed and delivered their speeches. Certainly the technical ability to produce fuller and more accurate reports coincided with a new emphasis on political arguments based on facts and supported by statistics. Older traditions of reporting political speeches, epitomised by parliamentary sketch writers, were best suited to reporting classical forms of political oratory whose impact depended less on factual accuracy than rhetorical flourishes and sophistry.¹⁹³ Improvements in reporting accelerated the shift away from a political oratory fashioned in the style of Demosthenes to one founded upon verifiable fact: a theory explored further in the next chapter, which considers how speeches were delivered.

¹⁸⁹ Joseph O. Baylen, 'Stead, William Thomas (1849–1912)', *ODNB* (Oxford, 2004). Janette Martin, 'public meetings, reporting of', in Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor, *Dictionary of Nineteenth Century Journalism*, forthcoming online version.

¹⁹⁰ Only eminent men, like Gladstone, continued to attract verbatim reports, Meisel, *Public Speech*, p. 271.

¹⁹¹ Hewitt 'Aspects of Platform Culture' p. 11.

¹⁹² Holyoake, *Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life*, Vol. II, p. 159.

¹⁹³ Such reports were concerned with personalities and mannerisms rather than the content and argument of speeches; see James Grant, *Random Recollections of the House of Commons from the year 1830 to the close of 1835 including personal sketches of the leading members of all parties by one of no party* (London, 1836).

Chapter five: Speaking to the People, delivering popular political oratory

It was his attitude, his voice, his gesture, and his enthusiasm, rather than his language, which contained the summary of his power. Occasionally ... he delivered a grand and beautiful sentence, but only occasionally. He could impress his hearers with the conviction that his speeches were from beginning to end masterpieces of eloquence; but the moment they appeared in black and white the sweet illusion vanished, the charm was dissolved, the magic spell was broken, and he appeared but little more than an ordinary speaker.¹ [Henry Vincent's oratory]

Robert Gammage, former Chartist and the first historian of Chartism, was a connoisseur of oratorical style. In addition to tracing the pivotal moments of Chartism, the *History of the Chartist Movement* provides intriguing pen sketches of leading and middle-ranking Chartists in which oratory (voice, appearance and speaking style) figure prominently. Gammage, through his work as a Chartist missionary, was well acquainted with the Chartist platform and undoubtedly had plenty of opportunity to observe other Chartist speakers in action.² It is clear from his analysis that eloquence was judged on delivery not content. For example, as indicated in the quotation that heads this chapter, Henry Vincent (widely held to be one of the best Chartist orators) was lauded not for the substance of his speeches, which only rarely contained a 'grand or beautiful sentence', but for his voice, enthusiasm and gesture. Indeed, according to Gammage, when Vincent's words were rendered in black and white the magic spell was quite broken.³ The use of non-verbal, visual communication, rituals and symbols was an important part of the radical platform as work carried out by Paul Pickering, James Epstein and John Belchem during the 1980s and 1990s demonstrates. To understand Victorian oratory it is also necessary to consider the emotional landscape of the period. Kitson Clark, over fifty years ago, was the first historian to pay serious attention to the ways in which romanticism shaped the 1830s and 1840s.⁴ In more recent years Rohan McWilliam has shown how melodrama permeated popular radicalism.⁵ Such historiography firmly situates oratory in the three dimensional context of delivery and performance and reminds historians that emotions and feelings were essential components of popular political oratory.

¹ Gammage, *History*, p. 12.

² Maehl, *Robert Gammage: Reminiscences of a Chartist*.

³ Gammage, *History*, p. 12.

⁴ Kitson Clark, 'The romantic element'.

⁵ Rohan McWilliam, *The Tichborne claimant: a Victorian sensation* (London, 2007); 'Melodrama and the Historians', *Radical History Review*, (Fall 2000), 57-84.

The focus of the chapter will be upon delivery rather than the substance of popular political oratory. To an extent the separation is artificial but for reasons of coherence, space and to avoid repetition of the analyses made by post-modernist historians on the key narratives of political rhetoric (the constitution, domesticity, patriotism, utopia, etc.)⁶ this restriction is necessary. In three areas, however, this chapter will stray beyond the purely stylistic aspects of political rhetoric and the performative nature of popular political oratory. The first of these will be religion. The language of Christianity was so integral to the political rhetoric of the period (even in the performances of those explicitly opposed to priestcraft) that it deserves consideration for influencing the content as well as the delivery, structure and style of discourse. The prevalence of melodrama on the political platform and finally the use of facts, statistics and demonstrable ‘evidence’ are also singled out in this study because their use in political rhetoric changed during the Chartist period. By mid-century the presentation of evidence became a dominant feature of political oratory indicative of a wider cultural shift away from the romanticism of the early nineteenth century (evoked by Kitson Clark) to the later Victorian emphasis on knowledge, progress and ‘gradgrindian’ fact.⁷

The main contention is that during the Chartist era speaking styles began to change and that classical oratory and elocution were gradually superseded by more democratic modes of public speaking. This change was driven by the increasing numbers of self-taught orators, the commercialisation of the lecture platform and the rejuvenation of homiletics led by celebrity popular preachers such as Charles Haddon Spurgeon and George Dawson. All these factors influenced not only the content of oratory but also the manner of delivery. Whereas classical oratory relied upon carefully structured arguments and favoured sophisticated rhetorical techniques such as *praeteritio* or *captatio benevolentiae*, popular political oratory was more concerned with getting the message across than following complex rules.⁸ It was founded on enthusiasm and was often the product of a working-class oral culture that valued wit and storytelling over scholarly principles. Many of the

⁶ Such work includes: James Vernon (ed.), *Re-reading the constitution: new narratives in the political history of England's long nineteenth century* (Cambridge, 1996) and *Politics and the People*, especially Chpt. 8; Anna Clark, ‘Rhetoric of Chartist Domesticity’, *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 3, (1992); *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley, 1995); Patrick Joyce *Visions and Democratic Subjects*. See also Hugh Cunningham, ‘The Language of Patriotism’, in Raphael Samuel (ed.), *Patriotism: The making and unmaking of British National Identity*, Vol. 1 (London, 1989).

⁷ Kitson Clark, ‘The romantic element’. The term ‘gradgrindian’ come from Thomas Gradgrind, a character in Charles Dickens’ novel *Hard Times* whose soulless devotion to facts and figures exemplified utilitarianism take to extremes.

⁸ *Praeteritio* means boasting while pretending not to, *captatio benevolentiae* is a rhetorical technique for speaking with self-conscious humility.

prominent lecturers of the mid-Victorian period were of humble origins. Take for example the anti-slavery lecturer, George Thompson, the temperance speaker, Thomas Whittaker and Chartist lecturers such as Thomas Cooper, Robert Lowery, and Jonathan Bairstow. All these men were self-taught without the benefits of a classical education. It seems plausible that the vast number of speeches made by such men, over time, rejuvenated the style and delivery of popular oratory. Audiences changed too. At the start of the nineteenth century, aside from the rituals of the hustings, working people were not great consumers of political speeches. By the mid century working people listened to political lectures in large numbers and the manner and content of addresses were tailored accordingly.

Few would now dispute that the style and delivery of a speech were integral to the message. The difficulty lies not in convincing readers of the importance of the topic but in accessing evidence. Unlike Gammage, newspaper reporters generally relied upon platitudinous phrases when describing extra parliamentary political speeches, such as ‘clear and masterly’, ‘in a strain of thrilling eloquence’. As we have seen in Chapter Four, Victorian reporting often produced formulaic descriptions of speech which lacked the vigour of the original delivery. Some of the most telling descriptions are those when lecturers failed in the eyes of the reporter: from such negative reports we can discern what it was held a good speaker should do. When the American essayist, Ralph Waldo Emerson, toured the UK in 1847, his speaking style jarred with many in his audience.⁹ A Manchester reporter complained that ‘the tones of his voice are nasal’ and that ‘his delivery is indifferent and careless ... dwelling on insignificant words, raising the voice in a peculiar and invariable manner at the end of every sentence, and sometimes absolutely stopping in the middle, to turn over a page or two’. A still more heinous crime in the eyes of the reporter ‘was the woodenness of the face ... he read words of passionate admiration – of reprehension – of dissent, and of contempt, and his voice hardly varied; his countenance still less’.¹⁰ Not only does this report suggest that audiences expected emotion, gestures and facial expressions from their orators, it also indicates a preference for extempore delivery over the carefully scripted and read address.

⁹ Townsend Scudder III, Emerson’s British Lecture Tour, 1847-1848, Part I, *American Literature*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Mar., 1935), 15-36 and part II, Vol. 7, No. 2 (May, 1935), 166-180. See also Wach, ‘Culture and the Middle Classes’, p. 399.

¹⁰ *Howitt's Journal*, Vol. II, 1847, 370-1. Clare Pettitt, in a paper delivered at the "Lecturing the Victorians" Symposium at the University of Cambridge, 31 October 2008, argued that Emerson’s underperformance was a deliberate ploy to reclaim the significance of the words. Pettitt’s argument is convincing but it does not detract from the fact that Emerson’s style was at odds with most popular oratory in this period.

Further insights into how popular orators spoke and how they were perceived by contemporary audiences can be gleaned from autobiographies, memoirs and correspondence. But even these do not convincingly capture the auditory experience. One technique for studying the stylistic aspects of a speech is to try and get at the sound and rhythmic qualities of oratory by reading speeches aloud.¹¹ When said aloud the power of certain expressions becomes more apparent. Take, for example, the Chartist Jonathan Bairstow's use of the alliteration 'petty puppets of political power' in a speech against the League, which while a delight to read silently is even better to hear or say out loud.¹² Professional lecturers, especially those who prepared in advance and delivered their speeches indoors, employed alliteration and other poetic techniques to ensure that their lectures sounded as well as they read. For professional itinerant speakers, who essentially repeated the same lectures to different audiences across the country, stock expressions and arguments, including memorable lines of eloquence, would be memorised, polished and improved as their tours progressed.¹³ Indeed a hostile commentator accused George Jacob Holyoake of spending years lecturing 'upon a subject until every metaphor was polished like an electro-plated proverb'.¹⁴

Popular political oratory did not operate in a cultural vacuum. It was indebted to wider cultural practices and borrowed from speaking styles and techniques found in other places where the spoken word was paramount. For this reason the second part of this chapter will consider how political oratory was influenced by the stage, religion and the law courts. The pulpit, the courtroom and the Victorian stage not only influenced platform oratory in terms of language and style, they also provided a place where political arguments could be articulated. As we shall see Chartist trials were arenas where political ideas were voiced and recorded for posterity. Politics could also be found lurking in several plays that were performed in this period while contemporary political issues loomed large in the sermons of clergymen such as the Rev. G. S. Bull and the Rev. J. R. Stephens. The content and style of political oratory was also moulded by technological, economic and social changes: the arrival of the railways, cheaper print and expanded and improved reporting all helped shape popular political oratory. As leisure became increasingly commercialised, itinerant

¹¹ Recent pedagogical advice on Victorian literature interestingly encourages students to read Victorian novels out loud, Matthew Rubery, 'Victorian Literature Out Loud: Digital Audio Resources for the Classroom', *Journal of Victorian Culture* Vol. 14, 2009, pp. 138-9.

¹² *NS*, 31 October 1840.

¹³ Gammage suggest as much when he describes how Vincent's speech held the occasional sentence of eloquent beauty. Gammage, *History*, p. 12.

¹⁴ McCabe, *Life and Letters*, Vol. II, pp. 272-3.

political lecturers also drew upon the repertoire of the itinerant showman and other professional entertainers; a trend investigated further in the next chapter.

Speaking styles on the popular political platform

How gifted orators used gesture, props, mimicry, poetry, melodrama, plain speaking, religious rhetoric, and statistics, will be the focus of the first part of this chapter. Audiences would readily walk mile after mile and stand for several hours to see their heroes speak despite the fact that at mass rallies, without modern sound amplification, only ten percent were actually in earshot of the speaker.¹⁵ This suggests much more was happening than just words. The power of oratory lay partly in the theatricality of its performance.¹⁶ The symbolism of the banners, the music of the bands, even the attire of the speakers and their use of props and gesture were part and parcel of the message. Whether outdoors, at mass rallies, or at indoor meetings political orators deployed a wide range of rhetorical devices and techniques to transfix and persuade their audiences.

While public speaking skills could be acquired by study and application, to a large degree a speaker's style was determined by personality, voice, demeanour, gender and physical appearance. Emma Martin's rhetoric was serious and careful; Feargus O'Connor's speeches were gregarious and bombastic; while Thomas Cooper's style was more akin to preaching. George Thompson possessed a deep baritone voice that was pleasant to hear and conveyed authority, while the popular preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, was reputed to have phenomenal powers of voice projection.¹⁷ Other lecturers, such as George Jacob Holyoake, were let down by weak voices and lack of presence which made them more suited to the indoor lecture hall than the mass platform.¹⁸ Yet for all their distinctiveness successful orators shared certain personality traits: natural eloquence; fluency of speech; a memory stocked with facts, figures and imagery; confidence and the ability to talk for two or three hours at a stretch. The League lecturer Abraham Paulton had these qualities in abundance: once started on a topic he would talk for hours with scarcely an intermission: 'pouring out as he went along a wealth of imagery which, if economically used, would have served as a year's stock in trade for any ordinary

¹⁵ Pickering, 'Class Without Words', p. 153.

¹⁶ Vernon, *Politics and the People*, p. 117.

¹⁷ Rosemary Chadwick, 'Spurgeon, Charles Haddon (1834–1892)', *ODNB* (Oxford, 2004).

¹⁸ Holyoake was 'at his best speaking to small audiences of cultivated men and women' McCabe, *Life and Letters*, Vol. II, p. 285. A reference written for Holyoake, in support of his application to become an Owenite missionary, states that his capabilities are well suited towards ordinary lecturing 'if not adapted to large & noisy assemblies', Bishopsgate Institute, London, Holyoake 1/8 undated letter, [c. 1840] from Mr Hollick.

rhetorician'.¹⁹ Combativeness was another useful trait. James Acland acquired notoriety for his willingness to argue his point in face of great hostility and even physical violence. He welcomed a fight whether speaking in favour of the New Poor Law Act in the heartland of the opposition or locking horns with Chartist lecturers.²⁰

Professional lecturers were also required to think on their feet. While it was relatively easy to deliver eloquent prepared speeches, performing well at unrehearsed argument was far more challenging.²¹ George Thompson's letters to his wife, for example, described how, at two consecutive meetings in February 1833, his opponent Peter Borthwick 'floundered horribly' and 'could not answer a word'. Leading Thompson to conclude that while Borthwick was effective at delivering a set lecture he: 'cannot debate the matter. His documents are so worthless - his arguments so weak - and his cause so bad that if he is wise he will never again venture to meet me in public.'²² The very public defeat of Peter Borthwick furthered the anti-slavery cause and cemented Thompson's reputation as a great orator.²³

Character and ethos

Success was not merely a case of debating skills or eloquence, but was also determined by the *ethos* of the lecturer and the perceived merits of a cause. The great Roman orator Cicero held that a man's speech reflected his character and, in turn, a speaker's perceived integrity, sincerity and personal character determined the persuasiveness of their speech.²⁴ The Greek philosopher Aristotle described the moral characteristics of a speaker as 'ethos'. According to Aristotle, persuasion is achieved by the speaker's personal character when 'the speech is given in such a way as to render the speaker worthy of credence – we more readily and sooner believe reasonable men on all matters'.²⁵ The Victorians, too, were preoccupied with consistency and sincerity and it was

¹⁹ See obituary for Abraham Paulton, *Manchester Examiner*, 12 June 1876.

²⁰ Acland had a 'Promethean capacity to uphold both sides of an argument', Pickering and Tyrrell, *People's Bread*, p. 21.

²¹ Holyoake too claimed that the debate was the 'friend of improvement', as it forced speakers to rigorously prepare their arguments. Holyoake, *Rudiments of Public Speaking*, p. 67.

²² REAS/2/1/26, letter written 16 Feb, 1833.

²³ According to Garrison, Thompson 'could do more for himself and his cause with Mr Borthwick, than without him' Garrison, *Lectures of George Thompson*, p. ix. Gifford, 'George Thompson', p. 68.

²⁴ The 'character' of an orator was a central theme in Cicero's great work *De Oratore: or, His Three Dialogues Upon the Character and Qualifications of an Orator* translated by William Guthrie (Oxford, 1808).

²⁵ Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric*, translated with an introduction and notes by H C Lawson-Tancred (London, 1991), Vol. 1, Chpt. 2.1356 a, p. 74.

expected that public men should lead exemplary private lives.²⁶ Men, such as Peter Borthwick, who were hired to defend the indefensible and were motivated only by financial gain, lacked *ethos*. They were derided as mercenaries bereft of moral character. Other speakers, whether paid or not, retained their ethos because they would only speak in support of sincerely held beliefs. George Thompson, for example, refused to ‘advocate any opinions which [he] did not sincerely cherish from an entire conviction of their soundness’.²⁷

Personal experience, like ethos, was linked to persuasiveness. Temperance advocates who were reclaimed drunkards spoke with greater authority than those who had never tasted alcohol. According to an Eaglesham Chartist, missionaries who spoke from the heart would not require ‘sophistry’ as persuasion required only ‘the bare recital of a Marsden of what he has seen and suffered as Hand Loom Weaver, or that of a Mr Douall who has witnessed the vampire effects of the accursed Factory system to make a lasting impression’.²⁸ The Anti-Poor Law Movement and the campaign for factory legislation also used first hand narratives and pitiful accounts of the abject cruelty of the workhouse regime. Such rhetoric was powerful as it focused on the sufferings of an individual or a family making their situation all too imaginable to those listening. Richard Oastler horrified his audience in speeches (and on the page) that recounted the atrocious accidents which befell factory children. Oastler accentuated the impact of his words by showing the audience the straps used by cruel overseers to discipline unruly factory children.²⁹

Props and visual aids

The role of props in political speeches, both as obvious visual aids and more subtlety, in the dress of the speaker and the symbolism of the venue, should receive the same consideration as the actual content of a political speech. The banners held aloft in processions, the appearance of the cap of liberty and the very gestures and expressions of a speaker were all symbolic forms of communication, as James Epstein, John Belchem and Paul Pickering’s work illustrates.³⁰ Props, which were alluded to in the course of a speech,

²⁶ Samuel Smiles wrote an entire book on the importance of ‘character’, Samuel Smiles, *Character* (London, 1871). Stefan Collini, ‘The Idea of Character in Victorian Political Thought’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Fifth Series, Vol. 35 (1985), 29-50.

²⁷ JRUL, REAS/8, ‘Biographical Sketch and portrait of George Thompson Esq. [reprinted from the *India Review*, Jan 1843]’ (Calcutta, 1843), p. 2.

²⁸ ‘General Convention of the Industrious Classes’, Add Mss 34245, f. 174, letter sent March 1839.

²⁹ Kydd, *Factory Movement*, p. 226. Oastler’s strap was part of his wider strategy of drawing parallels between ‘Yorkshire’ and colonial slavery.

³⁰ Epstein, *Radical Expression*; Belchem, ‘Radical Language, Meaning and Identity;’ John Belchem ‘1848: Feargus O’Connor and the collapse of the mass platform’, in James Epstein and Dorothy Thompson (ed.), *The*

might be actual physical objects such as the sacks of malt used by temperance advocates or the models of a big loaf and a small loaf used by League lecturers.³¹ They might also be less obvious references to objects in sight of the audience and speaker. Ernest Jones, during an outdoor speech in Halifax in 1853, used physical landmarks as props. Pointing as he spoke he reminded his audience of the: ‘panorama of Labour’s history. At one end is bounded by a factory, and one end by the workhouse – and opposite ... the mansion of a capitalist employer.’³²

Those addressing an audience were generally elevated, whether on a waggon, hustings platform or positioned on a rock.³³ This not only improved acoustics and audibility it also gave the speaker a stamp of authority and provided the audience with something to see. Orators addressing meetings (especially at larger outdoor rallies) often enjoyed a supporting cast of fellow orators and personalities, which added interest and variety to the proceedings.³⁴ Indoor lecture platforms too were often crowded with enthusiastic supporters in addition to the speaker. For humble itinerant lecturers it was important that they could attract a local person of good standing to act as chair and also to encourage reputable supporters to occupy a place on the platform. The experience of the League lecturer A. W. Paulton in Derby illustrates how ill-judged rhetoric might drive supporters away from visual endorsement. During a series of lectures delivered in Derby during December 1838 Paulton appeared increasingly isolated as his supporters drifted away from the platform. While on the first night of his lectures the platform was ‘tolerably well filled’ his patrons were offended by his radical message and by the following evening he was, according to the *Derby Mercury*, left alone on the platform as ‘not a single gentleman [ventured] to throw his sanction over the lecturer again’.³⁵

Dress spoke volumes to the audience – even those out of earshot. George Julian Harney’s appearance dressed in a toga, during a Chartist speech, was a subtle reference to the French Revolution which added to the radicalism of his words.³⁶ Charles Haddon Spurgeon favoured the sober suit of a businessman rather than clerical robes, accentuating

Chartist experience : studies in working-class radicalism and culture, 1830-60 (London, 1982), 269-310; Pickering, ‘Class Without Words’.

³¹ John Buckley’s biography describes a League meeting where two loaves were hoisted onto a pole ‘one about the size of a penny roll, the other exaggerated into the size of a lace pillow’. J. C. Buckmaster (ed.), *A Village Politician: The life-story of John Buckley (an Autobiography)* (London, 1897) p. 139.

³² *People’s Paper*, 2 July 1853.

³³ See frontispiece p. viii, ‘A Chartist Meeting, Basin Stones, Todmorden, 1842’. A. W. Bayes, Calderdale MBC, Museums and Arts.

³⁴ Vernon, *Politics and the People*, p. 117.

³⁵ *Derby Mercury* 12 December 1838.

³⁶ Chase, *Chartism*, p. 38.

his appeal to his lower middle-class London congregation.³⁷ Appearance could also be linked to the ethos or credibility of a speaker. After his release from York prison in August 1841, O'Connor's loyalty to the working classes was symbolically announced by his appearance in fustian, the poor cheap cloth of the working man. Unlike speeches, clothing could not be misquoted (although hostile newspaper could choose to omit accounts altogether).³⁸ While a fustian-clad O'Connor was perceived to be genuine the same could not be said of those whose appearance undermined their arguments. George Thompson mocked the extravagant dress worn by his arch rival, Mr Borthwick, whose very attire revealed insincerity. 'Everytime I see him he is drest [sic] in a frock suit - and yet in his lectures he triumphantly enquires - "What have I that the slave has not?"'³⁹ In a similar vein, Mr Pipkin, a lecturer employed by the agricultural interest, unwisely attended a meeting of poor agricultural labourers wearing a watch chain, 'strong enough to hold a bulldog' and a large diamond ring.⁴⁰

Several anti-slavery lecturers illustrated their lectures with illustrations and panoramic projections depicting the conditions of slavery.⁴¹ Benjamin Godwin of Bradford, in the spring of 1830, held four public anti-slavery lectures which were lavishly illustrated by specially commissioned transparencies made by a local artist:

Very beautiful and masterly transparencies with appropriate mottoes, illustrated the whole. The last was about 19 feet high. In the centre and fore-ground religion was represented as descending surrounded with a radiance from which most of the light issued; under his influence Britannia was guiding Justice in presenting the charter of freedom to an enslaved Negro. On the right was a group of Negroes under the shade of an Indian tree at a cheerful repast – at a distance they were following their labour, with oxen &c instead of the present system of almost exclusive manual labour with no driver being them &c &c On the other hand was a negro family going to a church, seen at a distance and decently clad – white and black mingling as they advance.⁴²

³⁷ Chadwick, 'Spurgeon', *ODNB*.

³⁸ Pickering, 'Class Without Words', discusses at length the role of fustian as an alternative class language. He notes that hostile papers tended not to report controversial clothing and symbols, p. 158.

³⁹ REAS/2/1/26, letter 16 Feb 1833.

⁴⁰ Buckley wisely pointed out that wearing 'dress boots, lavender kids and diamonds', is not the best way to endear oneself to an audience of working men. Buckmaster, *Village Politician*, pp., 145-6.

⁴¹ Lorimer, *Colour, Class and the Victorians*, p. 73.

⁴² Godwin, *Reminiscences*, Vol. II, f. 502. See *Leeds Mercury*, 27 March 1830. The lectures were later published in tract form, *The substance of a course of lectures on British Colonial Slavery delivered at Bradford, York, and Scarborough by the Rev Benjamin Godwin* (London, 1830)

Godwin's display was similar to that of a diorama, which were very popular with nineteenth century audiences.⁴³ Anti-slavery lecturers also exhibited chains and whips to dramatize the more sensational aspects of slavery.⁴⁴ Such instruments of torture were more effective than just words: a fact recognised by W. H. Chadwick who, some decades later, used a model of the cat-o'-nine-tails to illustrate his lectures urging the abolition of flogging in the army.⁴⁵

Great attention was also paid to the decoration of a venue. Accounts of Chartist tea parties, Owenite Social festivals and radical dinners all reveal a preoccupation with creating the right atmosphere. Meeting rooms were decked out with evergreen branches, draperies and framed photographs of key radical and historical figures, which suggested both a civilised and cultured style and stressed the historical antecedents of radicalism. The ACLL lavishly decorated the hall used for a grand banquet held in Manchester in January 1840 with pink and white drapery. Such pleasing artifice was an eloquent stage prop which equated free trade with a utopian future where lightness, elegance and plenty would be ubiquitous.⁴⁶ Women too, as illustrated by press reports, became little more than props: decorative ornaments whose presence exerted a civilising influence and underlined the morality of the cause. Both middle-class movements like the League and anti-slavery cause and lower class radical movements like the Chartists and Owenites, were keen to emphasise the presence of women on social occasions. *The Bradford Observer's* report of the Operative Anti-Corn Law Association dinner held in Manchester in January 1840 was typical: 'The galleries contained three tiers of guests ... the front seats were generally occupied by respectable-looking females, most of them without bonnets.'⁴⁷

Dialect and plain speaking

Both orators and audiences were keen to project themselves as respectable. The most obvious marker of class was accent. Speaking guides and elocution manuals frowned

⁴³ Brooks McNamara, Scenography of Popular Entertainment, *Drama Review: TDR*, Vol. 18, No. 1, Popular Entertainments (Mar., 1974), p. 22.

⁴⁴ Lorimer, *Colour Class and the Victorians*, p. 73; *Report of the Agency Committee of the Anti-Slavery Society, established in June 1831 for the purpose of disseminating information by lectures on colonial slavery* (London, 1832), p. 11.

⁴⁵ Thomas Palmer Newbould, *Pages from a Life of Strife: being some recollections of William Henry Chadwick, the last of the Manchester Chartists* (London, 1911), pp. 28-9.

⁴⁶ *ACLC*, 16 January 1840.

⁴⁷ *BO*, 16 January 1840. For a persuasive account of how women were written into civic narratives as champions of public virtue see Simon Morgan, 'A sort of land debatable'.

upon the use of regional accents and dialect.⁴⁸ According to the eighteenth century master of elocution James Burgh, the orator should aim to pronounce words like an educated person from the metropolis.⁴⁹ For nationally prominent professional lecturers like Henry Vincent, George Thompson and James Acland, adopting a polite, standardised style of speaking was necessary to make themselves understood the length and breadth of the country. Those who could speak ‘properly’ could also hope to address the ladies and politer audiences at meetings convened during working hours.⁵⁰

For speakers operating on smaller circuits, retention of their native speech, especially when addressing the labouring classes could be advantageous. The dialect of the Halifax Chartist, John Snowden, gave him ‘a rugged eloquence’ which worked as it ‘spoke through sympathy of touch with horny hand at the workshop and loom’ and was cemented by mutual experience of poverty.⁵¹ Honest and unpretentious speech peppered with dialect words and delivered in a regional accent could increase a speakers’ credibility and ethos. For this reason the Halifax Anti-Corn Law Association hired an intelligent operative called Heyworth Hargreaves to speak in the townships surrounding Halifax for five weeks in the spring of 1840.⁵² Hargreaves, who was originally from Bacup, spoke in a Lancastrian accent and turned his lack of education to his advantage by remarking that ‘he was, strictly speaking, an illiterate man, having never received any education but that afforded by a Sunday School, and that consequently, they could expect nothing from him deserving of the appellation of eloquence or oratory’.⁵³

While use of dialect was contrary to the rules of oratory, its use on the platform was not confined to the humble and uneducated. Richard Oastler was described as speaking with a northern accent that accentuated rather than marred his delivery.⁵⁴ A generation or so later the wealthy radical MP, Joseph Cowen, persisted in speaking in a Northumbrian burr – so much so that during his maiden speech, several MPs were rumoured to have

⁴⁸ The wrong accent, according to the manual *Talking and Debating* (1856) could impede social advance Mugglestone, *Speaking Proper*, p. 1.

⁴⁹ Donald E Hargis – ‘James Burgh and the Art of Speaking’, *Speech Monographs*, Vol. XXIV, 1957, p. 279.

⁵⁰ Sidney Smith, Abraham Paulton, George Thompson and Henry Vincent also addressed polite audiences.

⁵¹ Obituary published in the *National Reformer*, 7 September 1884, reproduced in Royle, *Chartism*, p. 127.

⁵² WYAS: Calderdale, minute book of the Halifax Anti-Corn Law Association, 20 Jan and 23 Feb 1840, HAS/B/11/1; *The First Annual Report of the Halifax Anti-Corn Law Association*, 1840, p. 4.

⁵³ *NS*, 9 May 1840. A later report on the activities of Hargreaves published in the *Star* noted that ‘the more aristocratic lecturers like Messrs Smith, Paulton etc’ had failed hence the new League tactic of sending a working man, *NS*, 4 July 1840.

⁵⁴ Although the authority of this particular description is weakened by the fact that the author incorrectly described him as speaking with a Lancashire and not Yorkshire twang, Trollope, *What I Remember*, p. 132.

thought he was speaking in Latin.⁵⁵ Some of those who spoke on a national lecture circuit also chose to retain their dialect. The sermons of the radical Methodist preacher, Joseph Barker, were renowned for their homely expressions. The Quaker, Mary Howitt recorded in her autobiography how, at the Unitarian chapel in Stoke Newington, Joseph Barker addressed a packed congregation in a strong Yorkshire accent and described God as a 'loomp o' luv'.⁵⁶ In a country which was still characterised by distinctive regions and localities, possession of a marked regional accent was a novelty which could both attract an audience, and win support when on home territory. The socialist missionary, Lloyd Jones, after witnessing a public debate between the League lecturer, James Acland, and Salford Chartist, R. J. Richardson, commented on Richardson's 'rude provincialism of speech and awkwardness of manners'. Yet for all his elocutionary flaws it was Richardson, on his home turf, who won the debate.⁵⁷

Alongside dialect, popular speakers increasingly began to favour simple language over abstract or complex rhetoric. The shift towards simplicity and vivid metaphor was pioneered on the political platform by William Cobbett whose Rotunda lectures between August and October 1830 were 'remarkable for their clarity and for their use of homely illustration'.⁵⁸ Such speaking styles soon became established on the political lecture circuit. The Chartist and later temperance lecturer, Robert Lowery, noted in his autobiography that unless there was a middle-class element in the audience, he would not support his argument 'with history or general literature for fear [he] would not be understood'.⁵⁹ When lecturing before a popular audience the best lecturers illustrated their arguments with metaphors relating to everyday life and common experience. Use of the vernacular opened up new rhetorical possibilities allowing orators to convey sensational images to their listeners. The anti-slavery speaker the Rev. James Everitt, for example, during an attack on the Apprenticeship system, compared the negro apprentice to a half starved horse, claiming that the difference between a slave and the apprentice was 'the former might – in homely language, be compared to a fat, well fed dray-horse, in full

⁵⁵ Paul Usherwood, Jeremy Beach, Catherine Morris, *Public sculpture of North-East England*, (Liverpool, 2000), p. 153. For Cowen's use of dialect see, Owen Ashton 'Orators and Oratory in the Chartist Movement, 1840-1848', in Ashton, Fyson and Roberts, *The Chartist Legacy*, p. 68.

⁵⁶ Margaret Howitt (ed.) *Mary Howitt: An Autobiography* (London, 1889), p. 38.

⁵⁷ Dorothy Thompson, 'Chartism as a Historical Subject', *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, Vol. XX, 1970, p. 11, as quoted by Paul A Pickering, 'Class Without Words', p. 153.

⁵⁸ Spater, *William Cobbett*, Vol.2, p. 494. William Cobbett, *Eleven lectures on the French and Belgian revolutions and English boroughmongering delivered in the Theatre of the Rotunda* (London, 1830).

⁵⁹ Harrison and Hollis, *Robert Lowery*, p. 153.

labour, and the latter to a half-starved hack in a London cab, worked to the utmost of its strength (hear)⁶⁰

Charismatic preachers like Charles Haddon Spurgeon and George Dawson also used conversational speaking styles to great effect in the pulpit. Indeed rather than lose his congregation in the finer points of theology Spurgeon conjured up images that were accessible to all. For example, his sermon on the 1857 election employed the metaphor of an express train:

It is no use my trying to stop this great train in its progress. People are just now going on at an express rate on these matters; I think I will be wise, and instead of endeavouring to turn them off the line, I will turn the points, so that they may still continue their pursuits with the same swiftness as ever, but in a new direction.⁶¹

Simple vivid metaphors might also be used to render physical force sentiment less seditious. Jonathan Bairstow during a speech in Derby market place in the summer of 1841 used the imagery of an angry lion to describe how public opinion could not be thwarted indefinitely:

the lion of popular opinion already gnashes its teeth and lashes its tail, and unless concessions be made in time, its rage cannot much longer be enchained and should it be driven to take vengeance on your oppressors the dreadful consequences are awful to contemplate.⁶²

Such rhetoric was thrilling and perhaps, as it could hardly be construed as a literal incitement to arms, offered Bairstow some immunity from prosecution.

Humour and comedy

The best way to win over an audience was to make them laugh. For this reason humour was a common rhetorical device used at the beginning of a speech. The most popular speakers immediately sought rapport by addressing the audience in a familiar manner as if they were old friends. George Thompson, for example, on arriving at a lecture feeling under the weather, turned this to his advantage and obtained the audiences

⁶⁰ *The Substance of a Speech delivered at the Anti-Slavery Meeting held in the Wesleyan Chapel, Brunswick Place, Newcastle upon Tyne on Thursday evening, April 1838 by Rev. James Everett* (Newcastle, 1838), p. 5.

⁶¹ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, 'A Particular Election', delivered on Sabbath Morning, March 22, 1857, at the Music Hall, Royal Surrey Gardens, *The New Park Street Pulpit: containing sermons preached and revised by C H Spurgeon, minister of the chapel during the years 1855-1860*, Vol.3 (London, 1858), pp. 129-136. To take another example Spurgeon commenced a sermon with the words "I do not ask how are your poor feet," "but how are your poor souls?" "Men of the Day, No. 16, Rev. Charles Spurgeon". *Vanity Fair*, 10 December 1870.

⁶² TNA, HO 45/45 f. 4. For a slightly different version see Derbyshire Local Studies Library, MS BA/909/16186 item 8.

sympathy by amusing them with witty remarks on how anti-slavery meetings can make people feel better:

I have heard of many extraordinary cures wrought upon persons by coming to such meetings – the squeezing does them good (laughter), the warmth and the perspiration do them good, and above all the effect of the speeches upon their minds and the action of their minds upon their bodies is highly beneficial.⁶³

Comedy might also turn on exaggerated gesture and movement. Temperance speakers often indulged in slap stick comedy routines like that of the advocate Richard Horne whose mere expression ‘excited roars of laughter before he opened his mouth, while the shrug of the shoulders, the lifting of the leg, and the ever memorable pat’ upon his bald head, were equally entertaining.⁶⁴ Such behaviour might alienate the more respectable elements of the temperance movement yet it proved highly effective with popular audiences. The eccentric Bradford-based working-class temperance lecturer, Thomas Worsnop, both delighted and embarrassed audiences with his farcical behaviour. Thomas Whittaker’s autobiography recalled how Worsnop utterly demolished one of his temperance lectures by appearing with an oversized pencil and paper:

He took a very prominent seat on the large and conspicuous platform in the Drifffield Corn Exchange. His presence and grimaces the moment he showed himself set the meeting in a titter. Anything like sobriety in the meeting seemed an impossibility ... the moment [Whittaker] rose, out came this pencil, the bundle of paper, and a jack knife, and he began to whittle his pencil very much as a joiner would, and the people were fit to explode.⁶⁵

The best orators were able to respond humorously to events as they happened: whether in the shape of a witty riposte meted out to a hostile heckler, or a comment on something within sight of the audience. Take, for example, Feargus O’Connor who, during his trial for seditious libel in spring 1840, had the whole courtroom convulsed with laughter over his jibe that the Attorney General was hanging his head in shame at the conduct of the Whig Government when in actual fact the unfortunate judge had only momentarily laid his head upon his hands!⁶⁶ Comedy could be evoked by the pace and manner of delivery. During a speech against the repeal of the Corn Laws, in October 1840,

⁶³ *Speech of George Thompson, at the Hood Street Chapel*, p. 3.

⁶⁴ *British Temperance Advocate*, August 1881, p. 539, reproduced in Harrison, *Dictionary*, p. 67.

⁶⁵ Thomas Whittaker, *Brighter England and the way to it* (London, 1904), pp. 37-38.

⁶⁶ Pickering, *Feargus O’Connor*, pp. 85-86.

Jonathan Bairstow divided society into productive and unproductive members. Bairstow then listed in great detail the people found in the second category:

all the royal family, landed aristocracy and gentry, spiritual peers and established clergy; the military, legal and distributive portions of the community; including all shopkeepers, merchants, manufacturers, millowners, commissioners, judges, barristers, counsellors, attorneys, hangmen, gaolers, turnkeys, police, spies, informers, smugglers, swindlers, pedlars, duffers, hawkers, contraband traffickers, professional actors, singers, pawnbrokers, publicans, vagrants, gipsies, coiners of base money, common prostitutes, paupers, beggars; inmates of asylums, madhouses, dispensaries and infirmaries; pickpockets, gamblers, confirmed drunkards, felons, burglars, and others too numerous to mention (laughter).⁶⁷

The humour of this speech lies in the sheer range of categories and also in equating the Queen, gentry and clergy with swindlers, beggars, prostitutes and turnkeys. Bairstow's list also lent itself to a natural crescendo. In the hands of a skilled orator like Bairstow one can easily imagine the audience's delight.

Many political and religious orators entranced their listeners by the use of crescendo. A description might commence at a standard pace and, as the intensity of the argument builds, so too does the pace of delivery. Arguably, rapid delivery was characteristic of the emerging popular speaking style. Kitson Clark has suggested that during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the speed at which oratory was delivered increased. Contemporaries too commented on the rapid speech of popular orators. George Head was amazed at how fast the Preston teetotaller Harry Anderton spoke:

his utterance was distinct, yet he might be said to talk in demisemi-quavers, for he never for an instant stopped, but continued incessantly to spit forth words and syllables ... at each inspiration inhaling breath to the utmost capacity of his lungs, he expended all, even to the last thimbleful; and then, but not before his voice had almost sunk to a whisper, did he refresh himself by a strong gulp, and, like Richard Lalor Sheil, talk as fast again as ever.⁶⁸

The preacher and popular lecturer, George Dawson, also had a reputation for fast delivery, which prevented all but the most gifted shorthand reporters from taking down his words.⁶⁹ Perhaps the most interesting information upon speed of delivery was recorded in the autobiography of Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Spurgeon's autobiography described how

⁶⁷ *NS*, 31 October 1840.

⁶⁸ George Head, *Home Tour*. See pp. 416 - 420 for full account of the meeting

⁶⁹ See Wilson, *The Life of George Dawson*, p. 68. A disgruntled reporter from the *Bradford Observer* claimed that taking down a lecture by Dawson was a 'mathematical impossibility' and that his lectures had 'no outline, nor scheme, nor skeleton', *BO*, 28 March 1850.

the shorthand writer (and biographer of Isaac Pitman) Mr T. A. Reed had calculated that the average public speaker delivered 120 words per minute. However, according to Reed's calculations Spurgeon changed the pace of delivery according to the stage and content of his discourse. Hence during the delivery of one sermon, 'during the first ten minutes, he spoke at the rate of 123 words a minute; the second ten minutes, 132, the third ten minutes 128, the fourth ten minutes, 155; and the remaining nine minutes, 162'. Not only does this give Spurgeon an average rate of 140 words per minute, clearly much faster than the average speaker, it also shows how his sermons used the rhetorical technique of crescendo and retained the congregation's attention by a varying the pace of delivery.⁷⁰

Repetition and shorter sentences were other characteristics of the nineteenth century oratory particularly at mass outdoor rallies.⁷¹ Repetition, often in the form of a series of rhetorical questions, enabled the audience to anticipate what was coming next thereby drawing them into the performance.⁷² Crucially, besides emphasis and dramatic effect, repetition gave extempore speakers time to mentally prepare their next lines. Not only was it a stylistic device to hammer home the point, when used effectively, repetition could rouse an audience into a fervour. The speeches of the Rev. J. R. Stephens provide a good example of mass repetition (Extract 1, p. 208).

Lecturers who read from a script ran the risk of boring their audience. Speakers' manuals and preaching guides cautioned against reading as it denied the speaker essential eye contact with their audience and often resulted in a lacklustre speech. The Rev. C. M. Davies, author of *Unorthodox London*, who met the charismatic preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon after watching him preach, was amazed that his notes comprised only a 'logically divided skeleton of a discourse' written on the back of an envelope.⁷³ Spurgeon prided himself on his spontaneous delivery. He frowned upon mere reading, exclaiming that 'if I cannot speak extemporaneously, I will hold my tongue: to read I am ashamed'.⁷⁴ George Dawson also shunned speaking from notes.⁷⁵ Yet not everyone was blessed with outstanding memory, or had the necessary confidence to speak without a script. For causes with high demand for speakers, reading could be an acceptable substitute for the extempore

⁷⁰ C.H. Spurgeon *Autobiography*, Vol. IV, p. 76.

⁷¹ Kitson Clark, 'The romantic element', pp. 221-2.

⁷² Vernon, *Politics and the People*, p. 122.

⁷³ Charles Maurice Davies, *Unorthodox London; or, Phases of Religious Life in the Metropolis* (London, 1874), p. 42.

⁷⁴ Charles W Spurgeon, *Sermons in Candles being two lectures* (London, 1890), p. 8. See also Ellison, *Victorian Pulpit*, p. 39 for a discussion of extempore preaching.

⁷⁵ According to Henry Sutton, head of the *Guardian* reporters, Dawson lectured extempore 'out of a richly stored mind'. See Wright Wilson, *The Life of George Dawson* (Birmingham, 1905), p. 159.

lecture. Several of Sidney Smith's lectures were published for those capable of 'reading with correctness' and 'assembling an audience'.⁷⁶

Even some professional lecturers read their lectures, especially at the beginning of their speaking career. According to Samuel Smiles, A. W. Paulton, at an early League meeting in Leeds, read his lecture 'with not much force' and produced little effect.⁷⁷ Mr Baldwin, one of the lecturers appointed by the anti-slavery agency in 1831, was also averse to extempore speeches and 'did not often indulge in them' preferring to 'read his lectures, intermixing them with such explanatory remarks as might be suggested by the inquiries of his auditors'.⁷⁸ Undoubtedly such reluctance to speak without a script was related to the fear of being lost for words in front of an audience. Such fears were commonplace. Benjamin Godwin recalled how during his first appearance on an anti-slavery platform he was beset by nerves, although once he commenced speaking he described how 'a kind of inspiration moved and guided me'.⁷⁹

Poetic and literary influences

It was not uncommon for self-taught workingmen to quote large chunks of Shakespeare or to recite Byron's poetry at length.⁸⁰ Poetry was tremendously popular. Not only was poetry relatively cheap to publish (or indeed free in newspaper poetry columns), the era boasted an abundance of inspiring role models. Indeed during the first half of the nineteenth century 'an extraordinary number of people seem to have been able to write correct, easy and reasonably effective verse'.⁸¹ The quality and quantity of Chartist poetry is well known and it can be no coincidence that several Chartist orators were also poets.⁸² Poetic imagery and lines of poetry featured prominently in political rhetoric: lecturers from all movements interlaced their speeches with poetry in the expectation that the lines would

⁷⁶ *ACLC*, 11 June 1839.

⁷⁷ McCord, *Anti-Corn Law League*, p. 37.

⁷⁸ Stephen, *Anti-Slavery Recollection*, p. 139.

⁷⁹ Godwin, *Reminiscences*, Vol. II, f. 496.

⁸⁰ Antony Taylor, 'Shakespeare and radicalism: the uses and abuses of Shakespeare in nineteenth-century popular politics'. *Historical Journal*, 45:2 (2002), 357-79. For a discussion of Byron and Shelley's popularity with radical working men see Richard D. Altick, *Victorian People and Ideas*, (London, 1973), pp. 3-5. Philip Arthur William Collins, *Thomas Cooper, the Chartist: Byron and the 'poets of the poor'*, published lecture, University of Nottingham (Nottingham, 1970); Rose, *Intellectual life of the British Working classes*, pp. 32;35-6.

⁸¹ Kitson Clark, 'The romantic element', p. 225. Ebenezer Elliott held that that poetry permeated the age, and that 'everyman is poetical, when feeling strongly, he reflects deeply'. Sheffield City Archives, Ref. MD 2192, lecture published in Tait's *Edinburgh Magazine*, 1837, p. 762.

⁸² Michael Sanders, "'A Jackass Load of Poetry': *The Northern Star's* Poetry Column 1838-1852, *Victorian Periodicals Review*, Vol. 39, issue 1 (Spring, 2006), 46-66; Michael Sanders, *The Poetry of Chartism, aesthetics, politics and history* (Cambridge, 2009).

resonate with the audience.⁸³ Harney's funeral oration for Samuel Holberry (Extract 2, p. 208) borrowed from several poems including lines from Byron's poem, *Don Juan*: 'the very stones, To rise against earth tyrants'. Lines from Thomas Moore's poems, *Lalla Rookh: an Oriental Romance* and *Forget Not the Field*, were also recited. Thomas Moore, although not himself a radical, was the literary executor of Byron, a fact which would not have been wasted on contemporaries.⁸⁴ It is interesting that Harney, like many lecturers of the period, felt at liberty to revise and re-jig Moore's verse to suit his immediate purpose. The original lines of *Lalla Rook* read:

No she has sons that never! never!
Will stoop to be the Moslem's slaves
While heaven has light or earth has graves

In Harney's rendition 'Moslem' is replaced with 'despots' and the second line becomes the third. The very plasticity of verse is significant: poetry could be moulded to suit a variety of causes.

Poetry also permeated popular political oratory in terms of language and style. Rhyme, alliteration, assonance, metaphor and simile were commonly found in political speeches. It is plausible that political lecturers selected words and strings of words for both their semiotic and their spoken qualities. For example, the following lines from Harney's funeral oration for Samuel Holberry have a poetic, rhythmic quality: 'neither persecution, nor scorn, nor calumny – neither bolts, nor bars, nor chains, nor racks, nor gibbets'.⁸⁵ There is evidence to suggest that the rhythmic patterns of platform oratory and the mode of delivery favoured by the stump orator was a recognisable style. Intriguingly a letter from Swinburne to Dante Gabriel Rossetti asked him to make sure that his poems, *Songs before Sunrise*, (1871), were free from 'any touch of the metrical stump-oratory ... I will have nothing of the platform in it if possible'.⁸⁶ This comment suggests that popular political oratory had a distinctive poetical rhythm and one which was not desirable.

Political oratory was also influenced by contemporary literary trends. Henry Stanton likened George Thompson's oratory to 'a well-acted tragedy or well-written novel', which is interesting as Thompson was acquainted with friends of Charles Dickens

⁸³ Matthew Bevis points to an enduring link between poetry and oratory Matthew Bevis, *The Art of Eloquence - Byron, Dickens, Tennyson, Joyce* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 3-4.

⁸⁴ *NS*, 2 July 1842.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* See extract 2, p. 208.

⁸⁶ Cited by Matthew Bevis, 'Volumes of Noise', *Victorian Literature and Culture* (2003), p. 586.

and interested in his plots and stories.⁸⁷ Story telling was a component of Thompson's more playful lectures in which he masterfully used evocative words to convey both visual imagery and the sense of smell, touch and taste. In a speech made by Thompson at an Anti-Corn Law lecture in Carlisle in 1842, he took his audience on a visit to the home of a typical protectionist to reveal the extent of his hypocrisy. As Extract 3, pp. 208-9 illustrates, his speech engaged the audience as they can picture in their mind's eye the grand house, the foreign footman and the bright hall lamp. The sumptuous feast, lovingly described by Thompson, is in sharp contrast to the diet available to the working man whose very bread is taxed. The throwaway remark that turtles are exempt from the sliding scale was particularly pertinent. The great rapport Thompson built with his audience during the delivery of this speech was noted by the reporter: 'during the whole of this sketch ... the audience were convulsed with laughter, and at the end were loud in their applause'.⁸⁸

The dynamics between the audience and the speaker were crucial to a lecturer's success. George Jacob Holyoake distinguished between a mere speaker who simply gave information and the orator whose sole objective 'is to incite action' and impel and direct the passions.⁸⁹ Fine words were useless if they did not chime with those listening. Robert Lowery noted that the best and most eloquent speaking occurs where 'the speaker and the audience are one in feeling and desire. The speaker only gives vent to the hearers' emotions. His words find a response in their wishes'.⁹⁰ The best speakers were able to work their audiences much as a conductor worked the orchestra.⁹¹ Shared jokes, good natured riposte to hecklers and singing all fostered a sense of shared sympathy between the audience and the speaker.⁹²

Some political orators were held to have an almost supernatural power over their listeners. The former Chartist orator, W. H. Chadwick, had a hypnotic effect upon an audience who listened to him speak on Irish Home Rule. According to his biographer, at the conclusion of Chadwick's address the audience rose *en masse* and 'instead of a great outburst of cheering there was an almost painful silence. Grown men began to sob ... slowly the people filed out, as yet hardly free from the mesmeric (if it were mesmeric)

⁸⁷ Stanton, *Sketches of Reforms*, p. 245. Thompson's correspondence describes dining with Frank Stone, and being let in on 'the secret history of some of Dickens's best stories in his various works'. REAS/2/2/16, [?3] Aug 1849.

⁸⁸ George Thompson, *Lecture on the Corn Laws, 7 Jan 1842, Carlisle*, pp. 15-16

⁸⁹ Holyoake, *Public Speaking*, p. 241.

⁹⁰ Harrison and Hollis, *Robert Lowery*, p. 96.

⁹¹ Joyce, *Democratic Subject*, p. 119.

⁹² Vernon, *Politics and the People*, p. 120.

spell'.⁹³ The Chadwick example was extreme: while audiences were visibly moved by charismatic orators they rarely lost their capacity to speak. Most audiences were not passive and actively participated in speeches and, through their noisy responses, guided the lecturer in the direction in which they wished to be 'led'. Sometimes the crowd's enthusiasm led speakers into greater excesses, as those employing the most violent rhetoric obtained the most applause.⁹⁴ Similarly, at the hustings politicians listened to their audiences (and increasingly professional elections agents) to ensure that their speeches were hitting the right note.⁹⁵

The rise of 'democratic oratory'

The Greeks described rhetoric which worked upon the emotions as 'pathos' and that which appealed to reason as 'logos'.⁹⁶ The finest orators were those who could combine both tactics, 'fusing them by the fervour of his genius'.⁹⁷ Chartist, League, temperance and anti-slavery lecturers throughout the period used facts and figures to prove their political points. Yet the use of pathos often occurred in the same speech. The sufferings of the poor, the torment of the slave (whether in a Yorkshire factory or overseas) and the impact of alcoholism provided ample raw material for pathetic anecdotes. While pathos and emotion continued to be found on the political platform, it is evident that rhetoric based on feeling was being superseded by arguments which relied on factual evidence and reasoning. The move away from sentiment to reason was part of a broader shift from romanticism to utilitarianism.

Classical oratory dealt with studied feeling, imagination and passion and was primarily a literary art rather than a tool for analysing the problems of an industrialising society. 'Oratory', in common parlance, referred to the elaborate speaking styles of statesmen, philosophers and the upper classes. It was not something commoners did and humble-born lecturers routinely apologised for their lack of training in the rhetorical arts.⁹⁸ Occasionally, for high-profile events, political lecturers fashioned their speeches according to dictates of the classical rhetoricians. For example, George Julian Harney's funeral

⁹³ Newbould, *Pages from a Life of Strife*, p. 32. Edmund and Ruth Frow, 'William Henry Chadwick', Saville and Bellamy, *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, Vol. 7, 53-55.

⁹⁴ Samuel Bamford's attack on professional agitators makes this point, Samuel Bamford, *Passages in the Life of a Radical and Early Days*, edited by Henry Dunckley (2 Vols., London, 1893), Vol. 2, p. 36.

⁹⁵ Vernon, *Politics and the People*, pp. 121-2.

⁹⁶ For a discussion of temperance pathos and logos see, Leah Rae Berk, 'Temperance and Prohibition Era Propaganda: A Study in Rhetoric', Fall 2004, Brown University Library Digital Collection accessed 8 August 2009 <http://dl.lib.brown.edu/temperance/essay.html>.

⁹⁷ Edward Manson, 'The Art of Rhetoric', *Westminster Review*, Vol. 148 (1897), p. 635.

⁹⁸ See comments made by Heyworth Hargreaves p. 176 above.

oration for the deceased Chartist prisoner, Samuel Holberry, (Extract 2, p. 208) employed oratorical rules and made reference to Roman and Greek history.⁹⁹ At times his words were as highly worked and theatrical as a Shakespearian tragedy:

O! possessed I the power to give utterance to the thoughts swelling within my breast:
could I launch the thunders of eloquence against the heads of the destroyers of Holberry, I
would rouse ye to men of more than common mould.¹⁰⁰

Robert Gammage, while praising Harney's funeral oration as 'eloquent', said this was in spite of its 'imperfect delivery'. A remark which (unless Gammage was being derogatory about Harney's lecturing prowess) implies that its dense literary style read on the page better than it sounded.¹⁰¹ While the style of Harney's speech was partly accounted for by the solemnity of the occasion, it provides an example old-fashioned speech-making that was falling out of favour. Politics was all about persuasion. While contrived literary masterpieces might inspire awe, if impenetrable they were unlikely to convince. The most popular speakers in the Chartist era were those who moved away from classical ways of speaking and adopted a simpler, conversational tone.

By the later 1850s even elocutionists recognised that classical styles of public speaking were ill-suited to the times. James Hunt's *Manual of the Philosophy of Voice and Speech* distanced itself from old-fashioned rhetorical theory which specified how volume and pitch should be matched to specific rhetorical stages. Hunt ridiculed the pretension and artifice of manuals which insisted that in declamation:

The voice should be kept between the *do* and *sol* of the scale; that *do* should be used for explanation; *re* in elevating the vowels; *mi* for the gentler passions; *fa* for emphatic passages; and *sol* for the most pathetic parts.¹⁰²

Such artifice might have worked well in a polite drawing room but it was totally unsuited to the political platform and it is easy to see how classically trained orators could alienate an audience of working men. Indeed, not mimicking the classical orator was held up as a matter of praise. The *Northern Star* congratulated the Chartist missionary James Leach for

⁹⁹ For example, 'O! for gold uncounted, for power unlimited, for the wealth of Croesus, or the sceptre of Caesars', employs the classical rhetorical technique of *metonymy*, in which an object is not called by its own name, but by the name of something intimately associated with it, e.g. Croesus is linked with gold and power connected to Julius Caesar.

¹⁰⁰ *NS*, 2 July 1842.

¹⁰¹ Gammage, *History*, p. 215.

¹⁰² Hunt, *Manual*, p. 389, [my italics].

delivering his lecture in a style ‘devoid of those classical and unmeaning terms which college educated orators bluster about’.¹⁰³

Perhaps then the activities of political pressure groups and the rising numbers of paid lecturers in the 1830s and 1840s led to a shift in speaking style whereby the artifice of classical oratory gave way to a lecturing style centred on factual argument. George Thompson, one of the first paid political lecturers to acquire a national reputation, was renowned for his use of ‘evidence’. His main speaking strategy was to present a cogent argument ‘buttressed by a wide array of evidence’, often to the extent that a second party was required to hold his documents.¹⁰⁴ A contemporary described George Thompson’s use of facts as a ‘peculiarity’, which implies a new style of speaking:

His speeches might be set down merely as rare specimens of elocution, or declamation, but for one peculiarity. They deal largely with the facts ... He reads up on every topic he discusses. His stores of facts are relieved of all dryness or repulsion in the presentation by the panoramic style in which he marshals them before the eye, all clad in the garb furnished forth by a rich elocution and lively fancy. Here lies his strength: for a single apposite fact outweighs, with a mass of men, a whole volume of abstract reasoning or florid declamation.¹⁰⁵

The job of the paid political lecturers was to convince, and one of the best strategies for demonstrating political truths was the presentation of incontrovertible facts. Indeed the leading reform movements of the period strongly encouraged their hired speakers to base their arguments upon factual information and statistical evidence. The anti-slavery agency, for example, claimed, ‘the marshalling of facts, is everything; illustrations of arguments by facts, tells more with the multitude than the most logical syllogism or the happiest simile’.¹⁰⁶ The preface of Thomas Ballantyne’s *Corn Law Repealer’s Hand-book* similarly valued statistics over empty rhetoric. Ballantyne claimed that for a man to understand the Corn Law question it was necessary ‘to throw aside all figures of rhetoric, and confine himself simply to figures of arithmetic’.¹⁰⁷ Even temperance speakers, in addition to trading upon pathetic anecdotes and titillating personal testimonies, used blackboards to prove their point by mathematical calculation. Joseph Livesey’s *Malt Liquor Lecture* provides a classic example of a temperance lecture which was somewhere between a maths

¹⁰³ *NS*, 28 Nov 1840.

¹⁰⁴ Gifford, ‘George Thompson’, p. 70.

¹⁰⁵ Stanton, *Sketches of Reforms*, p. 245.

¹⁰⁶ Stephens, *Anti-slavery Recollections*, p. 253.

¹⁰⁷ Ballantyne, *Corn Law Repealer’s Hand-book*, p. iv.

lesson and a popular scientific demonstration.¹⁰⁸ Such professionalism might deter old school orators who did not have facts and figures to hand. Mr Townsend, one of the speakers at a meeting of the Durham Protection Society, (Extract 4, p. 209) confessed that he nearly declined the invitation to address the audience as he did not know ‘the prices of wheat per bushel or topics of this nature’.¹⁰⁹

Chartist missionaries, temperance advocates and League lecturers all took the accumulation of relevant facts very seriously.¹¹⁰ The Victorians were fascinated with the powers of the mind, typified by the study of mnemonics which promised to endow speakers with legendary powers of recall.¹¹¹ Whether due to hard graft or specially taught memory techniques the powers of recall displayed by professional political orators were phenomenal. John Buckley, a self-taught working man who achieved much acclaim for his lectures against the Corn Law, recalled that he ‘could repeat from memory the imports and exports since the passing of the first Corn Law in 1820, the average price of corn each year, the wages of the agricultural labourer, and the rent roll and acreage of the principal landowners’.¹¹² The temperance agent William Gregson attributed his success to ‘the knowledge that he had proofs at his back for everything he said in public or in private, and that he could quote chapter and verse without a moment’s hesitation’.¹¹³ Such dedication was not unusual. Indeed when reading the correspondence of George Thompson, or surveying the contents of the ACLL letter book, it is striking just how much time is spent in preparation.¹¹⁴ Lecturers in the field often requested that specific publications or journal articles were sent to them and, when not travelling to the next engagement, they spent their time gathering information and preparing their arguments.

Parliamentary blue books, in particular, were regularly mined by reforming bodies to prove the veracity of their claims. This plundered information was republished in their own pamphlets with a heavy emphasis that official ‘investigations had produced these

¹⁰⁸ For a detailed discussion of the Malt Liquor Lecture see Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England 1815-1872* (1971, reprinted 1994, Keele), pp. 115-119.

¹⁰⁹ His lack of preparation is evident in his rambling and at times incoherent speech.

¹¹⁰ For information on the statistical movement in the 1830s and 1840s see, M. J. Cullen, *The Statistical Movement in Early Victorian Britain: The foundations of Empirical Social Research* (Sussex, 1975).

¹¹¹ James Acland, as a young man gave public lectures in Bristol on mnemonics as a technique for learning foreign languages, Acland, *Memoirs*, p. 32.

¹¹² Buckmaster, *A Village Politician*, pp. 135-6.

¹¹³ Shaw, *Life of William Gregson*, p. 101.

¹¹⁴ For example in 1860 Thompson calculated that to write thirty Indian lectures it would take nine months writing on average thirteen pages a day and working for six hours a day, diary 1860, REAS/7/4.

particular testimonies, facts and figures'.¹¹⁵ Hence Thomas Ballantyne informed his readers that all tabulated information had 'been taken from Parliamentary Returns, or from sources equally authentic'.¹¹⁶ The Bradford Woolcombers in 1845 also demonstrate the extent to which popular political oratory drew upon such official sources. In response to the shocking statistic that the average life expectancy for a Bradford woolcomber was a mere sixteen years, as opposed to thirty-nine for the professional classes, working-class activists, clergymen and middle-class paternalists joined forces to launch an enquiry into the sanitary condition of Bradford.¹¹⁷ George White, a Chartist and the leader of the Bradford Woolcombers, played a key role in gathering information and presenting evidence at a succession of public meetings. A gentleman who visited their committee room observed:

several working men busily engaged amidst papers, and blue books, and statistical documents, which lay about them in pyramids ... arranging their "great facts" for the meeting which was to be held in the evening.¹¹⁸

The woolcombers also compiled a voluminous report which, according to the *Observer*, did credit to their intelligence and 'talents as statisticians'.¹¹⁹

Parliamentary speeches and Acts of Parliament were regularly used by platform speakers to challenge their opponents.¹²⁰ During a speech in Newcastle in 1838 George Thompson quoted from a speech made by Lord Stanley, later 14th Earl of Derby, to the Commons on 1 August 1834 and then from the Act of Parliament dealing with the apprenticeship system to expose how the spirit of the act had not been implemented.¹²¹ Orators who read from an Act of Parliament were not only evoking the authority of the law, they were also using the document as a prop, which could be picked up with a dramatic flourish and read at a different pace and pitch, adding interest and authority to a political speech. Richard Oastlers' '*Damnation!*' speech against the new poor law in Huddersfield employs this rhetorical technique. Oastler brandishes a copy of the Poor Law Amendment Act (or as he calls it 'the Book from Hell') and reads from clause 98 which

¹¹⁵ Oz Frankel, 'Blue books and the Victorian Reader', *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (Winter 2004), p. 309.

¹¹⁶ Ballantyne, *Corn Law Repealer's Hand-book*, p. iv.

¹¹⁷ For editorial on life expectancy in Bradford see *BO*, 25 September 1845.

¹¹⁸ *BO*, 5 June 1845.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*

¹²⁰ Norman McCord, *British History 1815-1906* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 196-200.

¹²¹ *Speech of George Thompson, Esq., at the Great Anti-Slavery meeting held in Hood Street Chapel, Newcastle, on Thursday January 25th, 1838* (Gateshead, 1838), pp. 5-6.

dealt with punishment of those who refuse to implement the act. A working knowledge of the law could also be used to embarrass a deceitful opponent. In an anecdote related by Garrison, George Thompson humiliated Peter Borthwick by jumping up at a public meeting and insisting that Borthwick read from an Act which he claimed stated that the negro's word is as good as his master's in the law court. Borthwick was of course unable to comply with this request.¹²²

The political pulpit

This chapter will now consider how religious, theatrical and legalistic styles of speaking fed into popular political oratory. The relationship between Christian radicalism and political oratory is of particular interest. While evangelical Christians argued passionately for the abolition of slavery overseas, men like Richard Oastler and the Rev. J. R. Stephens began to question practices closer to home. The allegedly unchristian attitudes enshrined in the Poor Law Amendment Act (1834) and the exploitation of women and children in factories aroused great anger in these men who, despite their entrenched Toryism, found themselves temporarily aligned with radical agitators including Feargus O'Connor. The speeches of Oastler and Stephens drew upon scriptural evidence to show how God's provisions for the poor had been subverted by industrialisation.¹²³ Their fiery denunciations attracted large audiences of operatives endowing both men with cult-like status in the industrialised centres of Yorkshire and Lancashire.¹²⁴ Oastler, unlike Stephens, was not a clergyman, but as a devout Christian he couched his arguments against corrupt mill owners and the iniquities of the New Poor Law in deeply religious tones. Nor did his lack of religious office prevent him from ascending the pulpit at Stephens' Stalybridge chapel and leading the singing of a hymn.¹²⁵

The extent to which biblical language permeated the rhetoric of campaign groups has been emphasized by several historians.¹²⁶ Biblical rhetoric was the *lingua franca* of political argument because it was embedded in the popular consciousness of even the

¹²² William Lloyd Garrison, *Lectures of George Thompson with a full report of the discussion between Mr. Thompson and Mr. Borthwick, the pro-slavery agent, held at the Royal Amphitheatre, Liverpool, also a brief history of his connection with the Anti-slavery cause in England* (Boston, 1836), p. iv.

¹²³ Lyon, *Politicians in the Pulpit*, p. 2.

¹²⁴ For an examination of the relationship between the churches and social movements see Michael S. Edwards, *Purge this realm: A life of Joseph Raynor Stephens* (London, 1994).

¹²⁵ Thomas Adolphus Trollope, thought the impact of Oastler 'giving out the verses of a hymn, one by one, which the congregation sang after him' was more impressive than Stephen's sermon, Thomas Adolphus Trollope, *What I Remember* (1st ed. 1887, reprinted London, 1973), p. 132.

¹²⁶ Eileen Yeo, 'Christianity and Class Struggle in Chartism, 1838-42', *Past and Present*, 91 (1981), 109-39; Lyon, *Politicians in the Pulpit* (Aldershot, 1999), F B Smith, *Radical Artisan* (Manchester 1973); Vernon, *Politics and the People*, pp. 317-8; Wearmouth, *Working Class Movements*.

poorest audience and could be readily applied to other contexts such as political and moral reform.¹²⁷ Religious arguments also gave movements moral authority. Not surprisingly the Chartists, the League, and the temperance and anti-slavery movements were all keen to enlist God and virtue on their side. The Chartists used the language of moral Christianity to great effect. Biblical language and quotations were ideally suited to emphasize ‘the superior virtues of the poor against the moral and political corruption of the rich’.¹²⁸ Politico–religious oratory was popular with working class audiences because it articulated their struggles in a language they could understand and gave biblical justification for moral (and indeed physical force) opposition to the unjust legislation. Chartist orators were fond of exclaiming that ‘Christ was the first Chartist’, and to pointing out that ministering to the wants of the poor and sick was a religious duty enshrined in the bible.¹²⁹ Extracts from the bible could be used to directly confront the moral authority of the state. The banners displayed at the funeral of the Chartist prisoner Samuel Holberry included scriptural slogans: ‘Thou shalt do no murder’, ‘The Lord Hateth the hands that shed innocent blood’ and ‘Vengeance is mine, and I will repay it saith the Lord’.¹³⁰

Chartist lecturers also compared their struggle to that of the Israelites, a noble and dispossessed people whom God favoured and would ultimately lead to the Promised Land – rhetoric particularly evident in the Chartist land plan.¹³¹ The symbolic use of land in political language worked on a number of levels: it appealed to an engrained romanticism and love of the countryside as opposed to the corruption of the industrial city, and it also represented liberty and the potential for egalitarianism. Hence the utopian vision of the land is also found in the rhetoric of Owenism and the factory reform movements.¹³² Indeed the biblical trope of the ‘promised land’ operated as an easily recognizable narrative which could be creatively adapted to suit all shades of the political spectrum. Even Durham landowners were not averse to likening their struggle to that of the chosen people (Extract 4, p. 209). At a rally called by northern protectionists in February 1844, one of the

¹²⁷ According to Tom Laquer, by 1851 around 75% of working class children between the ages of 5 and 15 attended Sunday Schools where they would have received detailed instruction from the Authorised Bible, as cited in Burton, ‘John Wesley’, p. 73.

¹²⁸ Vernon, *Politics and the People*, p. 324.

¹²⁹ Wearmouth, *Working Class Movements*, p. 194. Chase, *Chartism*, p. 338, fn 98; Taylor, *Ernest Jones*, p. 133.

¹³⁰ Gammage, *History*, p. 214.

¹³¹ Malcolm Chase ‘We wish only to work for ourselves’: the Chartist land plan’, in Malcolm Chase and Ian Dyck (eds.), *Living and learning: essays in honour of J.F.C. Harrison* (Aldershot: Scolar, 1996), 133-48. Malcolm Chase ‘“Wholesome object lessons”: the Chartist land plan in retrospect’. *English Historical Review*, 118:475 (2003), 59-85.

¹³² Vernon, *Politics and the People*, pp. 315-17.

speakers opined that the Israelites were supported by agriculture and not industry and warned the audience that, if they continued to lose trust in God and break his laws, they were in danger of being forsaken by God. His argument, however incoherently formulated, clearly identified the landowners cause with God.

The free-traders were equally voracious in claiming God for their cause.¹³³ The League encouraged clergymen to chair or attend free trade meetings, while the Lord's Prayer, with its apt emphasis upon 'daily bread', was regularly mentioned during League meetings.¹³⁴ Richard Cobden was particularly keen to recruit high-profile supporters such as Joseph Sturge and George Thompson, both of whom were widely admired for their work in defence of the slave.¹³⁵ Thompson's first major engagement for the League was a tea party in Manchester in May 1841 attended largely by clergymen and women. Here he gave an impassioned address, which drew parallels between the anti-slavery movement and the campaign to repeal the Corn Laws and suggested that repeal was not a matter of political economy but rather a crusade for freedom and justice.¹³⁶ The Rev. W. J. Fox, one of the League's most popular speakers, also used religious rhetoric to explain questions of political economy.¹³⁷ Such arguments diverted attention away from critics who held that the League was primarily interested in reducing operatives' wages.

Religion did not just provide language; it offered structural models and rituals. We have seen in previous chapters how reform movements adapted the Methodist lecture circuit and system of classes as organizational structures. Religion also provided a model for structuring meetings: Chartist, temperance and Owenite groups copied the formal structure of a church service. Martha Vicinus has described how Chartist speakers generally commenced their speeches with a 'secular invocation' which welcomed the audience and emphasised both the joy and solemnity of the occasion, and closed with a 'political "blessing," reminding listeners to do their duty and act upon their beliefs'.¹³⁸

¹³³ The first history of the League claimed that it was a semi-religious crusade, Archibald Prentice, *History of the Anti-Corn Law League, Second Edition with a new introduction by W. H. Chaloner*, (2 Vols., 1853, 2nd ed. London, 1968), Vol. 1, p. 197, see also W. H. Chaloner's introduction, p. xviii.

¹³⁴ *Leeds Mercury*, 2 March 1839; 4 January 1840; 31 October 1840.

¹³⁵ Kitson Clark, 'The romantic element', p. 232. Howe *Letters of Richard Cobden*, p. 221 and p. 223. Simon Morgan, 'The Anti-Corn Law League and British anti-slavery in transatlantic perspective, 1838-1846', *Historical Journal*, Vol. 52, Issue 1 (2009), pp. 90-91.

¹³⁶ Pickering and Tyrrell, *People's Bread*, p. 120. *Report of the Conference of Ministers of all denominations on the Corn Laws held in Manchester, Aug. 17th, 18th, 19th and 20th, 1841* (Manchester 1841).

¹³⁷ See tract W. J. Fox, *The corn law question considered in its moral bearings* (London, 1839).

¹³⁸ Martha Vicinus, "To live free or die": the relationship between strategy and style in Chartist speeches, 1838-1839', *Style*, Vol. X, Fall 1976, No. 4., p. 487. For more recent research into Chartist rhetoric see Sheila Graham, 'Demagogues or debaters? A study of Chartist speeches reported in the *Halifax Guardian* and

Chartist meetings held on Sundays generally included the singing of popular psalms and hymns; indeed the Chartist movement penned its own sacred songs usually sung to the tune of the 'Old Hundredth Psalm', for this very purpose.¹³⁹ Such devotional ritual fostered a sense of political communion. The ability of music and song to unite audiences should not be underestimated. At a mass Chartist meeting in May 1839 held at Peep Green the event opened with a Methodist hymn, sung by a vast multitude and accompanied by 'thousands of musical instruments'. The effect was said to have been truly stunning.¹⁴⁰

Several professional lecturers, despite having no formal religious qualifications, both lectured and preached. According to the obituary notice of George Lomax, a Manchester-born political and temperance lecturer, he had 'delivered upwards of five thousand lectures [and] preached over a thousand sermons'.¹⁴¹ Other professional itinerant lecturers including Robert Lowery, Henry Vincent, Jonathan Bairstow and George Thompson all refer to preaching.¹⁴² At times the distinction between a lecture and a sermon was blurred and the two terms might be used interchangeably. Categorisation of a speech act depended both on the content and style of a speech as well as the time, place and context of delivery. Thus a speech delivered outdoors on a Sunday at a location associated with Methodist preaching which was followed by prayers and hymn singing might logically be considered by speaker and audience to be a sermon.¹⁴³ Similarly an address to commemorate the death of a Chartist prisoner delivered on a Sunday was a religious act. The content of a speech also determined whether it was a 'sermon' or a 'lecture'. Thus addresses designated as sermons tended to be characterised by religious language, doctrinal examples and by direct appeals to God.

Thanks to the attentions of the Derby magistrates we can compare a Sunday 'sermon' preached by the Chartist Jonathan Bairstow with that of a 'lecture' delivered by

the *Northern Star* between 1838 and 1839', *Transactions of the Halifax Antiquarian Society*, Vol. 15 (2007), 112-21.

¹³⁹ Thomas Cooper's song book the *Shakespearean Chartist Hymn Book* (Leicester, 1842). The Chartist John Watkins also composed his own hymns, Chase, *Chartism*, p. 121.

¹⁴⁰ Bowan and Pickering 'Songs for the Millions' p. 49. For a description of the Peep Green meeting see 'The Struggles of an old Chartist by Benjamin Wilson of Salterhebble', in David Vincent (ed.), *Testaments of Radicalism: Memoirs of Working Class Politicians 1790-1885* (London, 1977), pp. 197-8.

¹⁴¹ He claimed to have travelled over 60,000 miles in pursuit of these duties, *Manchester Times*, 24 January 1880. George Lomax was employed on an ad hoc basis by the BLPTA, see WYAS: Bradford, BLPTA minutes, Sept 1843 - June 1852.

¹⁴² Lowery while employed by the British Association for the Promotion of temperance, reported that he had delivered '144 lectures and preached 38 sermons', *British Temperance Advocate*, Vol. XVII, 1850, p. 88. Henry Vincent took out a preaching license while lecturing on the Charter in the late 1830s, primarily for the modicum of legal protection offered by such a license, Groth Lyon, *Politicians in the Pulpit*, pp. 200-2.

¹⁴³ Wearmouth, *Working Class Movements*, pp. 185-194.

Bairstow on a Monday evening.¹⁴⁴ Both speeches took place within months of each other in Derby market place during the spring and early summer of 1841.¹⁴⁵ On Sunday 21 March, Bairstow preached a funeral sermon for the late Chartist prisoner, John Clayton, in aid of his widow.¹⁴⁶ Bairstow sermon was formulaic, it commenced with two verses from Psalm 90, 'praise God from whom all blessing flow', followed by a prayer and a commentary on John Chpt. 19 before concluding with another prayer. Yet this traditional structure was subverted and used as a potent instrument for presenting Chartist political arguments in the context of religious truths. Thus Bairstow's prayer entreated the almighty to implement the Charter (a document which, according to Bairstow, was moulded according to the rules laid down by the New Testament), to remove all tyrants and intercede for the liberation of all Chartist prisoners. The thrust of the sermon was that Jesus was himself poor, he was a reformer, and that true religion had been distorted and corrupted by the modern day 'Scribes and Pharisees'. Despite ostensibly being a devotional address, Bairstow's sermon, like those of the Rev. J. R. Stephens, employed incendiary language. He told his listeners that if the Government did not concede to the Chartists 'there must be bloodshed and vengeance'.¹⁴⁷

Bairstow's lecturing style was distinct from his preaching. A subsequent lecture in the Derby market place on the evening of Monday 10 May did not appeal to God, or follow the ritualised structures of the church service. This time Bairstow confined himself entirely to political questions, namely the recent election in Nottingham at which Chartist electors had assisted the Tory candidate (John Walter, editor of *The Times*) because of his sustained opposition to the Poor Law Amendment Act.¹⁴⁸ It was a political harangue entirely devoid of religiosity, demonstrating how Chartist propaganda was packaged to suit the occasion.¹⁴⁹ The expected behaviour of the audience also marked out one speech act as a sermon and the other a lecture. At the start of his earlier sermon Bairstow had requested that the audience show no sign of approbation or disapprobation 'but to listen in order and

¹⁴⁴ From police reports held at The National Archives, HO 45/45 ff. 4-18.

¹⁴⁵ TNA, HO 45/45 ff. 3-5a, 'Account of proceedings in Derby marketplace on Sunday March 21, 1841'. See also Derbyshire Local Studies Library, MS BA/909/16186 item 3, 21 Mar 1841. TNA HO 45/45 ff. 17-18, lecture Monday evening 10 May 1841. Groth Lyon, *Politicians in the Pulpit*, p. 221.

¹⁴⁶ See placard advertising funeral sermon, TNA HO 45/45 f. 6.

¹⁴⁷ TNA HO 45/45 f. 5.

¹⁴⁸ According to police reports around 500 working people listened, TNA HO 45/45 ff. 17-18.

¹⁴⁹ As Malcolm Chase points out for the all the religiosity of the Chartist camp meeting and the popularity of hymn singing the typical Chartist meeting was held in that most unsacred of places - the public house, Chase, *History*, p. 142.

silence to his address'.¹⁵⁰ This was in contrast to his market place lecture, where Bairstow had invited questions from his audience.¹⁵¹

We know from George Thompson's letters to his wife that during his early career as an anti-slavery orator he was sometimes called upon to give sermons and he considered exchanging itinerant lecturing for a more settled life in the church.¹⁵² Delivering political ideas clothed in religious morality and posturing as a preacher had obvious appeals. It elevated the paid speaker from a hireling to a person with a spiritual calling. Moreover pulpit oratory had a distinct advantage over the political platform in that during a sermon it was not permissible for the audience to heckle or disagree with the speaker, interrupt or leave – a fact not wasted on contemporaries as a witty article in the *Bradford Observer* illustrates.¹⁵³ Dressing up a speech as a sermon would thus effectively silence opposition and ensure an attentive captive audience. Some lecturers, like the notorious infidel preacher the Rev. Robert Taylor and even George Thompson himself, might dress as a clerical figure, a prop which provided visual emphasis to their message.¹⁵⁴ In the case of Taylor such attire was to hold up the church to derision while in Thompson's case the motivation, if ill-judged, was certainly not disrespectful. During Thompson's speaking tours of America in the 1830s he alienated several supporters by not only appearing in clerical robes at some of his public appearances but also by having the title 'Reverend' appended to his name.¹⁵⁵ Thompson's language and arguments were deeply religious and it was therefore not surprising that he was regularly invited to address congregations and that he was happy to take on a religious persona.

The term 'preaching' also referred to intonation, manner and voice. As we have seen in the previous chapter, many political lecturers were former lay preachers, and it is plausible that they applied the intonation and delivery of the sermon to politics. It is notable how many temperance and Chartist orators were said to speak in a manner reminiscent of a preacher. George Head, for example, described how a Bolton temperance speaker spoke in 'the style of a field preacher'.¹⁵⁶ Contemporaries described Thomas Whittaker's temperance oratory as possessing 'a rich, and pure, and deep tone of religious

¹⁵⁰ Report sent to local magistrates of Jonathan Bairstow preaching John Clayton's funeral service, 22 March 1841, Derbyshire Local Studies Library MS BA/909/16186, item 4.

¹⁵¹ HO 45/45 f. 18.

¹⁵² See letters to Anne Thompson 27 Nov 1837, REAS/2/1/40 and 21 July 1836, REAS/2/1/36.

¹⁵³ The 'popular preacher' has a great advantage over other public speakers as 'no one may hiss, no one may depart', *BO*, 29 Nov 1855. Perhaps these comments were inspired by *John Bull*, 6 October 1855.

¹⁵⁴ See esp. 'Show time at the Rotunda', Epstein, *Radical Expression*, pp. 136-7.

¹⁵⁵ Anthony J Barker, *Captain Charles Stuart, Anglo American Abolitionist* (Baton Rouge, 1986), p. 135.

¹⁵⁶ Head, *Home Tour*, p. 417.

feeling', while the temperance advocate John B. Gough operated in an American revivalist tradition that has echoes today in the style of evangelical preacher Billy Graham.¹⁵⁷ Similarly on the radical platform, Miles Taylor has described how the oratory of the Chartist leader Ernest Jones was 'shot through with the imagery and potency of an evangelical preacher'.¹⁵⁸

Melodrama, sentimentality and performance

Theatricality was a key component of the popular political platform.¹⁵⁹ In recent years historians and literary critics alike have presented the 'melodramatic imagination' as the key to understanding the Victorian frame of mind.¹⁶⁰ Elaine Hadley makes a compelling case for viewing melodrama as much more than a theatrical genre: instead, she suggests that it is better understood as a behavioural paradigm which was manifested widely in nineteenth-century literature and society.¹⁶¹ Certainly, as the work of Rohan McWilliam illustrates, melodrama lay at the heart of radical rhetoric both in print, on the platform and in the court room.¹⁶² Melodramas combined polarised depictions of good and evil with a utopian sense of fair play and social justice. They were popular because they were essentially morality plays which presented contemporary issues in such a way that good was able to overcome evil.¹⁶³ Such plays were satisfying because, as the artisan Thomas Wright noted, they predictably 'terminated with the detection and punishment of vice'.¹⁶⁴ As a genre melodrama was endlessly pliable and could be moulded to suit various causes including that of political reform. As work on the late Chartist newspaper *Reynolds's Weekly Newspaper* shows the melodramatic mode was equally effective in

¹⁵⁷ *Northern Temperance Advocate*, No. 3 Vol. 2, March 1844 p. 28. Louis Billington, 'Popular Religion and Social Reform: A Study of Revivalism and Teetotalism, 1830-50', *Journal of Religious History*, Vol. 10, 1979, p. 274. Billy Graham (1918-) is an American evangelical Baptist preacher whose tours, radio and television recordings have reached billions of people. "Billy Graham" *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, 2009, accessed 8 August 2009 <<http://0-search.eb.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/eb/article-9037605>>.

¹⁵⁸ Taylor, *Ernest Jones*, p. 88.

¹⁵⁹ Vernon, *Politics and the People*, pp. 118-20; Kitson Clark, 'The romantic element', p. 222; Joyce, *Visions*, pp. 310-12.

¹⁶⁰ The American academic Peter Brooks revived interest in Melodrama with his influential *Melodramatic imagination: Balzac, Henry James, melodrama, and the mode of excess* (New Haven, 1st ed. 1976, new preface 1995). For a more recent discussion see McWilliam, 'What is interdisciplinary', p1.

¹⁶¹ Elaine Hadley, *Melodramatic Tactics: Theatricalised Dissent in the English Marketplace, 1800-1885* (Stanford, 1995), p. 98.

¹⁶² McWilliam, 'The mysteries of G.W.M. Reynolds: radicalism and melodrama in Victorian Britain'. In Chase, Malcolm; Dyck, Ian (ed.), *Living and Learning: essays in honour of J.F.C. Harrison* (Aldershot, 1996), 182-98

¹⁶³ Joyce, *Democratic Subjects*, pp. 177-179.

¹⁶⁴ Thomas Wright, *Some Habits and Customs of the Working Class* (1867, reprinted New York, 1967), p. 158.

fiction and in newspapers.¹⁶⁵ *Reynolds's Weekly Newspaper* was a best seller largely because it presented political news couched in the well-rehearsed narrative of the melodrama, thereby enabling audiences to order and make sense of events.¹⁶⁶

Melodramatic oratory worked in a similar fashion. When placed into the context of a melodrama the big political questions of the day could be contextualised allowing audiences to believe that political reform would bring about a happy ending. Moreover being able to anticipate themes and arguments was important in an age when speeches were not fully audible to parts of the audience. The language of melodrama, with its juxtaposition of good and evil, can be found in anti-poor law, factory movement, Chartist, free trade and temperance oratory.¹⁶⁷ All had a ready villain, in the shape of a corrupt and parasitic aristocracy, and an intrinsically good and much wronged 'people' at their rhetorical disposal. Patrick Joyce has shown how radical gentlemen leaders, such as Ernest Jones, Feargus O'Connor and George Reynolds, employed the conventions of romanticism to present themselves as 'romantic heroes in a political melodrama of their own scripting'.¹⁶⁸ In siding with the people, such leaders faced social ostracism and financial ruin. Yet such was their devotion to championing good over evil they were prepared to make these sacrifices.

To the modern eye such clear cut divisions into good and evil appear overdrawn, even simplistic. Yet to understand their power we need to contemplate the mental horizons of those living through the Chartist era. As Kitson Clark evocatively described, the years between 1830 and 1850 were 'more heavily charged with emotion than anything we know'.¹⁶⁹ The use of melodramatic, sentimental, passionate and even violent language by orators in this period needs to be set into the context of the time and the licence given to rhetorical performances. After reading speeches made by Richard Oastler, or the Rev. J. R. Stephens during the anti-poor law campaign, or the language adopted by Chartist and League lecturers, it would be easy to assume that such orators were advocating mass civil disobedience and urging an uprising. Certainly violent language and extravagant

¹⁶⁵ Anne Humpherys and Louis James (ed.), *G.W.M. Reynolds: Nineteenth-Century Fiction, Politics, and the Press* (Aldershot, 2008).

¹⁶⁶ Anne Humpherys, 'Popular Narrative and Political Discourses in *Reynolds's Weekly News*', in Laurel Brake, Aled Jones and Lionel Madden (eds.) *Investigating Victorian Journalism* (London, 1990).

¹⁶⁷ Robert Gray, *The Factory Question and Industrial England, 1830-1860*. Hadley, *Melodramatic Tactics*.

¹⁶⁸ Joyce, *Democratic Subjects*, p. 214. Miles Taylor contends that the Chartist Ernest Jones's career can only be interpreted by registering the 'long reach of the age of romanticism', Taylor, *Ernest Jones*, p. 10.

¹⁶⁹ Kitson Clark argued that this overflow of emotion revitalised religion and politics and revived nationalism, 'it taught men to feel and understand the lot of the less fortunate and to stand up for their own wrongs'. Kitson Clark, 'The romantic element', p. 237.

statements were intended to impress upon the Government the severity of the labourers' distress and the difficulty they had in restraining their followers from actually violence.¹⁷⁰ Yet such extreme language was also found in this period in sermons, literature, poetry, on stage and in contemporary journalism. It reflected the emotionalism of the day and must not be taken literally. Kitson Clark noted how notorious orators like Feargus O'Connor and the Rev. J. R. Stephens, when challenged by the law, explained, probably quite honestly, that they had not really meant what they had appeared to say.¹⁷¹ The trial speech of the Chartist, Jonathan Bairstow, in 1843 makes this very point. Bairstow said in his defence that when faced with scenes of starvation it is understandable that men should occasionally:

verge into warm and impassioned language ... for there are times gentlemen, when, whatever may be our attachment to the law, judgement is almost overbalanced and overpowered by feeling and passion.¹⁷²

A symptom of this great outpouring of emotion was the readiness with which nineteenth-century audiences could be moved to tears. Audiences openly wept in theatres, they sobbed too while listening to pathetic instalments of Dickens's latest novel.¹⁷³ A powerful orator or a poignant public occasion might also elicit great emotion. Hence when Richard Oastler made his public return to Yorkshire in February 1844, after three and a half years in the Fleet prison, newspaper reports described how both old and young strove to restrain their feelings when he first appeared amongst them. They struggled until at last 'fairly overcome, they burst into tears'. Oastler too sank back into his chair weakened by emotion and was advised not to speak until later that day.¹⁷⁴ Skilful orators worked the crowd's propensity to emotion. A good, well told story that combined pathos with a moral purpose could be cathartic, as the autobiography of the temperance orator, Thomas Whittaker, illustrates. At a vast outdoor meeting, held in the roughest area of Newcastle in the 1836, Whittaker addressed some two thousand working men. His audience was composed of the lowest orders, 'scores of them "the vilest of the vile", some were actually drunk, others a little nonsensical'. Yet, according to *The Star of Temperance*, Whittaker's

¹⁷⁰ Brian Harrison and Patria Hollis, 'Chartism, Liberalism and the Life of Robert Lowery', *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 82, No. 324 (July, 1967), p. 514.

¹⁷¹ Kitson Clark, 'The romantic element' pp. 235-6.

¹⁷² *The Trial of Feargus O'Connor*, p. 275.

¹⁷³ Sally Ledger, "'Don't be so melodramatic!'" Dickens and the affective mode', *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 4 (2007), p. 1. Nicola Bown, 'Introduction: Crying Over Little Nell', *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 4 (2007) www.19.bbk.ac.uk

¹⁷⁴ *NS*, 24 February 1844.

oratory moved the crowd, 'the stout hearted seemed to tremble ... men were seen to weep, to shake their heads, to wipe the big tears from their eyes, and readily subscribed to the pledge'.¹⁷⁵

Public sermons and graveside orations to honour political martyrs were also scenes of great emotion. The death of John Clayton in spring 1841, the first Chartist prisoner to die in custody, was marked by poignant funeral services preached across the country. In Burnley the words contained in Isaiah X. 1, 2 were preached and 'many were the tears that were shed during the delivery of the sermon'.¹⁷⁶ Similarly the death of Samuel Holberry in the summer of 1842 gave way to a vast outpouring of public grief both in his native Sheffield and within Chartist communities across the country.¹⁷⁷

The Chartist press regularly included theatrical reports and carried advertisements for plays, some of which carried an overtly political message.¹⁷⁸ A theatrical performance, like a political lecture, could reach even those with limited literacy. During the mid-nineteenth century cheap theatres proliferated and even the poorest sorts were occasionally able to see plays from the cheapest seats. Amateur dramatics flourished too. Local groups of artisans performed plays and pantomimes and organised soirees, especially during the winter months. In Elland, for example, local Chartists staged a performance of William Cobbett's anti-Malthusian play, *Surplus Population*, a melodrama in which a wicked property owner tries to seduce a poor and innocent girl.¹⁷⁹ *Surplus Population* combined entertainment with serious political education. A whole scene was devoted to the discussion of Malthusian principles in which the shoemaker Last (played by Elland's own radical shoemaker, Abram Hanson) acted as Cobbett's mouthpiece.¹⁸⁰ As Cobbett recognised, the play was a useful vehicle for propaganda in communities where oral culture remained strong and print culture was far from dominant. Subsequent radicals adopted the medium of theatre to express political sentiments. The Whitby Chartist John Watkins, for example, wrote a five act play *John Frost* in the aftermath of the Newport Rising. Written in iambic pentameter *John Frost* could either be read as verse or performed as a drama.¹⁸¹ It appears that *John Frost* was only ever performed in

¹⁷⁵ Whittaker, *Life's Battles*, pp. 132-3.

¹⁷⁶ *NS*, 3 April, 1841. See also *NS*, 20 March 1841; 27 March 1841.

¹⁷⁷ *NS*, 2 July 1842. See also Chase, *Chartism*, p. 156.

¹⁷⁸ Ros Merkin 'The theatre of the organised working class 1830-1930' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Warwick, Joint School of Theatre Studies, January 1993), p. 43

¹⁷⁹ Merkin 'Theatre of the organised working class' pp. 35-41; Thompson, *Chartists*, pp. 182-3. See also 'Reminiscences of notable shoemakers', *Boot and Shoemaker* 8 February 1879, p. 242.

¹⁸⁰ Merkin 'Theatre of the organised working class', p. 37.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, pp. 22-8; *NS* 2 January 1841; Chase, *Chartism*, pp. 119-20.

Nottingham, perhaps because few were willing to risk staging a play in the years following the Newport Rising, particularly given the play's uncompromising tone.¹⁸²

As Marc Brodie's analysis of the political pantomime *Wat Tyler: or Jack Straw's Rebellion* demonstrates, hearing a politically inspired play was an important means by which those who know 'nothing about politics' learnt what Chartism was about. *Wat Tyler* was performed at the London Victoria theatre (one of the very poorest theatres) six nights a week between Christmas 1849 and February 1850, attracting large audiences. Its central message, that corrupt royal and local officials were unfairly extracting tax from the poor for their own gain, would have resonated with mid-nineteenth century audiences. To make the political message even more apparent, during the performance the lead character, Wat Tyler, was described as 'the great and original Chartist'.¹⁸³

Middle-class reform movements like the League were also immersed in theatricality. Paul Pickering and Alex Tyrell open their history of the League with a vivid description of the Rev. J. W. Massie publically burning Peel's Corn Bill before a cheering Manchester audience: a scene which illustrates that Victorian political economy was far from dull. League meetings were lively affairs and many of its propagandists were as flamboyant as professional actors.¹⁸⁴ James Acland had indeed worked as a professional actor and other League lecturers spoke in a theatrical manner. The *Derby Mercury*, for example, complained that during a speech on free trade Abraham Paulton frequently adopted a 'theatrical air and tone of voice ... to make some especial hit'.¹⁸⁵ Indeed when the *Anti-Corn Law Circular* introduced the published lectures of Sidney Smith as a template for aspiring speakers, it recommended that those who have heard Smith speak should copy his lively, dramatic style.¹⁸⁶ For gifted mimics Smith's lectures provided ample opportunity 'to display their talents to advantage in the happy quotations from the ridiculous speeches of the aristocratic opponents of free trade'.¹⁸⁷ Henry Vincent too amused Chartist audiences by imitating speeches of aristocratic Whigs at the hustings.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸² Malcolm Chase, entry on John Watkins in Keith Gildart and David Howell (eds.) *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, Vol. XII (Basingstoke, 2004), p. 300.

¹⁸³ Marc Brodie, 'Free trade and cheap theatre: sources of politics for the nineteenth-century London poor', *Social History*, Vol. 28, No. 3 Oct 2003, p. 348.

¹⁸⁴ Pickering and Tyrell, *People's Bread*, especially chapter 9 'theatres of discussion' which describes how Revd Massie publicly burnt a copy of the corn law bill in a parody of Luther's famous gesture.

¹⁸⁵ A style which the reporter thought 'ludicrous', *Derby Mercury*, 12 December 1838.

¹⁸⁶ Gammage, *History*, pp. 11 and 39.

¹⁸⁷ Sidney Smith frequently used dialogue and extracts from speeches of his opponents to great effect in his oratory, *ACLCL*, 11 June 1839.

¹⁸⁸ Vernon, *Politics and the People*, p. 120.

While it is impossible to say with any certainty, it seems likely that such mimicking involved not only the voice but also theatrical gestures and movements.

The speaking styles of professional orators are best understood on a spectrum ranging from the undemonstrative (such as Ralph Waldo Emerson) to the wildly energetic. At the demonstrative end of the spectrum temperance lecturers had a reputation for slap-stick performances which attracted praise and censure in equal measures.¹⁸⁹ The temperance speakers Thomas Whittaker, Harry Anderson and John Gough exemplify theatrical styles of speaking, which utilised a range of voices, staged gestures and dramatic movement. The sheer dynamism of these performances is illustrated by Thomas Whittaker who, at the start of his speaking career at a meeting in Cockermonth, astounded his audience by dislocating his shoulder during a particularly vigorous lecture.¹⁹⁰ Whittaker's animated delivery was not unusual in temperance circles as a contemporary account of the Preston temperance lecturer Harry Anderton¹⁹¹ speaking in the early 1830s suggests:

All the time he flung his arms about, stamped with his feet, butted with his head at the audience, tossed forward one shoulder and then the other, striking (like Homer's heroes) the palms of his hands as hard as he was able against one, or both thighs together, and twisted a body, naturally unusually flexible, into many uncouth attitudes.¹⁹²

The American lecturer John Gough's commercial success as a celebrity temperance speaker was largely due to the performative nature of his 'speeches'. A contemporary female observer described the versatile way in which Gough, a former actor, impersonated 'the drunkard, then the hypocrite, anon the saint. Those restless, eager hands ... always busy, flinging the hair forward in one character, back in another, or standing it straight up in a third'.¹⁹³ Gough's lecture *Habit* was typical of his style. In this lecture, which was first delivered at Exeter Hall in November 1853, Gough used the metaphor of a gorgeous brightly hued bubble to symbolise a bad habit which a man will chase unthinkingly to his doom.¹⁹⁴ As the man becomes more desperate the narrative picks up pace and one can

¹⁸⁹ Revd George Gilfillan, for example, thought that John Gough's 'low mimicries, his jumpings to and fro, ...his eternal self-repetitions, the vulgarity and the coarseness of the display, [were] simply disgusting'. Cited in Joanne Madin Vieira Paisana, 'Tiplers, Drunkards and Backslider: the Temperance Movement in England 1830-72 (unpublished Ph.D, Universidade do Minho, 2002), p. 141.

¹⁹⁰ At his next meeting a large audience turned up as 'it was a new thing for a man to put his shoulder out with speaking'. Whittaker, *Life's Battles*, p. 112.

¹⁹¹ For details on Harry Anderton (1808-55) see Brian Harrison, *Dictionary of British Temperance Biography* (Coventry, 1973), pp. 2-3.

¹⁹² For a full account of this meeting see Head, *Home Tour*. See pp. 416 – 420.

¹⁹³ J. C. Furnas, *The Life and Times of the Late Demon Rum* (London, 1965), p148.

¹⁹⁴ John B. Gough, *Autobiography and personal recollections twenty-six years' experience as a public speaker* (Illinois, 1870), p. 341.

readily imagine Gough melodramatically gesturing, jumping and leaping around stage in accordance with the words:

He leaps, falls, and rises; scorched, and bruised, and blistered. Yet still the excitement and the power of evil habit become almost a passion. He forgets all that is past, or strives to forget it in his trouble. He leaps again. It is gone! He curses and bites his lips in agony. He shrieks the wild, almost wailing shriek of despair. Yet still he pursues his prize, knee-deep in the hot ashes. He staggers up, with torn limbs and bruised, the last semblance of humanity scorched out of him. Yet there is his prize, and he will have it. With a desperate effort he makes one more leap; and he has got it now; but he has leaped into the crater with it, and, with a bursted bubble in his hand he goes to his retribution!¹⁹⁵

The theatrical can also be discerned in the popular pulpit during this period. Charles Haddon Spurgeon also reached out to the people by delivering his religious message in the theatrical speaking style of the day. General James Garfield, an American tourist, described Spurgeon's performative style of preaching in his diary:

I could see those nervous motions of the hands and feet which all forcible speakers make when preparing to speak; and also in the speaking, the sympathy between his body and his thoughts, which controlled his gestures, and produced those little touches of theatrical power, which are so effective in a speaker.¹⁹⁶

Theatricality, specifically in the shape of melodrama, was also a characteristic of the mid-nineteenth century law court.

Courtroom oratory: theatricality and melodrama

The Victorian theatre and the Victorian law court shared many similarities. Both were places where 'actors' played their part before an audience. Within the courtroom the judge, jury and defendant were the cast while the spectators took the part of the audience. The elaborate costumes of wigs and gowns, the layout of the room, the defiance or penance of the defendant and the foreboding presence of the judge all heightened this sense of drama. Since the days of Thomas Erskine (who defended Horne Tooke and the other radicals tried for treason in 1794) melodramatic pleading was in vogue and the courtroom

¹⁹⁵ John Gough, *Habit: an oration delivered in Exeter Hall, November 22 1853* (London, 1853), p. 21. According to James Dawson Burns, Gough did not follow the traditional rules of rhetoric yet his own brand of speaking 'answered its own end far better than if he had taken Demosthenes or Cicero as a model', James Dawson Burns, *Temperance History: a consecutive narrative of the rise, development, and extension of the temperance reform* (London, 1889-91), pp. 359-60.

¹⁹⁶ This description was first published as 'Garfield in London, extracts from the journal of a Trip to Europe', *Century Magazine*, XXVII (Jan 1884), p. 414.

could be every bit as theatrical as the stage.¹⁹⁷ Indeed some Victorian barristers employed actors to train them in the art of pleading.¹⁹⁸ Courtroom oratory, like pulpit oratory, followed certain etiquette. Defendants were expected to speak with deference, to appeal to the judge and jury's sense of fair play and justice and to flatter the good sense and integrity of those who would decide their fate. In return the accused had the right to address the courtroom at length as long as they kept to the topic in hand. Political trials, as radicals were well aware, could be used to promote a cause and often represented a last chance to influence public opinion prior to lengthy incarceration. Trial speeches delivered by key figures were recorded verbatim and printed in newspapers and circulated as cheap tracts.¹⁹⁹ It was, therefore, important that defendants in politically motivated trials presented carefully crafted, captivating, and above all lengthy speeches which combined defence with promotion of the cause.

Leading barristers were well known within popular culture. Edward Kenealy, for example, who represented the Tichborne Claimant in the 1870s, enjoyed great popular acclaim.²⁰⁰ The rituals and language of the courtroom were familiar to the nineteenth century public through newspaper reports of sensational and political trials and the use of the courtroom setting in melodramas, popular literature, ballads, and pamphlets.²⁰¹ Trials might also be dramatised. The speeches of the Irish patriot, Robert Emmett, made during his 1803 trial for treason, was a particular favourite with Chartists and the text was on several occasions read aloud or performed.²⁰² In December 1840, the Stalybridge NCA performed *Robert Emmett*, a play based on Emmett's trial speech, in Manchester and Oldham.²⁰³ For aspiring activists the courtroom speech provided a useful model of political eloquence. The Chartist Robert Gammage described how, as a young man, he had

¹⁹⁷ Gillian Russell, 'The Theatre of Crim. Con.: Thomas Erskine, Adultery and Radical Politics in the 1790s', in Michael T. Davis and Paul A. Pickering, *Unrespectable radicals: Popular Politics in the Age of Reform* (Aldershot, 2008), 57-70. Epstein, *Radical Expression*, pp. 32-36.

¹⁹⁸ McWilliam, 'Melodrama and the Historians', p. 58.

¹⁹⁹ Feargus O'Connor published the 1843 Lancaster mass trial at his own expense, *The Trial of Feargus O'Connor and fifty-eight others at Lancaster on a charge of sedition, conspiracy, tumult and riot* (London & Manchester, 1843, 2nd ed. New York, 1970), preface, p. i.

²⁰⁰ McWilliam, *Tichborne Claimant*, especially chapter 6.

²⁰¹ Several temperance lectures took the shape of a mock trial, for example, Jabez Inwards, *Alcohol, a prisoner at the Bar: being the substance of two lectures delivered ... at the Temperance Hall, York*. (London, n.d.) [copy held at Stanford University Library, USA]; Francis Beardsall, *Trial of John Barleycorn, alias Strong Drink*. (Manchester, [1840?]); A N Brocklehurst, *The trial-at-Law of Tobacco Nicotino*. (London, n.d. [c.1870]). Dickens drew upon late eighteenth and early nineteenth century set-piece trials in his fiction, Sally Ledger, *Dickens and the Popular Radical Imagination* (Cambridge, 2007), esp. pp. 42- 43.

²⁰² *Northern Star* regularly carried advertisements for *The Life, Conversations and Trial of Robert Emmett* (1s a copy), *NS*, 7 November 1840; 21 November 1840. During a Birmingham NCA meeting the chair read out loud Emmett's defence which produced a great sensation, *NS*, 28 November 1840.

²⁰³ Merkin 'Theatre of the organised working class', pp. 21-22. *NS*, 12 December 1840; 19 December 1840.

learnt the *Trial of Robert Emmett* off by heart. This feat endowed the increasingly politicised Gammage with an identity and language for his own subsequent political career.²⁰⁴

The trial speech was part of a long radical tradition stretching back to the days of the London Corresponding Society. The transcripts of Horne Tooke and John Thelwall's treason trials provided successive generations of political radicals with a useful template for constructing a political defence speech. We know from library catalogue records that the library of George Julian Harney contained a sizeable collection of political trials and it is highly likely that he consulted such texts in preparation for his own trial in spring 1843.²⁰⁵ Indeed Chartist defendants, like their radical predecessors, self-consciously constructed their defence speeches in the knowledge that they were contributing to an enduring canon of trial speeches. As the early radical career of James Acland exemplifies, the rhetoric employed during political trials passionately engaged with the law, parodying and satirising its absurdities.²⁰⁶ Prior to his employment by the League, Acland, as a proprietor of a succession of unstamped newspapers, took great pleasure in exposing the iniquities of the libel law. In February 1829, during an eloquent and lengthy libel speech during a trial initiated by Bristol Corporation the previous year, Acland ridiculed the absurd claim made by Lord Ellenborough that "the greater the truth the greater the libel."²⁰⁷ At subsequent libel trials Acland continued to expose the inconsistencies of libel law and challenge its boundaries.²⁰⁸

While rigorous preparation was necessary for an effective courtroom speech, delivery was paramount. Most political agitators deliberately occupied the courtroom's attention for several hours at a time. A bored and irritated judge and jury might wreak their revenge in the sentencing and thus it was essential that the defendant's speech was captivating. The best defendants hammed up their performance, playing to the public

²⁰⁴ Pickering, *Feargus O'Connor*, p. 82.

²⁰⁵ Political trials found in Harney's library included those of Despard, Hone, Hunt, Watson, Tooke, Thomas Palmer, Thistlewood and McDouall. *The Harney Library: List of books (mainly political) presented by Mr and Mrs G. J. Harney and placed in the reference department* (Newcastle, 1899); Margaret Hambrick, *A Chartist's Library* (London, 1986).

²⁰⁶ Ledger, *Dickens and the Popular Radical Imagination*, p. 44.

²⁰⁷ *Morning Chronicle*, 22 August 1828. *The Times*, 6 February 1829. This absurdity was partially removed by the 1843 Libel Act which stated that in addition to truth the defendant had to prove that publication was 'for the public benefit' Libel Act 1843, c. 96 6 & 7 Vict. For an overview of English libel law in the period see, Peter N Amponash, *Libel Law, Political Criticism, and defamation of Public Figures: the United States, Europe and Australia* (New York, 2004), pp. 41-51.

²⁰⁸ Acland spent time in five different prisons: Bristol, Gloucester, Hull, Bury St Edmunds and the King's Bench Prison. *Report from the Select Committee on Prison Discipline* (House of Commons, 29 July 1850), p. 643.

gallery and the jury and trying to win support by wit and eloquence. Feargus O'Connor's trial for seditious libel heard at York in spring 1840 provides an example of the trial speech at its best. O'Connor, never a shrinking violet and well aware that his words would be widely reported in newspapers as well as recorded for posterity in the transcripts of the trial, relished his opportunity to broadcast his political opinions. He spoke for an impressive five hours in a speech that combined 'the talents of the barrister with those of the platform orator',²⁰⁹ As Paul Pickering has described, the variety of his courtroom eloquence was astonishing: 'interspersing juridical commentary and political polemic with satire, comedy and literary allusion' and delivered in a dramatic style which ranged 'from 'withering scorn' to mockery, mimicry and comedy'.²¹⁰ Clearly the impact of O'Connor's York trial speech depended not only on content but the manner of its performance.²¹¹ O'Connor was inevitably found guilty and sentenced to eighteen months imprisonment and yet his trial and its attendant publicity undoubtedly furthered the Chartist cause.

O'Connor would star in another high profile political trial in spring 1843. In the wake of the plug plot disturbances the previous summer, O'Connor and fifty-eight other Chartists were tried *en masse* at Lancaster Assizes.²¹² Much of the evidence against the Chartists came from the mouths of Cartledge and Griffin, two former Chartists who had betrayed their friends and become witnesses for the Crown. The speeches of two Chartist missionaries who conducted their own defence, George Julian Harney and Jonathan Bairstow, are of particular note. Both men presented their case as a melodrama in which Cartledge and Griffin were cast as the villains of the piece.²¹³ Harney, after informing the courtroom that he would not exchange his present situation with that of Cartledge and Griffin, described in a language which combined gothic horror with pure melodrama how these unnatural creatures would ultimately get their just deserts:

Let them fly from the haunts of their species; and alone, cut off from the sympathies of their fellow creatures ... feast on the rewards of treachery, and rot on the grains of their fiendish falsehood ... there will come a day when they will have their reward; when reflection's sting shall poison all; when the worm of memory shall gnaw at their hearts, and like the Promethean vulture, feast upon their vitals until the conscience stricken wretches shall wither beneath the tortures of conscious guilt, and, dying, shall so down to

²⁰⁹ Epstein, *Lion of Freedom*, p. 211.

²¹⁰ Pickering, *Feargus O'Connor*, pp. 82-6.

²¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 85.

²¹² *Trial of Feargus O'Connor*; Gammage, *History*, pp. 236-7.

²¹³ For information on the subsequent lives of Cartledge and Griffin see Paul A. Pickering 'Betrayal and exile: a forgotten Chartist experience', in Paul A. Pickering and Michael T. Davis (eds.) *Unrespectable Radicals? Popular Politics in the Age of Reform* (Aldershot, 2007).

the grave without the love of wife or child, countryman or friend, to shed a tear to their memories.²¹⁴

Jonathan Bairstow's defence speech (Extract 5 pp. 209-10) similarly denounced Cartledge and Griffin in the language of sensational fiction, describing how they appeared before him as inhuman zombies 'with bloodless lips and unmoved countenance'.²¹⁵ Harney and Bairstow's language borrowed from the gothic fiction of Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein* (1818), a style which would have resonated with many of those present in the courtroom.²¹⁶

In a courtroom setting, the heart-wrenching story could be similarly dramatic and assist the defendant's case. Later during his trial speech, Jonathan Bairstow gave an account of his life story, couched in the melodramatic formula of the poor but honest working man who, having witnessed the woe and suffering of his class, sought only to aid them in their struggle. He described how as a young child he worked in a mill before becoming a Chartist lecturer at the age of eighteen. Bairstow then recounted, with great pathos, the impact of his arrest on his family, describing how he has left behind: 'a weeping wife shedding bitter and scalding tears over the sod beneath which lies our departed and only off-spring'.²¹⁷ It would be interesting to know how Bairstow conducted himself during this speech. Did he pace the floor and make direct eye contact with the jury? How did he hold his body? Did he clasp his arms and raise his eyes heavenwards when describing his grief? When recounting the loss of a child theatrical displays of grief were appropriate and perhaps expected. Such information is of course lacking in the verbatim transcript, and thus lost to the historian. We do know however that his performance moved the judge. Several days later, when summing up the evidence, the judge referred to Bairstow's speech as a 'very powerful address'.²¹⁸

Conclusion

Popular political oratory underwent significant changes during the Chartist years as various reform movements and pressure groups utilised the platform to foment political and moral change. As public speaking expanded beyond its traditional arenas of the stage,

²¹⁴ *Trial of Feargus O'Connor*, p. 238.

²¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 272.

²¹⁶ The language of gothic horror was often found in the rhetoric of Chartism, for example a letter sent to the 1839 Chartist Convention from an Eaglesham Chartist complained of the 'the vampire effects of the accursed Factory system', see above p.172.

²¹⁷ *Trial of Feargus O'Connor*, pp. 273-5, Chase, *Chartism*, pp. 240-1

²¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 382.

the law courts and the pulpit oratory, it became increasingly populist in style and tone. By the 1860s the most successful speakers were not classically trained orators but those who spoke in a natural, conversational manner. The American temperance speaker, John Gough, the anti-slavery lecturer, George Thompson, and the charismatic preachers Spurgeon and Dawson, were praised precisely because they made each member of the audience feel that a friend was addressing them personally.²¹⁹ This shift from the elaborate and artificial to the direct and straightforward was a consequence of the democratisation of public speaking and the participation of a large number of speakers without classical training in oratory and rhetoric. Rather than parodying artificial classical oratory, the popular political platform embraced popular culture and spoke in a language that was both entertaining and accessible. Audiences too had changed and were more inclined to listen critically and challenge opinions with which they disagreed. The Baptist minister Benjamin Godwin, writing in 1855, described how over the last 30 years ‘among hearers there has been less of a disposition to take everything on trust and a greater tendency to think and enquire for themselves, “what is truth.”’²²⁰

Chartist, free trade, temperance and anti-slavery lecturers satisfied this appetite for critical engagement with the facts while simultaneously appealing to the people’s desire for entertainment. Successful political oratory was much more than just spoken words and the best orators were total performers who used expression, pitch, pace, gestures, props, and audience interaction to great effect. The entertainment value of political oratory deserves emphasis. Listening to lectures on political, moral, literary or religious topics was a popular pastime and people attended meetings not only from conviction but also out of curiosity. The ability of political lecturers to move sideways into paid lecturing work for other reforming movements, or even into the world of commercial entertainment, illustrates how political oratory was embedded in popular styles of communication.²²¹

²¹⁹ It is significant that Spurgeon became an immensely popular preacher despite not having undertaken specific theological training, see Rosemary Chadwick, ‘Spurgeon, Charles Haddon (1834–1892)’, *ODNB* (Oxford, 2004).

²²⁰ While Godwin was concerned with the reception of sermons the same was true of all types of oratory, Godwin, *Reminiscences*, Vol. I, f. 373.

²²¹ The career of the former Chartist, W. H. Chadwick, demonstrates the permeable barriers between popular lecturing and entertainment. After the demise of Chartism Chadwick married an actress and worked as a popular entertainer offering demonstrations on phrenology, mesmerism and clairvoyance, before a reawakening interest in politics led him towards temperance and liberalism, Edmund and Ruth Frow, ‘William Henry Chadwick’, Saville and Bellamy, *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, Vol. 7, pp. 53–55.

Chapter five extracts

Extract 1: The Rev. J. R. Stephens, Peep Green, October 1838

I speak to men to-day who have shaken off the sleep of ages, and are now awake to their own and their children's rights; men who are come here today to do their work in good serious earnest ' Our forefathers have set up land marks – land marks of law – land marks of right, land marks of liberty; these landmarks we are determined to have restored (Cheers) We stand upon our old rights – we seek no change – we say give us the good old laws of England unchanged (Cheers) They shall not be changed (Cheers) They shall not be changed (Cheers) The laws of our fore-elders , and what are those laws? What is the constitution by which we seek to abide? (Magna Carta) – Aye Magna Carta. The good old laws of English freedom – free meetings- freedom of speech – freedom of workshops – freedom of homesteads – free and happy firesides, and no workhouses (cheers) English laws do not allow workhouses (Cheers)' ...-'The law of England says, that every man who is willing to work shall have a free home and a free hearth, and be as happy in it as the monarch on his throne – (loud cheers) – and if he cannot work, or if there be no work for him to do, or if he have no strength to work, or if he be maimed, or halt, or blind, or fatherless, or destitute, or desolate, then justice, not charity – but justice provides that he shall have a not less happy home than if he did work. (cheers)

NS, 16 October 1838

Extract 2: George Julian Harney's funeral oration for Holberry

O! for gold uncounted, for power unlimited, for the wealth of Croesus, or the sceptre of Caesars, I would not have that man's blood on my head.

If nothing short of his blood would satisfy them, why the mockery of sentencing him to imprisonment? Four years of torture, two of which have been sufficient to consummate the horrid tragedy! O! possessed I the power to give utterance to the thoughts swelling within my breast: could I launch the thunders of eloquence against the heads of the destroyers of Holberry, I would rouse ye to men of more than common mould; my words should make

the very stones
To rise against earth tyrants

And the cry of Holberry and justice ringing through the land should strike the death knell of tyranny. Desolated empires and slaughtered myriads have preserved their names from oblivion, but will not in a future and better age save them from execration, - whilst with the Tells and Tylers of the earth, the name of Holberry will be associated, venerated and adored.'

Swear as I now swear that neither persecution, no scorn, nor calumny – neither bolts, nor bars, nor chains, nor racks, nor gibbets, nor terrors of the scaffold, shall sever us from our principles affright us from our duty, or cause us to leave the onward path of freedom. But that, come weal, come woe, we swear, with hearts uplifted to the throne of eternal justice, to have retribution for the death of Holberry.²²²

NS, 2 July 1842.

Extract 3: George Thompson, 1842

Let us pay a friendly visit to the man who preaches this doctrine, and let us see whether he lives up to it. For the beauty of preaching, is that which is by practice. Let us go and dine with him at his town house, at seven, just after he has left the House of Lords, where he has silenced Lord Radnor

²²² Note the Shakespearean echoes of this funeral oration. Harney is clearly channelling Mark Antony in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*.

by crying,—"Don't be dependent on foreigners for your supplies ...- alighting at his door, which, perhaps is opened by a foreign footman – (laughter) – you wipe your feet upon a mat made of Russian hemp (don't be dependent on foreigners) – loud laughter – Over your head burns a hall-lamp fed by oil from the polar seas, and supplied with a wick made from American slave-grown cotton - (don't be dependent on foreigners) ...

Let us go down to dinner. It is spread upon a table of Spanish Mahogany. The tureens and vegetable dishes are from Dresden. The turtle is from Camanas (no Sliding Scale or fixed duty for Turtle) The contents of the castors are all foreign. The delicious wines are all foreign. The side dishes are foreign, sent up by a French cook. The tongue, is Rein Deer. The Boar's head from Germany. The dessert comes on. The olives are from Mount Lebanon. The figs are from Turkey. The raisins are from Malaga. The Dates from Syria. The apples from New York. The Grapes from Portugal. The preserved Ginger from Jamaica. The Nuts from Italy. The Pomegranates from Egypt. The Prunes from France. The Oranges from Lisbon.

George Thompson, *Lecture on the Corn Laws, 7 Jan 1842, Carlisle*, pp. 15-16.

Extract 4: Durham Agricultural Protection Society, February 1844.

(Mr Crofton - chairman) the meeting was called for the purpose of forming a body to 'suppress the evil influences of that unconstitutional body who call themselves the "Anti-Corn Law League," and whose object was the destruction of the British farmer.'

(Mr Townsend) 'Perhaps I may be expected to make some allusion to the Holy Land, the people of which, the chosen people, were undoubtedly supported by their own agriculture, and yet were ruined at the last. I beg the meeting to understand me. I do not say that attention to agriculture ... will make a nation permanently prosperous, if it betrays its trust and forsake God, and break his laws ... one great lesson we may learn from history is, that whatever be our attention either to agriculture or commerce, if we forsake God, God will forsake us.'

'I have stated to you that I am old enough to remember the first French revolution. Let me mention further what took place at that period ... the most disastrous period of our history. The Habeas Corpus Act suspended – Ireland in rebellion – defeat on the Continent – a mutiny at the Nore – and the people excited to madness by the introduction of Jacobin principles; - everything seemed to be at hazard – all appeared to be going! But our land remained: our landlords continued firm; and the land was able to meet that dreadful debt, which is but the high price we have to pay for that which is invaluable, namely our national independence (loud cheers and hissing.²²³)

'There is but one country which is the leaven, so to speak, of all the other nations, by its high principles. That country is our own; and I say emphatically, let us not tamper with the greatness of England (cheers).

Report of the Speeches delivered at the meeting of the landowners and farmers of the county of Durham, held at Durham on Tuesday February 20 1844 (Durham Agricultural Protection Society, 1844).

Extract 5: Jonathan Bairstow, Lancaster Assizes, March 1843

These men were brought up in my presence, and, with bloodless lips and unmoved countenance, ejaculated with terms of cold indifference ... such gross and malicious misconstructions of statements.'

'Judge of a man like myself, who, being inured of the age of ten, and now but twenty-two years of age; for the last four years engaged as a public lecturer in connection with the Chartist movement; and, therefore could not but sympathize with the working men.'

'If seeing poverty, and starvation, and mendicancy stalking through the streets, if, with all these facts before us, we should feel excited, and should, at times, verge into warm and impassioned language, then, gentlemen, you are to judge of that language' ... 'For there are times gentlemen,

²²³ Chartists and Leaguers were present in the audience

when, whatever may be our attachment to the law, judgement is almost overbalanced and overpowered by feeling and passion.'

'I have ever pursued a straight-forward and peaceable, but determined course, while endeavouring to make the principles of the Charter become the law of the land'

'I have left a weeping wife shedding bitter and scalding tears over the sod beneath which lies our departed and only off-spring'

'That justice and plenty will, the one rule the population, and the other bless the inhabitants of this sea-girt isle ...I shall feel happy in suffering for that which you may believe to be an infringement of the laws of the country, but which in my soul, and before man and the Creator I believe to be a sincere and peaceful attempt [for the Charter].

Trial of Feargus O'Connor and fifty-eight others, pp. 238; 271-275.

Chapter six: the professional political orator

This chapter explores the extent to which the eloquent and articulate could earn a living from popular political oratory. During the years 1837-60 paid orators, declaiming upon free trade, Chartism, temperance, or anti-slavery, dominated the political platform. Yet the itinerating paid lecturer was the subject of much abuse, censure and snobbery. Such men (and occasionally pioneering women, like the Owenite lecturer Emma Martin) were regarded as rootless malcontents: outsiders who stirred up trouble in the locality before leaving to spread discontent elsewhere. The platform, especially in the guise of the outdoor meeting, was associated in the popular mind with Methodist hysteria and political extremism and was thus deeply unrespectable.¹ Yet despite this engrained hostility, some of the most gifted and tenacious speakers active in the 1830s and 1840s were able to forge long-term careers in public political oratory. This chapter argues that as the frequency and range of lecturing opportunities grew during the Chartist era, oratory became a mainstream tool of political agitation and was no longer the preserve of the political demagogue or religious fanatic. For the first time it was possible for talented, self-taught orators to turn speaking into a profession. The spoken word also acquired a new legitimacy thanks to the itinerant speaking tours of celebrity figures such as Charles Dickens, John Ruskin, Ralph Waldo Emerson and temperance speaker John Gough. Despite the competition posed by cheap print, the spoken address remained an essential tool for political mobilisation and thus no ambitious reforming movement could afford to be without a dedicated band of paid lecturers.

The story of the professionalisation of the platform will be told through a series of biographical studies which cast light upon the broader issues of paid lecturing (training, personality, career structure, payment, gender etc.) and illustrate how the post of lecturer evolved over the Chartist period. The political excitement of the late 1830s and 1840s saw a rapid expansion in paid lecturing posts as all the key reform movements (Chartism, Owenism, anti-slavery, temperance and free trade) employed professional speakers. This chapter traces some of these pioneers beyond the 1840s. The first case studies comprise three middle-ranking Chartist orators, Robert Lowery, Jonathan Bairstow and David Ross. Their career trajectories tell us much about the types of men that were attracted to the trade

¹ For example, many within the anti-slavery movement were opposed to employing paid itinerant agents and holding public meetings out of fear that their cause might 'become associated with the tactics of Henry Hunt and Major Cartwright'. David Brion Davis, 'James Cropper and the British Anti-Slavery Movement, 1823-33', *Journal of Negro History* (1961), p.161

of agitation and underline how, beyond periods of high political unrest, life was precarious for those who sought to earn a living from the platform. The second study focuses on the celebrated anti-slavery orator George Thompson and the League lecturer James Acland. Acland and Thompson operated on a national (and in the case of Thompson international) stage and both were actively involved in political debate until the 1860s and beyond. Their long speaking careers demonstrate how political agitation became increasingly professionalised during the Chartist period and how the lecture tour became a mainstream tool for political mobilisation.

There were very few paid female orators in this period, which raises interesting questions on the masculinity of the platform and the extent to which oratory was primarily a manly pursuit. Did female access to the platform grow or conversely narrow in the Chartist period, and what factors encouraged pioneering women to speak in public? The third group of case studies will attempt to answer these questions. The speaking careers of the Owenite lecturer Emma Martin, who toured Britain extensively in the early 1840s; the temperance and literary lecturer Clara Lucas Balfour, who first began addressing meetings in the 1840s; and the temperance speaker Jessie Craigen, active in the 1860s, will all be considered. Besides shifts in the gendering of the lecture platform one of the most noticeable differences between lecturing in the 1830s and lecturing in the 1860s was the growth and commercialisation of the lecture platform. By the end of the nineteenth century Charles Haddon Spurgeon was able to claim (possibly with some weariness) that ‘all society might be divided into "Lecturer and the Lectured.”’² The final group of case studies will consider three orators who were able to capitalise on this popular appetite for lecturing. The post-Chartist careers of Henry Vincent and Thomas Cooper and the career trajectory of the American temperance activist John Gough demonstrate how many of those who came to prominence on the political stage were subsequently instrumental in shaping the popular commercial lecture.

The rise of the paid itinerant lecturer

As chapter one argues, the precedents for itinerant speaking can be found within Nonconformity, the anti-slavery movement, the London Corresponding Society and the trade union practice of tramping in times of slump and depression. While the use of lecture circuits and town hall and county meetings stretched back into the eighteenth

² C. H. Spurgeon, *Sermons in candles: being two lectures upon the illustrations which may be found in common candles* (London, 1890), p. 7

century, what was novel about the late 1830s and 1840s was the number of paid itinerant speakers. Traditionally radical political movements were headed by a ‘gentleman leader’: a pattern established by Major Cartwright, Sir Francis Burdett, and Henry Hunt.³ Such men required no pecuniary rewards and thus their motives were above suspicion, while their superior education, social position and expansive leisure time made them natural leaders. The Chartist leaders, Feargus O’Connor and Ernest Jones and the visionary Robert Owen, fit snugly into the tradition of gentlemanly leadership. Yet both O’Connor and Jones were not immune to accusations of profiteering at the expense of the working man. In 1854 Jones wrote an angry letter to the editor of *Lloyds Weekly Newspaper* in response to a report describing him as a ‘professional agitator’. He indignantly claimed that for his services to the working classes he has ‘never received one sixpence’.⁴ O’Connor too issued regular denials that he took so much as a penny from the labouring classes.

According to the Lancashire radical Samuel Bamford, political lecturing developed into ‘a trade’ in the aftermath of the Peterloo massacre: a view supported by E. P. Thompson who attributed the development of a class of professional agitators to the rise of the radical press. The impressive circulation figures achieved by newspapers such as *Cobbett’s Political Register*, *Poor Man’s Guardian* and *Black Dwarf* permitted, for the first time, full-time radical agitators to earn a living as ‘regional agents, booksellers, and itinerant hawkers’.⁵ Such men were objects of suspicion and maligned by all sections of society.⁶ Bamford, a radical working man, was typical in his criticism of professional agitators:

a set of orators who made a trade of speechifying ... He who produced the greatest excitement, the loudest cheering, and the most violent clappings, was the best orator, and was sure to be engaged and well paid, and in order to produce those manifestations, the wildest and most extravagant rhodomontade would too often suffice. Such speakers quickly got a name; the calls on them were frequent; and they left their work or their business for a more profitable and flattering employment; tramping from place to place hawking their new fangles, and guzzling, fattening, and replenishing themselves at the expense of the simple and credulous multitude.⁷

³ John Belcham and James Epstein, ‘The Nineteenth-Century Gentle Leader Revisited’, *Social History*, Vol. 22 (1997). Chase, *History*, pp. 12-14.

⁴ *Lloyds Weekly Newspaper*, 26 March 1854.

⁵ Thompson, *Making of the Working Class* p. 740. See also chpt. 2, James, *Fiction for the Working Man*.

⁶ Their reputation was not helped by the links between radicalism and pornography, see McCalman, *Radical Underworld*.

⁷ Samuel Bamford, *Passages in the Life of a Radical and Early Days* (2 Vols. London, 1893), Vol. 2, p. 36.

At the other end of the political spectrum aristocratic protectionists too abhorred the use of paid agents and lecturers. In 1844 the Tory *Spectator* attacked the League and the Chartist movement, mocking their:

great staff of officers – minor newspaper writers, “delegates” whose “expenses” are paid, publicans and beer shop-keepers, who let out rooms on hire for meetings ... hand bill printers and many others who are too much interested in the movement to let it flag more than they can help.⁸

Not surprisingly, the ‘Anti-League’, a protectionist body founded to counter the work of the ACLL, had grave concern over whether or not to employ their own political lecturers to counter League propaganda.⁹

Chartism too struggled between the recognition that paid professional speakers and a permanent executive were essential for the vitality and growth of Chartism and an inherent distrust of a paid leadership. The *People’s Charter* (1838) explicitly endorsed paid MPs, recognising that if working men were to be politicians they would require payment.¹⁰ Two years later the NCA plan of organisation formalised rates payable to Chartist missionaries and the Convention delegates.¹¹ Yet rank-and-file Chartists were suspicious of the paid agitator. The *Northern Star* initially did its best to placate fears with a series of glowing reports. Two months after Jonathan Bairstow was appointed as a paid Chartist lecturer he was eulogised in a leading article:

We have very narrowly watched Mr. BAIRSTOW since his appointment to the honourable and important office of West Riding lecturer; and we say, with truth, that his whole career has been as honourable to himself and his constituents as it has been to the cause. ... We hear of no dissipation, no attachment to one spot above another, no neglect, no disappointment, no bravado, *nothing to take a feather’s weight from the Charter*.¹²

The honeymoon period did not last: at the 1842 Chartist Convention a squabble broke out over accusations that John Parry had derided Chartist missionaries as ‘pothouse

⁸ Republished in the *Glasgow Herald*, 18 November 1844.

⁹ George L. Mosse, ‘The Anti-League’, *Economic History Review*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (1947), 134-142.

¹⁰ The Charter recommended that MPs were to be paid £500 per annum, ‘thus enabling an honest tradesman, working man, or other person, to serve a constituency, when taken from his business to attend to the interests of the country’, *The People’s Charter being the outline of an Act to provide for the just representation of the People of Great Britain and Ireland* (3rd ed. London, 1838), point 4, p. 31.

¹¹ *NS*, 1 August 1841. Clause 22 of the NCA plan specified wages and travel and subsistence payable to the NCA executive.

¹² *NS*, 14 November 1840.

politicians' who squandered their wages in low beer houses.¹³ The fear that paid missionaries would fritter away their wages on drink was evident in the move to make all Chartist missionaries take the teetotal pledge.¹⁴ In the months that followed the 1842 Convention, a battle raged on the pages of the *Northern Star*, as the editor, William Hill, led an attack on the latest NCA balance sheet alleging that the executive had claimed inflated and dishonest expenses.¹⁵ John Leach, Jonathan Bairstow and Peter McDouall, in particular, were singled out for exorbitant travelling expenses and asked to explain themselves to readers of the *Northern Star*. There was a suggestion that some lecturers had deceptively claimed money both centrally and locally. John Campbell, the NCA treasurer, resigned and emigrated to America under an aura of suspicion, but the storm failed to subside. O'Connor eventually waded into the argument, sacked William Hill and defended the NCA executive, pointing out that 'you cannot get working men to live without wages'.¹⁶

The problem of financing humble politicians would not be solved until seventy years later in 1911 when MPs were for the first time funded by the British state. Until then gifted men like George Thompson might, by hard work and talent, reach Parliament but unless they could secure sponsorship their sojourn would be brief. Despite these deep-seated reservations the number of professional political lecturers grew. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the political orator was so familiar a figure that Thomas Carlyle penned a fifty page tirade against stump oratory that ended by urging young men to avoid at all costs the lure of the platform.¹⁷

The rise of the professional paid lecturer did not spell the end of the gentlemanly leader. Often for strategic reasons pressure groups operated a hierarchy of speakers. Brian Harrison identified three main categories of temperance professionals in the period up to 1872: the part-time gentleman amateur, the full-time temperance agent and the freelance professional.¹⁸ Owen Ashton has made a similar categorisation of Chartist orators.¹⁹ The ACLL similarly employed speakers suited to a wide range of social groups while

¹³ Parry denied the allegations in a letter to the editor of the *Northern Star*, *NS*, 30 April 1842.

¹⁴ The Durham missionary John Deegan was required to take the pledge, *NS*, 12 September 1840, and the desirability for all Chartist agents to be teetotal was raised at the 1842 Convention, *NS*, 30 April 1842.

¹⁵ For details on the NCA Account controversy see *NS*, 12 November 1842; 19 November 1842; 26 November 1842; 3 December 1842; 7 January 1843; 4 February 1843.

¹⁶ Chase, *Chartism*, pp. 238-9. Paul A. Pickering, 'Chartism and the 'Trade of Agitation' in Early Victorian Britain', in Roberts, *People's Charter*, pp. 29-30.

¹⁷ Thomas Carlyle, *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, V, 'The Stump Orator' (London, 1850).

¹⁸ Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians*, p. 143.

¹⁹ Ashton, 'Orators and Oratory in the Chartist movement', pp. 52-7.

encouraging unpaid gentlemanly supporters of free trade to give gratuitous lecturers.²⁰ In the top tier of the League's talent was Sidney Smith and A. W. Paulton (a former medical student from Manchester) who became the movement's first paid speaker. In the middle of the social spectrum was James Acland, at the bottom were lecturers employed to persuade and convince the operative class. These included a moral force Chartist called John Murray, an Irish radical called John Finnegan and, for a short time, the Halifax Association supported an operative from Bacup called Heywood Hargreaves who itinerated in the townships surrounding Halifax.²¹ Pay was graded according to social status; Sidney Smith was paid £270 per annum, whilst the humble born John Murray was offered only £80.²² The hierarchy of speakers was also evident in ACLL social events. Lower class lecturers such as Murray and Finnegan would not be permitted to share a platform with the League's elite. For example at the Great League Banquet in Manchester in January 1840, a separate event on the consecutive night was held for the operative class.²³

Being a paid agent had implications for social status. As we have seen in chapter two, itinerancy was frowned upon by the settled portion of society. To be paid for advocating a set of opinions was deemed vulgar, especially when speeches were heavily peppered with slogans and clichéd expressions.²⁴ Worse still, opponents claimed that payment undermined integrity. The disparaging idea that a person's conscience could be bought and sold was forcefully expounded in an article published in the *Northern Star*, called the 'Political Pedlar', in June 1842. While ostensibly a thinly veiled attack on the ex-Chartists who joined the Complete Suffrage Union (CSU), its central argument of how easily the paid speaker could strategically drop or adopt principles and thereby be 'all things to all men', was widely applicable and damaging to orators who moved between causes.²⁵ The tension between paid advocacy and moral integrity troubled George Thompson throughout his long career as a political orator, as we shall see below.

Why were so many people attracted to itinerant lecturing despite the hostility and snobbery? The reasons are likely to be as diverse as the personalities of those who took up

²⁰ The *Bradford Observer* held that in any sizeable town gentlemen of worthy talents, if respectfully invited, would gratuitously lecture in return for only their travel expenses, *BO*, 16 April 1840.

²¹ WYAS: Halifax, Halifax Anti-Corn Law Association, HAS/B/11/1. Pickering and Tyrrell, *People's Bread*, p. 76.

²² Brown, 'The Chartists and the Anti-Corn Law League', p. 355, fn. 4.

²³ *Leeds Mercury*, 18 January 1840.

²⁴ The unimaginative use of slogans was a fault commonly shared by the less talented radical and temperance agents. J. Ewing Ritchie derided the 'stereotyped phrases' used by many London stump orators, Davin 'Socialist Infidels and Messengers of Light', p. 168.

²⁵ An attack probably aimed at Henry Vincent, R. K. Philp and other defectors to the CSU, *NS*, 4 June 1842.

lecturing. For some people, the desire to speak was akin to a religious calling. The Chartist, Robert Lowery, best exemplifies this type of speaker. Lowery likened early Chartist oratory to ‘the eloquence of enthusiastic faith’ and attributed his dedication to Chartism to his utter conviction that he was right and before long everyone would be of his opinion.²⁶ Brian Harrison’s work on temperance lecturing also confirms the shared sense of mission between employing body and lecturer: ‘the relationship ... was never a mere cash nexus; both employer and employee were joint participants in the same crusade’.²⁷ This sense of fighting for an honourable cause compensated for the loneliness and mental and physical strains of lecturing. For the intelligent and articulate the job was also attractive because it was varied, involved travel and was, above all, intellectually satisfying.

While shared conviction played its part, pragmatism and the need to support a family offered further motivation. At the start of George Thompson’s first speaking position with the Anti-Slavery Agency, he sent a letter to his new wife entreating her not to worry about financial matters as his ‘wits [were] daily at work to devise a means of setting [her] free from pecuniary difficulty’.²⁸ In a similar vein the Bradford temperance lecturer Thomas Worsnop revealed in his autobiography that he took up lecturing primarily as a means of feeding his wife and eight children as: ‘there was a depression of trade in Bradford, and we were stinted to earn seven shillings a week; but that sum would not be enough for my family, and a wonderful thought entered my head – I thought I would turn travelling temperance lecturer’.²⁹ For other speakers the desire for public acclaim must surely have played a part. Lecturing, as Thomas Whittaker noted, was a useful stepping-stone into public life and one suspects that James Acland was motivated not only by his dislike of Tory corruption but also by ambition and desire for public recognition.³⁰

The majority of lecturers were extrovert and optimistic. A useful personality trait for the itinerant speaker was sociability and the ability to strike up friendships easily. The most effective speakers were self-publicists who did not shirk from loudly announcing their arrival in a new town or village. The temperance speaker John Clegg Booth, for example, would wander the streets singing temperance ditties to the tune of ‘I’d be a

²⁶ Harrison and Hollis, *Robert Lowery*, pp. 96-7.

²⁷ Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians*, p. 145.

²⁸ REAS/2/1/2, letter 24 Sept 1831.

²⁹ Francis Butterfield, *The Life and Sayings of Thomas Worsnop* (Bingley, 1870), pp. 22-3.

³⁰ Whittaker, *Life’s Battles*, p. 373.

Butterfly' to gather interest.³¹ His co-worker Thomas Whittaker described how in the early days of temperance lecturing the agent was by necessity 'bellman, chairman, speaker and everything', which suggests that the profession was suited only to those with a thick skin.³² Constant travelling and the mental strain of lecturing, often on a daily basis, meant that itinerant lecturing also demanded a robust constitution and a large reserve of mental and physical energy. Life on the road could be very lonely, especially for those with young families whom they could only hope to see intermittently. Thomas Whittaker calculated that during his first seven years of lecturing he spent less than twenty weeks in total by his own fireside. Indeed when called home to the deathbed of his first wife he had not seen her at all in the previous seven months.³³ One can't help but conclude that being married to an itinerant speaker must have been very trying. Some peripatetic lecturers, such as George Jacob Holyoake and Thomas Cooper, continued lecturing well into old age, despite the inconveniences inflicted upon their spouses.³⁴

It took a strong character to deal with ongoing harassment and petty obstructions meted out to the itinerant agitator. League lecturers, Chartist and Owenite missionaries and temperance advocates were routinely denied access to lecture rooms and were imprisoned on trumped up charges. Lecturers would sometimes find that lodging houses and inns refused to let rooms to controversial speakers. In Dewsbury in August 1839, for example, Bairstow returned to his lodgings to find that his landlady was no longer willing to accommodate him.³⁵ Seasoned lecturers, who were used to petty obstruction and harassment, turned the table on their opponents and publicised abuses of authority by constables, mayors or magistrates in their newspapers and speeches. Sidney Smith's poor treatment in Wakefield and harassment by the Louth Magistrates were highlighted in the League press,³⁶ while George Binns, a Chartist lecturer, creatively immortalised his unfair treatment at the hands of the Darlington magistrates in the form of a poem.³⁷ Interference by magistrates and constables could inadvertently publicise a meeting and win the

³¹ J. S. Balmer, *A Biographical Sketch of John Clegg Booth* (London, 1874), p. 43.

³² Whittaker, *Life's Battles*, p. 112.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 241;243.

³⁴ Indeed Cooper's wife was forced to move in with her sister 'for we had entirely broken up our home in 1861, and have never had one since', Cooper, *Life of Thomas Cooper*, p. 388.

³⁵ *NS*, 17 August 1839.

³⁶ Sidney Smith described how, after beating a Louth protectionist during a public debate in April 1839, the same man, in his official capacity as a magistrate, later arrested and fined him, *ACLC*, 30 April 1839.

³⁷ *NS*, 9 May 1840. 'To the Magistrates who committed me to prison under the Darlington Cattle Act for addressing a Chartist Meeting', *NS* 9 May 1840; First appeared in Russian anthology, Yuri V. Kovalev, *An Anthology of Chartist Literature* (Moscow, 1956), reproduced in Peter Scheckner, *An Anthology of Chartist poetry: poetry of the British working class, 1830s-1850s* (London, 1989), p. 119

sympathy of the local population. If no indoor rooms could be hired, lecturers might hold their meeting outdoors on wasteland or in the field of a sympathetic farmer. The novelty of controversial outdoor gatherings generated interest and often a crowd of curious observers. When the magistrates forbade the free trade lecturer John Murray to speak in Limerick in 1840, a great deal of sympathy was generated in the local population and, after the ruling was overturned, he had a large and enthusiastic audience.³⁸

Most lecturers did not shirk from direct confrontation with their political rivals: indeed many relished the opportunity for heated public debate. The sentiments expressed by John Shearman in a letter to his League employers in April 1839 were typical. Shearman noted that in Doncaster all the working men were Chartists and he was rather looking forward to ‘a row and scramble’ at the next meeting.³⁹ League and Chartist lecturers repeatedly clashed at stormy public meetings throughout the North East and Yorkshire with each group hoping to impose and carry their party’s resolution.⁴⁰ Given the noise and confusion, a loud voice and dogged determination to be heard were other essential characteristics of the public lecturer. Besides verbal abuse, itinerant lecturers had to cope with acts of physical violence that ranged from the petty and unpleasant to serious assault. The Chartist missionary Jonathan Bairstow reported to the 1842 Convention that he had been threatened with fire arms, assailed with brick-bats and on one occasion a dead cat.⁴¹ More seriously, George Thompson narrowly avoided serious harm from a Boston mob during his first lecture tour of America.⁴² James Acland was less fortunate and was badly mauled during a lecture in Saxmondham in May 1840 when a gang of roughs, hired by local landowners, forcibly removed him from the platform. It was testimony to his fighting spirit that he refused to press charges and continued his tour.⁴³

As the pool of speaking talent expanded, lecturing became more professionalised both in terms of its organisation and in the calibre of the lecturer. Across all movements political lecturers were responsible for their own training: keeping up to date with political arguments, memorising statistics and utilising official published sources, such as

³⁸ *BO*, 10 December 1840.

³⁹ *ACLL* letter book, f. 157, April 1839.

⁴⁰ Brown, ‘Chartists and the Anti-Corn Law League’, 342-371.

⁴¹ *NS*, April 30, 1842.

⁴² C. Duncan Rice, ‘The Anti-Slavery Mission of George Thompson to the United States, 1834-1835’, *American Studies*, Vol. 2, Issue 1 (April 1968), pp. 22-3; Thompson’s obituary notice written by William Lloyd Garrison, *New York Times*, 14 October 1878.

⁴³ *ACLL* letter book, f. 341, letter 8 May 1840; *BO*, 21 May 1840. Acland wrote to the League HQ saying ‘pray put legal proceedings out of the question until get my head broke. We must win by moral force’, cited in McCord, *Anti-Corn Law League*, p. 57.

parliamentary reports and debates. Not only were lecturers expected to know the key facts of the argument inside out, they were also expected to excel in the mechanics of public speaking. Thus to become a lecturer for a man with only rudimentary schooling required persistence, hard work and sheer determination. The self-taught orator was part of the broader culture of adult education and self-improvement that was gaining ground in this period. George Thompson, Thomas Cooper and Robert Lowery were all products of working-class autodidact culture and firm believers in hard work and self-improvement.⁴⁴ By his late teens, to remedy his lack of formal schooling, George Thompson had embarked on a programme of self-education and improvement. He joined various debating societies and began attending public meetings on historical and political subjects and, as his reputation as a public speaker grew, he obtained professional training from an elocutionist.⁴⁵ For Thompson, oratory was an escape route from the ill-paid drudgery of the counting house where he had been employed since the age of twelve. Training for his future occupation as a political activist was largely self-directed. At his interview with the Anti-Slavery Agency Committee in 1831, Thompson confessed that, although he did not currently know the finer points of the anti-slavery doctrine, he could guarantee that, given the right books, he could master the arguments in a few weeks.⁴⁶ For the public polemicist natural eloquence, the ability to rapidly absorb information and construct an argument were more important skills than a grounding in classical oratory or specialist knowledge.

The importance of self-directed study, hard work and determination is also illustrated by the trajectory of the indefatigable agitator George Jacob Holyoake.⁴⁷ Like Thompson, Holyoake had little formal schooling and his appointment as an Owenite missionary was based on his prowess as a teacher at the Birmingham Mechanics Institute, rather than his knowledge of socialism or formal educational achievements. During his long career, vividly described in his autobiography *Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life*, Holyoake earned money by lecturing and journalism.⁴⁸ Holyoake started his speaking career with the Owenites; he later joined the Chartist movement (serving on the council of the last NCA executive) and after Chartism lectured in support of secularism and the cooperative movement. His importance lay not in his own oratory (he was hampered by a

⁴⁴ Jonathan Rose, *Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven and London, 2002).

⁴⁵ Thompson was reputed to have been trained in the art of oratory by John Thelwall but I am unable to confirm this from other contemporary sources. Stephen, *Anti Slavery Recollections*, p. 150.

⁴⁶ Stephen, *Anti Slavery Recollections*, p. 150.

⁴⁷ Lee E. Grugel, *George Jacob Holyoake: A study in the Evolution of a Victorian Radical* (Philadelphia, 1976).

⁴⁸ Edward Royle, 'Holyoake, George Jacob (1817–1906)', *ODNB*, 2004.

weak voice suited only to the indoor lecture)⁴⁹ but in his interest in the technicalities of lecturing, demonstrated by his much-reprinted guide, *Rudiments of Public Speaking and Debate* (1852). Holyoake was an early supporter of working men who chose to become professional lecturers, arguing that ‘imparting knowledge is of as much value and of as much dignity as any trade’ and that ‘the teacher deserves good wages as much as any weaver or mechanic in the kingdom’. He suggested that the public lecturer should be paid two guineas per lecture including travel and subsistence: making the exchange honourable and transparent.⁵⁰

Lecturers were on the whole paid at a similar scale to that which they could earn at their usual trade. Thus Chartist county missionaries were paid around £2 per week from which they would be expected to pay all their travelling and subsistence expenses.⁵¹ Early temperance lecturers and Owenite missionaries were poorly remunerated for their efforts: Holyoake earned sixteen shillings a week in 1839, and Thomas Whittaker’s autobiography reveals how during his early years as a temperance lecturer he never earned more than thirty shillings a week.⁵² This was at a time when a skilled artisan like a tailor could earn around £1 a week and an adult male cotton spinner around one pound and five shillings.⁵³ Hospitality from local supporters and networks of family and friends occasionally provided free meals and a bed for the night, and travelling costs might be kept to a minimum by epic walking feats. But it is certain that Chartist, Owenite and temperance lecturers were not amply rewarded for their efforts despite suspicions to the contrary. As George Jacob Holyoake ruefully noted, ‘Socialist salaries were not of a nature to tempt any one to act against his conscience’.⁵⁴

Paid lecturers and agents were the public face of reform movements and it is not surprising that they were subject to a high degree of control. This was particularly true of organisations that attracted respectable, middle-class support like the anti-slavery, temperance and free trade movements. Temperance agents were expected to submit monthly (occasionally fortnightly) reports of progress and the minute books of the national

⁴⁹ According to a reference written by F. Hollick in support of Holyoake’s application to become an Owenite missionary, he did not have a strong voice, ‘His oratorical powers, and physical capabilities I know are enough for ordinary lecturing, if not adapted to large & noisy assemblies’, Bishopsgate Institute, George Jacob Holyoake Papers, Holyoake 1/2, undated letter [c. 1840].

⁵⁰ National Co-operative Archive, Manchester, George Jacob Holyoake collection, George Jacob Holyoake, *On Lecturing: Its Conditions and Character* (undated [c. 1851], printed for private circulation)

⁵¹ While employed as Durham Missionary, Mr Deegan was paid two pounds a week, from which he had to pay all travelling expenses, *NS*, 12 September 1840.

⁵² Holyoake, *Sixty Years of an Agitator’s Life*, p. 134. Whittaker, *My Life’s Battle*, p. 167.

⁵³ For a note on contemporary money, prices and wages, see Chase, *Chartism*, p. 403.

⁵⁴ Holyoake, *Sixty Years of an Agitator’s Life*, p. 134.

temperance associations illustrate how closely they were watched: travel expenses were rigorously scrutinised, and missed engagements, or time unaccounted for, would be queried.⁵⁵ Yet for all this supervision the actual content of a temperance lecture was left to the agent, who had free reign to indulge his passion; whether for statistics, poetry, singing or scientific experiment.⁵⁶ This was in contrast to the five paid anti-slavery agents appointed in the summer of 1831 who were provided with a detailed letter of instruction prior to their appointment. This letter included a list of recommended reading and set out the key doctrine of the movement, ‘that colonial slavery is a crime in the sight of God, and ought to be immediately and for ever abolished’.⁵⁷ Agency lecturers also received instructions on the art of lecturing, which included step-by-step lecture plans and advice on style, quotations, anecdotes and dealing with insult.⁵⁸ Once a lecturer had proved his worth the reins were loosened. Hence by the time George Thompson became the first paid agent of the Glasgow Emancipation Society in December 1833, his reputation was such that he was pretty much allowed free rein.⁵⁹

Agents employed by the League were similarly scrutinised, particularly those of lower class origins like John Murray, whose frequent letters to League headquarters illustrate just how closely he was supervised while on tour in Ireland.⁶⁰ League agents whose oratory was deemed to be dangerously radical or inflammatory caused great concern to the League leadership. The secretary of the Leeds Anti-Corn Law Association, George Grieg, was often in trouble for expressing radical sentiments, especially during debates with local Chartists, so much so that the *Northern Star* in February 1840 gleefully reported to its readers that ‘the Whigs were quite panic struck’ by a speech delivered by Grieg in Heckmondwike. Greig’s speech was allegedly so radical in its denunciation of the ‘indolent landed aristocracy’ and the ‘abominable’ new poor law, that the leading Chartists of the area did not believe it necessary to further question his sincerity.⁶¹ Acland too

⁵⁵ Jarvis Crake, Leeds town missionary, was required to give fortnightly progress reports, *Leeds Temperance Society Annual Report 1845*, p. 10.

⁵⁶ J. C. Booth, for example, was fond of singing and ‘often engaged his audience in the singing of temperance melodies’, Balmer, *Biographical Sketch*, p. 37.

⁵⁷ A phrase that echoes through George Thompson’s early anti-slavery speeches see, for example, *The Substance of a speech delivered in the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel, Irwell Street, Monday August 13th 1832*, p. 4.

⁵⁸ See ‘Letter of Instructions’, June, 1831, pp. 136-141 and ‘Private instructions to lecturers’, pp. 253-258 reproduced in Stephen, *Anti-Slavery Recollections*.

⁵⁹ According to Ronald Gifford, The Glasgow Emancipation Society was formed as a way of funding George Thompson’s participation in the trans-Atlantic anti-slavery movement. Gifford ‘George Thompson’, p. 102

⁶⁰ See for example the ACLL Letter book, ff. 642; 649; 652; 657.

⁶¹ McCord, *Anti-Corn Law League*, pp. 59-60. *NS*, 22 February 1850. Perhaps George Grieg’s radicalism hampered his post-League career. A series of letters held at the Manchester Local Studies and Archives

caused concern to the League leadership by his overtly radical language, which had a tendency to shock respectable middle-class audiences who were vital to the campaign.⁶² Acland's inflammatory oratory was attacked in the *Quarterly Review*, and he was even implicated in the outbreak of the plug plot riots of 1842.⁶³ The following year, Cobden feared that his practice of writing letters to local newspaper during contentious by-election campaigns might alarm members of the League Council who were 'apt to be unfavourably impressed with such slap-dash epistles'.⁶⁴

Despite intense scrutiny, being contracted as a salaried agent by a large organisation was often preferable to operating as a freelance lecturer. The security offered by the larger bodies made itinerant lecturing less of a gamble, and agents employed by national bodies acquired a certain status. Employers would pay for room hire, printing, transport, subsistence and accommodation and, should the tour be a failure, they would bear the costs and still pay wages. This is exactly what happened during the first lecture tour organised by the League in spring 1839, which proved to be a 'costly failure'.⁶⁵ Reforming organisations, which employed significant numbers of paid agents, were crucial for professionalising speaking. The temperance movement perhaps did most to strengthen the social position of the itinerant professional lecturer by providing its agents with career structures (there was a natural progression of talent from town missionary, to regional agent, to national celebrity speaker) and by supporting its employees with pensions and life insurance schemes.⁶⁶ In November 1853, for example, a short-lived Temperance Advocates Association was formed with the goal of protecting the interests of advocates. The temperance platform, as Thomas Whittaker claimed in his autobiography, offered a spring-board for gifted men and increasingly women who were 'ambitious of public life'.⁶⁷ The rise from temperance lecturer to bastion of the establishment could be remarkable as Whittaker's own life story illustrates. Whittaker was a factory hand before taking up

reveal that he was not considered for a lecturing post by the National Public School Association despite many prominent ex-Leaguers being attached to the leadership of this cause, Manchester Local Studies and Archives, Manchester, the National Public School Association, M136/2/3/1290-3.

⁶² McCord, *Anti-Corn Law League*, p. 57.

⁶³ See *Quarterly Review*, Vol. LXXI (Dec 1842), pp. 258-9.

⁶⁴ George Wilson papers, letter from Cobden to Wilson, 3 November 1843.

⁶⁵ McCord, *Anti-Corn Law League*, p. 60.

⁶⁶ The 1858 British Temperance League (BTL) minutes record that all agents should have life insurance, half of the premiums being payable by the BTL and half by the employee. University of Central Lancashire Library (UCLAN), Preston, Joseph Livesey Collection, BTL Minutes, 13 Oct 1858; Dawson Burns, *Temperance History*, p. 360.

⁶⁷ Whittaker, *Life's Battles*, p. 373.

temperance advocacy yet, by the time his death in 1899, he had served for many years as mayor of Scarborough and left an estate worth £11,632.⁶⁸

Jonathan Bairstow, Robert Lowery and David Ross

Yet not all talented orators were able to make the transition from the platform to wealth and respectability. The Chartist missionaries Robert Lowery, David Ross and Jonathan Bairstow did not acquire wealth and enduring public recognition. While all three were gifted orators, their lives underline the difficulties inherent in earning a living from oratory beyond periods of great political excitement. Jonathan Bairstow (dates unknown) was a weaver from Queensbury, a small village between Halifax and Bradford. A self-taught man with a great deal of natural eloquence Bairstow, like many radicals, acquired his public speaking expertise via lay preaching. Sparse biographical details of Bairstow's life have survived, but from the pages of the *Northern Star* it is possible to trace Bairstow's career trajectory.⁶⁹ He first appeared described as a 'minister of the gospel' in January 1838 and was praised for a radical lecture delivered at the Queenshead General Baptist School Room.⁷⁰ He is not mentioned again until the following spring, this time in connection with the Queenshead Northern Union, which indicates a growing radicalisation. From then on Bairstow is endlessly reported in the *Northern Star*, initially working alongside Mr Ashton during the summer of 1839 as 'the West Riding Agitating Delegates' before becoming the first paid West Riding Missionary in August 1840.⁷¹ His reputation spread across Derbyshire and the Midlands, and he was lauded as one of the most eloquent Chartist missionaries.⁷²

Like Bairstow, the Manchester (and sometimes Leeds) based Chartist David Ross (dates unknown) also remains a shadowy figure.⁷³ Ross's first public activities in Manchester were in relation to the Catholic Total Abstinence Society and a committee formed in 1839 to protect radical and socialist publishers.⁷⁴ Ross was a public lecturer prior to his involvement in Chartism and it seems likely that his paid work within the

⁶⁸ Mark Clement, 'Whittaker, Thomas (1813–1899)', *ODNB*, 2004.

⁶⁹ Bairstow is also mentioned in Thomas Cooper's autobiography and Gammage's *History*.

⁷⁰ *NS*, 20 January 1838. He is not mentioned again until he addresses a meeting at Northern Union of Queenshead (Queensbury) in April 1839, *NS*, 13 April 1839.

⁷¹ *NS*, 29 June 1839; 29 Jun 1839; 6 July 1839; 22 August 1840.

⁷² Gammage, *History*, pp. 210-11. Bairstow's influence was regional: it is significant that a search of the digitised *Northern Liberator* (1837-1840) generated only one hit, which suggests that he was not well-known in the North East in this period.

⁷³ Snippets of information relating to David Ross's itinerant lecturing career can be found in the preface of his book on hydrophaty. Ross, *Atmopathy and Hydrophaty*.

⁷⁴ Paul A. Pickering, *Chartism and the Chartists in Manchester and Salford* (London, 1995), p. 204.

movement was a mixture of conviction and pragmatism. Ross initially spoke in favour of Corn Law repeal until he was defeated in a public debate against James Leach and won over to Chartism. His rise was impressive. He became the West Riding missionary in 1843, served as a delegate at the 1844 NCA Convention before being elected onto the NCA Executive in spring 1847.⁷⁵ Even during the climatic years of political agitation, most political orators had to supplement their income with the so called 'trades of agitation', which included selling books, newspapers and consumable goods.⁷⁶ Presumably for this reason throughout his Chartist career Ross continued to lecture on non-Chartist topics. In 1843 he lectured in Clitheroe on Elocution and oratory, four years later he lectured in Belfast on elocution, temperance and public health.⁷⁷ Ross's success as a popular lecturer assisted his move away from active Chartism to vegetarianism, temperance and advocacy of the water cure. Ross's interest in medicine was similar to that of the Chartist lecturer, Peter Murray McDouall. Both men supplemented their incomes by administering unorthodox medicine, which had obvious radical appeal in being democratic and open to all.⁷⁸

The lecturing career of the Newcastle Chartist, Robert Lowery (1809-1863), is also revealing. Lowery's autobiography describes how he acquired his public speaking abilities via a small debating society where he learned how to listen to an opponent's argument and formulate a point-by-point refutation. His first experience of speaking in public was the delivery of a toast at a meeting in support of the Polish insurrection, which caused him a great deal of anxiety.⁷⁹ Before long his confidence grew and he addressed numerous radical meetings in the North East and, aided by his growing reputation as an orator, he was nominated as a delegate to the 1839 Chartist Convention. Lowery's commitment to a middle-class radical alliance and the temperance movement led to a bitter rift with Feargus O'Connor, and as a result Lowery drifted away from Chartism in 1842. After working for a while with Sturge's CSU and Lovett's People's League, he spent the rest of his working days as an itinerant agent for the temperance movement.⁸⁰ Lowery, despite his radical past,

⁷⁵ NS 4 July 1840; 11 July 1840; 30 December 1843; 10 February 1844; 6 April 1844; 3 April 1847.

⁷⁶ Pickering, 'Chartism and the 'Trade of Agitation''. James Acland, too supported his *Hull Portfolio* by selling 'Anti-corporate tea', 'Public opinion Coffee', and 'Radical Tobacco', William A. Gunnell (ed.), *Sketches of Hull Celebrities or Memoirs and Correspondence of Alderman Thomas Johnson, and four of his lineal descendants from the year 1640 to 1858* (1876, Hull), p. 463.

⁷⁷ *Belfast News Letter*, 28 September 1847.

⁷⁸ Paul A. Pickering and Stephen Roberts, 'Pills, Pamphlets and Politics: The career of Peter Murray McDouall (1814-54)', *Manchester Region History Review*, Vol. 11 (1997), pp. 34-43.

⁷⁹ Lowery gave a lovely description of how he practised his speech out loud in a field full of sheep. Harrison and Hollis (eds.), *Robert Lowery*, pp. 72-4.

⁸⁰ Brian Harrison, 'Lowery, Robert (1809-1863)', *ODNB*, (Oxford, 2004).

was very well respected in the temperance movement. In 1859, for example, the National Temperance League described him as an ‘indefatigable and useful agent’.⁸¹ As his voice failed and he became increasingly infirm, a public subscription was raised in September 1862 to pay for his passage to Canada to join his daughter. He died there the following August.⁸² Not only did Lowery sustain a long-term career in itinerant lecturing but he also left a detailed and perceptive autobiography which gives intriguing insights into public speaking in this period.⁸³

Lowery’s ability to survive from speechmaking and his move towards respectability (if not wealth and public eminence) is in contrast to the fates of Ross and Bairstow. Ross, after a spell as an elementary school teacher in Leeds, was by 1848 fully occupied with hydropathy and his own invention the ‘Atmopathic’ cure.⁸⁴ His success was such that a leading temperance-publishing house printed his book, *Atmopathy and Hydropathy*.⁸⁵ Encouraged he opened his own hydropathy premises, taking out a large advert in the *Manchester Times* alerting the public to his new establishment ‘at Worcester Street, Hulme’. He also publicised his venture via public lectures at the Manchester Athenaeum.⁸⁶ It seems likely his business struggled; certainly according to the *Manchester Times* in April 1852 his lectures ‘were sparsely attended’.⁸⁷ Ross’s culpability in a scandal concerning a former patient who was allegedly killed by imprudent administration of cold water may also have affected his business.⁸⁸ Certainly after 1852 Ross drops out of public life and it is no longer possible to trace him in the local or national press.⁸⁹ Joseph Constantine, a former assistant at the Manchester hydropathy baths, offers a clue to his disappearance. According to Constantine, Ross lost his business owing to his ‘defects of

⁸¹ *Annual Report of the National Temperance League*, (1860), p. 9. Several years earlier Lowery worked as a temperance agent in Yorkshire for the winter of 1851/2, BTL Minutes, 21 May 1851.

⁸² Harrison, ‘Lowery’, *ODNB*.

⁸³ Unfortunately his description ends in 1841 so we do not have his insights into temperance lecturing, nor have searches of British Library 19th-century newspapers online generated any of Lowery’s temperance speeches.

⁸⁴ *Belfast News Letter*, 2 June 1848, describes two lectures by David Ross of Manchester on baths and bathing. The *Manchester Times*, 20 May 1848 reported two lectures by Ross on the water cure. For further details on his itinerant hydropathy lecture tours see preface of his book below.

⁸⁵ David Ross’s book, *Atmopathy and Hydropathy*, was published by Simpkin, Marshall and Co.

⁸⁶ *Manchester Times*, 20 February 1850; 17 April 1851.

⁸⁷ A newspaper report claimed that the ‘audience was not numerous’ *Manchester Times*, 24 April 1852.

⁸⁸ *Manchester Times*, 11 July 1849.

⁸⁹ David Ross’s career trajectory was primarily gleaned from the JISC funded British Library 19th-century newspapers online resource

character', and as his business floundered he was 'overpowered' by the 'demon alcohol' and died of an alcohol related disease.⁹⁰

Bairstow's trajectory also ends in ignominy. After his sedition trial in 1843 (alongside O'Connor and fifty-eight others at Lancaster) he moved to Leicester.⁹¹ Bairstow's popularity as an orator with the people of Leicester encouraged Thomas Cooper to ask Bairstow to look after his house and business during his incarceration. If we are to believe his former friend and ally, Bairstow conducted himself disgracefully. Cooper's biography accused Bairstow of ingratitude, theft, gambling and abandonment of his wife.⁹² Certainly the accusation of abandonment was accurate. In 1847 a pitiful notice appeared in the 'Readers and Correspondents' section of the *Northern Star*, which described Mrs Bairstow as being in great distress 'not having heard from her husband in more than a year'.⁹³ The last reference I can find to Bairstow is in September 1845 when the *Bradford Observer* claimed that Bairstow, a Chartist lecturer formerly of Queenshead, was unable to gain an audience.⁹⁴ At this point the trail goes cold and it is impossible to know for sure how he ended his days.⁹⁵ Life was uncertain for those without financial reserves, however talented. David Ross died a bankrupted alcoholic, Jonathan Bairstow abandoned his wife before fading into obscurity, while a depressingly large number of prominent Chartists ended their days in the workhouse.

George Thompson and James Acland

Even political lecturers at the top of their game were plagued by financial insecurities and often struggled to reconcile their reliance upon wages with their desire for independence of thought and action. This section will look in depth at the careers of George Thompson, the anti-slavery orator and the free trade lecturer James Acland. Both men excelled on the political platform and, for a time at least, prospered through oratory. An examination of their career trajectories will yield useful information upon the professionalisation of politics, the significance of character and reputation and the tensions between payment and integrity.

⁹⁰ Joseph Constantine, *Fifty years of the Water Cure, with autobiographical notes* (London, 1892). For information on Ross see pp. 19-20; 30.

⁹¹ Although Bairstow was charged and found guilty he, like the others, was not brought up for sentence but released.

⁹² Cooper concludes he came 'to his end in some obscure way', Cooper, *Life of Thomas Cooper*, p. 250.

⁹³ For Bairstow's marriage and subsequent desertion see, *NS*, 21 August 1841 and 4 September 1847.

⁹⁴ He also lectured in London in November 1844, *NS*, 30 November 1844. *BO*, 25 September 1845.

⁹⁵ A search of the census records has not generated any likely matches. Perhaps Bairstow, like so many former Chartists, emigrated.

The anti-slavery lecturer George Thompson (1804-1878) was central to the development of professional political oratory during the Chartist era. Thompson was the first hired orator on the international stage and his success largely defined the role of the paid political orator. Not only did he reach Parliament, for his services to America he was invited by President Lincoln to witness the raising of the flag on the ruins of Fort Sumter.⁹⁶ Thompson's rousing speeches inspired a generation of political orators. Henry Vincent recalled how while a boy in Hull he had heard Thompson speak. Vincent described how Thompson's 'weird-like declamation against slavery', filled him with a determination 'to bear [his] part in the conflict for social, intellectual and political progress'.⁹⁷ Thompson's speaking style, his salary, his ability to move between organisations and earn his living from itinerant lecturing and the ways in which he prepared and organised his lecture tours provided an exemplar for the would-be professional orator. Perhaps more than any other paid agent, Thompson made itinerant political lecturing respectable. The Edinburgh solicitor Sidney Smith was undoubtedly encouraged by Thompson's successes. In February 1839, while negotiating the terms of his employment with the ACLL, Smith based his request for salary and the financial arrangements (such as room hire and publicity) on the terms and conditions which Thompson received.⁹⁸

George Thompson was an attractive figure for high-minded young reformers because of his carefully cultivated moral character. He claimed never to speak in support of a cause which he did not genuinely endorse, and then only once he had rigorously tested all his arguments against 'the requirements of truth and righteousness'.⁹⁹ Thompson's public persona of integrity, honesty and independence from party sentiment also made him highly sought after by reforming agencies. During a lengthy career on the political platform Thompson spoke in support of a wide range of causes: from anti-slavery, Indian emancipation, free trade and political reform, to peace and temperance. This was a remarkable feat given that Thompson was not a man of independent means and was dependent on lecturing for the support of his wife and family. For much of his career Thompson operated on a national and, on occasion, international lecture circuit, yet arguably, this did not lessen his influence upon Yorkshire and the northeast where he was a frequent visitor. Unlike most British abolitionists, Thompson's power base was in the

⁹⁶ He was the only foreigner offered this privilege, obituary *New York Times*, 14 October 1878.

⁹⁷ William Dowling, *Henry Vincent: A Biographical Sketch* (London, 1879), p. 68.

⁹⁸ ACLL letter book, f. 75, letter from Sidney Smith, 25 Feb 1839.

⁹⁹ REAS/8, 'Biographical Sketch and portrait of George Thompson Esq. [reprinted from the *India Review*, Jan 1843]' (Calcutta, 1843), p. 2.

North and in Scotland – a geography that mirrored his social position as an outsider, a paid advocate and therefore subsidiary and peripheral to the leisured and wealthy London-based anti-slavery reformers.

Of the five agents appointed by the Agency Committee in 1831, Thompson had the lowest social origins. Yet despite his lack of formal education, he was by far the most effective. Thompson had the ability to communicate fruitfully with a wide range of people: from working-class radical audiences through to polite gatherings of middle-class lady philanthropists, wealthy Quakers and aristocrats like Lord Brougham. He even presented a petition to the Queen.¹⁰⁰ His role as a diplomatic intermediary between the working and middle-classes in England and between the British and American anti-slavery reformers deserves emphasis.¹⁰¹ Chameleon-like, Thompson could dazzle wealthy audiences with his fine speeches while retaining the common touch. Thompson's professional career was shaped by his religion and strong sense of morality. He was raised a Wesleyan Methodist and married the daughter of a Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion minister, a background evident in his oratory which often evoked Christian principles.¹⁰² Thompson's reputation for morality and integrity was worth cultivating. It was in both Thompson and his employers' interests to perpetuate the myth of the disinterested moral spokesman rather than the paid agent. This perhaps explains why, despite firm evidence to the contrary, Thompson claimed on at least one speaking engagement that he was unpaid.¹⁰³ At a meeting in Carlisle in 1842, Thompson began his address by claiming: 'I have no personal, no party end to serve. I am the agent of no society. I am the hired advocate of no set of opinions. I am a gratuitous fellow labourer.'¹⁰⁴ It is difficult to know whether this was a rhetorical flourish to emphasise his integrity and independence, or a calculated untruth. The League had formally hired him since May 1841 so, even if that particular lecture was gratuitous, to claim complete independence was disingenuous.¹⁰⁵

Thompson's role was awkward in that he presented himself as morally-driven and independent, and yet he was wholly dependent on a salary. Pressure groups were often

¹⁰⁰ Thompson asked his wife to send his best silk stockings for his meeting with the Queen, REAS/2/1/44, letter 28 Feb 1838. Thompson delivered, with Ralph Wardlaw, a petition against slavery signed by 130,000 women, Gifford, 'George Thompson', p. 192.

¹⁰¹ See Gifford, 'George Thompson'.

¹⁰² W. A. S. Hewins, 'Thompson, George Donisthorpe (1804–1878)', *ODNB*, (Oxford, 2004).

¹⁰³ Manchester Archives and Local Studies, George Wilson papers, letter dated 10 August 1842 from Thompson to the League HQ.

¹⁰⁴ George Thompson, *Paradise regained by Sir James Graham, Bart [an anti-corn law lecture by G Thompson]* (Carlisle, 1842), p. 4.

¹⁰⁵ Howe, *Letters of Richard Cobden*, p. 22.

slow to pay their agents and forward monies to cover the often substantial expenses incurred by travelling, printing and venue hire. A letter from Thompson to the ACLL in August 1842 suggests lecturers had to pester for what was owed them.¹⁰⁶ Often Thompson was reluctant to collect all the monies and expenses he was owed especially from those with whom he mixed socially. In a letter to Elizabeth Nichols (nee Pease), in 1860, Thompson's embarrassment is palpable:

If you can and will render me a little aid towards meeting the expense of this publication I shall be very glad & grateful. My whole heart is in the Anti-Slavery cause but through I have much zeal I have little money and must aid the good work by other means than silver and gold.¹⁰⁷

Throughout his career Thompson struggled between appearing as an independent figure whose conscience could not be bought and his need to provide for his wife and children, a dilemma best illustrated by his advocacy of the case of the Rajah of Sattara during the 1840s. Since the formation of the British India Society in 1839, Thompson had worked as its agent committed to exposing the tyrannical practices of the East India Society. Three years later Thompson embarked on a fact finding trip to India where he came under the patronage of first Dwarkanath Tagore and later the Emperor of Delhi. Both men paid him to represent the case of the Rajah of Sattara to Parliament and the British public.¹⁰⁸ While he promoted the interests of his Indian patrons, Thompson was able to provide a comfortable house for his wife and children and enjoy the trappings of a comfortable middle-class existence. Yet former friends in anti-slavery movement attacked his actions and the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* derided him as 'the paid agent of a slave holder', for his willingness to plead Sattara's case.¹⁰⁹ The crux of the matter was that moral crusades were still the preserve of the wealthy philanthropist and the work of agitators without independent means was sullied by suspicion. As early as 1846, Thompson's reliance on payment had been censured in British anti-slavery circles. The Quaker J. B. Estlin in a private letter claimed that Thompson lacked moral influence and was 'looked

¹⁰⁶ 'You will kindly send me that which I am reluctant to ask - but never needed more - some money. ... send me, on a/c of salary and expenses, £100 ... If you could oblige me with the remittance by return of post or at the latest on Friday, I shall feel very grateful', George Wilson papers, letter dated 10 August 1842.

¹⁰⁷ REAS/2/4/19, letter from Thompson, 23 July 1860.

¹⁰⁸ For an account of this episode see Gifford, 'George Thompson', pp. 230; 237-241.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 259-60.

upon as sort of an *adventurer*, trading by his wits in any cause that is open to him but especially favouring those of a philanthropist'.¹¹⁰

A talented, charismatic man like Thompson could have found wealth and social standing as a preacher or barrister or in other professional capacities. For Thompson, the transition from religiously charged anti-slavery oratory to preaching would not have been difficult. We know from his personal letters that he did toy with the idea of becoming a minister.¹¹¹ Had he done so he quite feasibly would have enjoyed great popularity, perhaps on a par with George Dawson or Charles Haddon Spurgeon. At the very least the church would have secured a comfortable middle-class existence for Thompson and his family. By the middle of the nineteenth century 'gifted preachers', especially those with a large urban congregation, were 'increasingly identifiable as part of a mobile and aspirant professional middle class'.¹¹² The Bar would also have made a suitable home for Thompson's oratorical talents. According to Garrison, Thompson turned down the opportunity to train as a barrister after his great success with the anti-slavery agency, and instead embarked on his 1834 lecture tour of America.¹¹³

Ironically, Thompson's greatest achievement, his election as MP for Tower Hamlets in 1847, led to financial ruin and a decline in his popular appeal. His stint in office was not a great success and he lost his seat in 1852. George Stephen attributed Thompson's 'lamentable failure in the House' to 'his entire ignorance of the tone of that high society from which the great bulk of our parliamentary men are taken'.¹¹⁴ More likely, Thompson was not re-elected as his constituents did not share his enthusiasm for India. An anonymous letter in *The Times*, which advised Thompson to 'transfer his attention and eloquence for a while from the Rajah of Sattara to the drainage of the district represented by him in Parliament', was closer to the mark.¹¹⁵ Financially, Thompson's election to Parliament was a disaster. MPs were not paid for their work and Thompson inevitably mixed in circles and incurred expenses that he simply could not afford. After Thompson left Parliament his popularity as an orator waned and his paid engagements were on less

¹¹⁰ Letter from J. B. Estlin to Samuel May, 1 Sept 1846, in Clare Taylor, *British and American Abolitionists: An Episode in Transatlantic Understanding* (Edinburgh, 1974), p. 281.

¹¹¹ Letters to Anne Thompson, 21 July 1836, REAS/2/1/36 and 27 Nov 1837, REAS/2/1/40.

¹¹² Robert Gray, 'The Platform and the Pulpit: cultural networks and civic identities in industrial Towns, c. 1850-1870', in Alan Kidd and David Nicholls (eds.), *The Making of the British Middle Class: Studies of Regional and Cultural Diversity since the Eighteenth Century*, (Stroud, 1998), p. 139.

¹¹³ According to Garrison's obituary, Lord Brougham, Sir Stephen Lushington and others offered to undertake his legal education and provide for his family in the meantime, *New York Times*, 14 October 1878.

¹¹⁴ Stephen, *Anti Slavery Recollections*, pp. 150-151.

¹¹⁵ *The Times*, 30 January 1849.

advantageous terms. In the early 1860s, for example, an American anti-slavery society employed him as their UK agent on the agreement he would be paid only if he raised sufficient sums to cover his £100 salary.

In spite of his increasingly precarious finances the longevity of Thompson's public service was remarkable. Well into his sixties and in poor health, Thompson addressed public meetings on disestablishment of the Irish church (1868), support for non-sectarian education (1870) and the Permissive Liquor Bill, (1871).¹¹⁶ In April 1870, despite being in great pain, he vehemently criticised the Contagious Diseases Acts at public meetings in South Shields and Newcastle.¹¹⁷ At such meetings Thompson was greeted with a rapturous welcome by admiring audiences. Thompson's oratory earned him a national reputation and won him illustrious friends such as Lord Brougham, William Lloyd Garrison and John Bright; yet he earned relatively little from his momentous efforts to abolish slavery and ended his days in straitened circumstances.¹¹⁸ Thompson may have failed to reach financial security but he was instrumental in pioneering a new democratic style of speaking and establishing charismatic oratory as a tool for moral and political reform.

James Acland (1799-1876), who attained notoriety as an ACLL agent, was only five years older than George Thompson and it is probable that they met during their work for the League. Yet their routes to the political platform and their subsequent career trajectories are quite distinctive. Acland did not have an international reputation and, unlike Thompson, was not involved in a wide range of moral and philanthropic causes. Nor was Acland particularly popular either with middle-class radicals or working men. He was primarily a talented, albeit argumentative, political animal who thrived on the cut and thrust of the campaign and was not above employing underhand tactics or strategies to obtain his desired outcome. If Acland had a twenty-first century equivalent it would be the political spin doctor – a master tactician who knew how best to play the system and the electorate. Throughout his public career he styled himself as an independent radical, supporting the poor 'against the rich ... the weak against the powerful, and for suffering right against dominant wrong'.¹¹⁹ Yet he saw no irony in lecturing in support of the new poor law and opposing Chartism. League historians Paul Pickering and Alex Tyrrell have

¹¹⁶ *Daily News*, 26 March 1868; *Birmingham Daily Post*, 14 April 1870; *Freeman's Journal*, 10 October 1871.

¹¹⁷ 'On Monday night I spoke with pain; but last night my head was clear, my tongue had liberty, my ideas came readily, and I really think I evinced much of my old fluency and fire', REAS/2/4/32, letter to Mrs E. P. Nichols (nee Pease) 6 April 1870.

¹¹⁸ Gifford, 'George Thompson', pp.386-392. He was buried in Leeds Burmantofts cemetery, *Leeds Mercury*, 12 October 1878.

¹¹⁹ *The Bristolian: Or Memoirs and Correspondence of James Acland*, 23 February 1872.

dismissed Acland as ‘a mercenary pure and simple’ citing his willingness to speak both for and against the temperance cause, yet this stance denigrates Acland’s enduring role in popular political reform.¹²⁰

Acland’s public career began with a battle for the freedom of the press. While editor of the unstamped *Bristolian* (1827-1830) he exposed crooked magistrates, fraudulent local charities, adulteration of bread and corrupt local politics.¹²¹ This pattern was repeated in Hull between 1831-5 where Acland edited the *Hull Portfolio*.¹²² Acland was repeatedly prosecuted for political libel, serving time in five different prisons for his scurrilous attacks on dishonest local officials and corrupt corporations. He also delivered public addresses on the need for ‘Corporation Reform, Vote by Ballot, Triennial Parliaments’.¹²³ His success as a rabble-rouser encouraged his parliamentary ambitions and he stood as a Radical parliamentary candidate in Bristol in August 1830 and as a Liberal candidate in Hull in December 1832, polling 25 and 433 votes respectively.¹²⁴ It is impossible to know whether these elections were a genuine attempt at a parliamentary career or whether they were merely exercises in self-promotion. Besides providing an opportunity for gifted speakers to shine on the local political stage the hustings offered pressure groups a useful venue for political propaganda. Thus, while employed by the League, Acland offered himself as a candidate at several elections without any intention of going to the polls.¹²⁵ Acland never made it to Parliament, yet as a gifted extra-parliamentary orator and political organiser he had few rivals.

Acland was born in London in 1799 the son of a well-to-do army contractor and enjoyed extensive schooling including lessons in Latin and elocution.¹²⁶ Acland’s thirst for excitement and adventure led him to run away at the age of fifteen in the expectation that he could earn his living by acting or offering recitations of Bryon and Shakespeare.¹²⁷ As an old man Acland recalled that life as a strolling player was hard but he found it

¹²⁰ Pickering and Tyrrell, *People’s Bread*, p. 21. Acland’s involvement with ‘all the reform agitations of the last half-century’, was commented upon in an obituary notice, see *Annual Register*, 1876, p. 143.

¹²¹ For further details of Acland’s early life see Neville Acland, *Memoirs and Correspondence of James Acland from 1799-1829* (privately printed, Colchester, 1996).

¹²² For Acland’s radical activities in Hull see Kenneth Mahon, ‘James Acland and the Humber Ferries Monopolies’, *Transport History* (1969), pp. 167-187. James Joseph Sheahan, *History of the town and Port of Kingston-upon-Hull* (Beverley), 1866, pp. 201-204.

¹²³ Gunnell, *Sketches of Hull Celebrities*, pp. 460-1.

¹²⁴ He contested the Hull election from his prison cell in Bury St Edmunds while serving an eighteen month sentence for libel brought by the Hull Corporation.

¹²⁵ Pickering and Tyrrell, *People’s Bread*, pp. 29-32; Michael J. Turner, ‘Reform Politics and the Sunderland by-election of 1845’, *Northern History*, XXXVIII, (2001), 83-106.

¹²⁶ Acland recalled that he acquired his oratorical skills by the ‘recitation of poetry and Shakespearean plays’, and that he won the school prize for elocution, Acland, *Memoirs*, p. 2.

¹²⁷ *Bristolian*, 10 April 1872.

possible to live ‘on a very limited allowance of bread and bacon, and a large allowance of love and admiration’.¹²⁸ After tiring of the theatrical life Acland spent much of the 1820s as a freelance parliamentary and newspaper reporter mainly working in the police courts.¹²⁹ During his late teens and twenties Acland led a peripatetic life and was the proverbial jack-of-all trade and master of none.¹³⁰ Yet Acland’s time on stage, in the courtroom both as observer and defendant, as a public lecturer and involvement with the unstamped movement formed a long apprenticeship to his true vocation as an itinerant political orator. After all, the life of an itinerant political lecturer was not too dissimilar to the itinerancy of a strolling theatre company: both ventures shared similar concerns of venue, accommodation, publicity etc.

Acland, like other successful lecturers was readily able to move between causes. Prior to joining the ACLL, Acland was sharpening his debating skills on the contentious Poor Law Amendment Act (1834). During a tour of the northern industrial towns in 1838 Acland lectured before paying audiences on the advantages of the controversial new legislation.¹³¹ Despite accusations that he was in the pay of the Whigs, it seems more likely he operated as a freelance lecturer during this period, deriving income from admission charges.¹³² Ticketing had the additional benefit of encouraging more affluent and receptive audiences. Yet if he hoped to avoid trouble by charging admission, his strategy failed: a lecture at Huddersfield, the heartland of the opposition movement, resulted in a riot and much damage to the Philosophical Hall.¹³³ During this period Acland also debated the temperance question speaking initially against and then for abstention.¹³⁴ His support for temperance came at the end of a public debate in Liverpool against Edward Grubb (a prominent temperance advocate) which concluded with Acland magnanimously accepting defeat and taking the temperance pledge the following evening.¹³⁵ Besides Grubb, Acland debated during the late 1830s and early 1840s with other key radical figures including

¹²⁸ Acland, *Memoirs*, p. 5.

¹²⁹ Frederick Boase, *Modern English Biography*, (6 Vols., London, 1965), Vol. 1, pp. 10-11; Acland, *Memoirs*, pp. 19-22.

¹³⁰ The *Northern Star* claimed, with some justification, that he had been ‘everything in turn, and nothing long’, *NS*, 22 December 1838.

¹³¹ For a hostile, but detailed, account of Acland’s pro-poor law tour see G. R. Wythen Baxter, *The Book of the Bastiles; or the History of the Working of the New Poor-Law* (London, 1841)

¹³² For example tickets for a lecture held at the Weston Music-Saloon in Leeds in December 1838 ranged in price from 6d in the gallery to 1s 6d in the orchestra, *NS*, 1 December 1838.

¹³³ *The Times*, 20 November 1838; *Leeds Mercury*, 17 November 1838.

¹³⁴ Pickering and Tyrrell, *People’s Bread*, p. 21.

¹³⁵ Winskill, *Temperance Movement*, Vol. II, pp. 32-3.

Feargus O'Connor, Joseph Livesey, and the Rev. J. R. Stephens.¹³⁶ Such encounters strengthened Acland's reputation as an orator and allowed him to bask in the limelight that had made his earlier acting career so enjoyable. It also brought him to the attention of Joseph Parkes, a legal adviser to Richard Cobden who recommended him to the ACLL, as a man well able to hold his own during heated public discussions.¹³⁷

Unlike Thompson, Acland did not cultivate ethos or claim moral superiority. His time on the stage and behind bars and his willingness to become embroiled in public spats and libel actions did little for his reputation. Acland's perpetually disordered finances also weighed heavily on his personal character. Numerous letters from Acland to his paymasters in Manchester bemoan his lack of money. In April 1839 Acland wrote: 'need I add that I am in debt. My personal expenses are heavy and although a teetotaler I know I cannot do the things as an economist.'¹³⁸ As in Thompson's case, it seems likely that the League were not prompt in remitting his salary and reimbursing expenses incurred. Yet certainly Acland was culpable. According to Howell, he was 'free and generous to a fault' and 'could never save money, however much he earned'.¹³⁹ Such an inability to exercise restraint was increasingly perceived to be a character flaw. Worse still was the damaging accusation that Acland was dishonest and failed to honour his debts. The extent to which the ability to gain credit from shopkeepers and hoteliers was bound up with character is the subject of a fascinating study by Margot Finn.¹⁴⁰ Finn's argument that credit would be denied to those without character could help to explain Acland's flight from Bristol and Hull and why in the April 1839 letter cited above he was sickened at the prospect of Tory newspapers printing stories of 'money borrowed or accounts unsettled'.¹⁴¹

The ACLL's formidable campaign machinery influenced the strategies of subsequent pressure groups, while former employees utilized lessons learnt at the League in their subsequent careers.¹⁴² Acland's interest in statistics and the operation of the registration courts were all developed during his time with the League and were incorporated into his

¹³⁶ *Manchester Times*, 16 December 1837; *Preston Chronicle*, 4 May 1838; *NS*, 9 July 1842.

¹³⁷ Pickering and Tyrrell, *People's Bread*, p. 21. Acland was also reported in glowing terms by the *Leeds Mercury*, 17 November 1838.

¹³⁸ ACLL letter book, f. 178, letter 25 April 1839. Acland was on a mission to curry favour and win support and it was inevitable that this would involve treating his supporters.

¹³⁹ Bishopsgate Institute, London, George Howell Papers, Howell, 'autobiography' folio 30. His spendthrift nature meant that he did not leave sufficient funds to support his widow see *Daily News*, 5 November 1896.

¹⁴⁰ Margot C. Finn, *The Character of Credit: Personal Debt in English culture, 1740-1914* (Cambridge, 2003) especially pp. 18-21.

¹⁴¹ ACLL letter book, f. 178, letter 28 April 1839.

¹⁴² Dingle, *Campaign for Prohibition in Victorian England*, pp. 14;21-22.

electioneering handbook the *Imperial Poll Book of all Elections*.¹⁴³ Acland similarly put his speaking skills, knowledge of the registration court and statistical prowess to good use in the evolving profession of election agent and soon became a leading figure in the business of contesting elections. Indeed H. J. Hanham credits men like Acland and the legacy of the ACLL for the strength of the professional agent in the north.¹⁴⁴ The culmination of Acland's political reputation was his appointment in July 1867 as 'election and registration adviser' to the Reform League.¹⁴⁵

Although he failed to write an autobiography, towards the end of his life, Acland made some efforts towards securing his reputation as a Radical. In the preface to the last edition of the *Imperial Poll Book*, Acland claimed to be present in the procession that welcomed Henry Hunt from Ilchester Gaol after his Peterloo imprisonment and he also described how he himself had 'pined years in Tory gaols'.¹⁴⁶ The revived *Bristolian* newspaper (1872) also stressed Acland's devotion to the cause of Radicalism.¹⁴⁷ Despite his undoubted talents as a speaker, organiser and writer he never achieved political eminence. Richard Cobden kept him at arms length and warned others to take care when dealing with Acland, because he was 'indiscreet'.¹⁴⁸ One cannot help suspecting that his reputation as an orator and politician stalled because he was impulsive, egotistical and lacked 'respectability'.¹⁴⁹ Yet for all his faults the origins of the professional election agent can be seen in the pioneering work of James Acland.

A manly trade? Emma Martin, Jessie Craigen and Clara Lucas Balfour

During the Chartist era women rarely addressed public meetings and only a handful worked as paid political lecturers. For this reason the careers of the Owenite social missionary Emma Martin (1811/12- 1851) and the temperance (and later suffrage) speaker Jessie Craigen (1834/5–1899) offer insights into the barriers facing women who sought to earn a living from lecturing. Emma Martin was active in the 1840s and Jessie Craigen a generation later: their experiences demonstrate that, for political lecturers at least, women

¹⁴³ *Imperial Poll Book of all Elections* (1st ed. 1865, 2nd revised ed. London, 1869). After his death Acland's poll book was revamped and extended meeting with enduring success as Calmont's *Parliamentary Poll Book of All Elections* (1879). H. C. G. Matthew, 'McCalmont, Frederick Haynes (1846–1880)', *ODNB*, 2004.

¹⁴⁴ H. J. Hanham *Elections and Party Management: Politics in the Time of Disraeli and Gladstone* (Sussex, 1979), pp. 33; 237-9.

¹⁴⁵ D. A. Hamer, *The Politics of Electoral Pressure: A Study in the History of the Victorian Reform Agitations* (Sussex, 1977), pp. 73-5, 83, 310.

¹⁴⁶ Acland, *Imperial Poll Book*, p. 8.

¹⁴⁷ *Bristolian* (Feb-May 1872) was a money making venture and a vehicle for Acland's reminiscences.

¹⁴⁸ Howe, *Letters of Richard Cobden*, p. 294.

¹⁴⁹ McCord, *Anti-Corn Law League*, p. 58.

were still largely reported in terms of their physical appearance and attractiveness rather than the content and delivery of their oratory. It was widely perceived that politics was a masculine pursuit and that woman who took to the platform and harangued mixed audiences were inevitably ‘unsexed’ by the process. Women who did speak in public on political questions routinely apologised for their brazen conduct in stepping out beyond their domestic role.¹⁵⁰ Yet during this period some of the pressures which kept women off the platform were beginning to lessen. Aided by the expansion of adult education and the rational recreation movement the lecture format became established, and it became possible for respectable women to earn a living as popular lecturers. The temperance and proto-feminist lecturer, Clara Lucas Balfour (1808-1878) provides a good example of a woman who was able to earn a decent living as a professional speaker without being denigrated as unwomanly or uncouth.

Nineteenth-century popular politics had a reputation for violence and disorder. This propensity was particularly evident in the rituals surrounding the hustings which, for all their supposed inclusiveness, maintained a ‘strong premium on boorish masculinity’.¹⁵¹ Radical politics too ‘had its roots in pugilist and pub culture’, and many working men defined their honour in terms of their physical strength rather than their rational self-control.¹⁵² The physicality of the platform was evident in the series of pitched battles which occurred between Chartist and League supporters. In March 1842 supporters of the League and Daniel O’Connell invaded a rally in honour of Feargus O’Connor held at the Manchester Hall of Science. Violence broke out when the Leaguers refused to accept the Chartist nominee for Chair and the meeting degenerated into fisticuffs and mayhem. Feargus O’Connor was assailed with various missiles and ‘knocked down 3 times’ and while the Rev. James Schofield received a black eye and loosened teeth. All the furniture was ‘smashed to atoms’ and the damage was estimated at forty pounds.¹⁵³ While this was an extreme example, events such as these did nothing to elevate the reputation of the platform or encourage female participation. Meetings that degenerated into riots were

¹⁵⁰ See for example the formulaic way in which the Female Political Union of Birmingham justified their engagement with politics. Helen Rogers, ‘What Right Have Women to Interfere with Politics?’ The Address of the Female Political Union of Birmingham to the Women of England (1838) in T. G. Ashplant and Gerry Smyth, (eds.), *Explorations in Cultural History* (London, 2001), 65-100.

¹⁵¹ Lawrence, *Electing our Masters*, p. 3.

¹⁵² Clark, ‘Rhetoric of Chartist Democracy’, p. 71.

¹⁵³ McCord, *Anti-Corn Law League*, pp. 102-3; Royle, *Chartism*, pp. 108-110; Chase, *History*, pp. 197-8.

abhorred by both polite society and working-class advocates of moral suasion who saw ‘self-restraint’ as a core measure of character.¹⁵⁴

Conversely, as the mid-century progressed, ‘manliness’ was increasingly associated with a code of behaviour pioneered by Dr Thomas Arnold, headmaster of Rugby School. Rather than being signified by physical strength, ‘manliness’ became a behavioural code which encouraged elite males to protect the less powerful (whether women or the lower classes).¹⁵⁵ Thus it was considered ‘manly’ to speak out for the poor and oppressed at a town meeting and expose truth over vested interest. The *Bradford Observer*, for example, used the term ‘manly indignant language’ to praise participants at ACLL meetings.¹⁵⁶ Polite versions of ‘masculinity’ were not confined to the upper classes. Gentlemanly behaviour was independent of class and income and, as we have seen in chapter three, some of the most vociferous supporters of ‘manly conduct’ and ‘fair play’ on the platform were working men. Samuel Smiles made a point of emphasising that gentleman were found in all walks of life, recognisable by their character and behaviour rather than their income and social position.¹⁵⁷

Both rough and chivalrous manifestations of masculinity offered women little encouragement to leave the domestic sphere and participate in contentious political debate. Yet despite these cultural injunctions the Chartist years did see increasing female engagement with public speaking. While working women on the whole retreated from vocal public politics, their wealthier sisters were able to navigate the boundaries of femininity and respectability and take to the platform in larger numbers. From the 1850s middle-class female campaigners began to ‘make use of the spoken lecture’: a phenomenon which, Helen Rogers argues, was partly due to the changing perceptions of the lecture platform.¹⁵⁸ However, delivering prepared lectures in a lecture hall was quite distinct from addressing a public meeting. Significantly, the *Bradford Observer* study found only one instance of a woman addressing a public meeting in Bradford. The woman in question was a female operative who found it necessary to commence her speech to the

¹⁵⁴ Collini, ‘The Idea of Character in Victorian Political Thought’, p. 36.

¹⁵⁵ John Tosh, ‘Domesticity and Manliness in the Victorian Middle-Class, the family of Edward White Benson’, in Michael Roper and John Tosh (eds.), *Manful Assertions: masculinities in Britain since 1800* (London, 1991).

¹⁵⁶ *BO*, 4 December 1845. Recent research by Matthew McCormack demonstrates the interconnections between politics and masculinity in the early nineteenth century, McCormack, *Independent Man*, pp. 33-4.

¹⁵⁷ Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help*, pp. 413; 415.

¹⁵⁸ Helen Rogers, Any questions? The gendered dimensions of the political platform, *Nineteenth-Century Prose* Vol. 29, No. 1 (Spring 2002), p.123.

Bradford Power Loom Weavers Protective Society in 1845, with an apology, 'for stepping out of the latitude of her sex'.¹⁵⁹

Between 1838 and 1839 over a hundred female Chartist groups were formed, yet a decade later only fourteen were still active. Various reasons have been put forward to explain this decline. The increasingly formal organisational structures of the Chartist movement such as the NCA and the Chartist Land Plan, both of which rested upon subscription-based membership, may have deterred women from active participation.¹⁶⁰ Women were also driven out of Chartism as the movement failed to provide women with 'resources and recognition'. Hence while the *Northern Star* might welcome eloquent, albeit formulaic, addresses from female unions in its columns, it was less keen that women should be actively involved in political debate and it is notable that no women were employed as paid missionaries.¹⁶¹ The rhetoric of domesticity which became ever more evident in popular radicalism, offers another explanation for the gendering of the platform. Working men increasingly couched their arguments for the franchise in the middle-class rhetoric of domesticity. This was partly as a mechanism for shaming the middle-classes into improving the conditions of working class life, and partly as a means of asserting their masculine identity at a time when women were becoming more evident in the workforce. The ideology of domesticity served to exclude women from the world of politics ostensibly to support and protect them.¹⁶²

This is not to say that women were not valued by reform movements. They were indispensable in providing behind the scenes support and, importantly, in vesting movements with moral authority. Middle-classes movements, like the anti-slavery campaign and the League, welcomed the participation of women in subsidiary roles such as hosting fund-raising bazaars and tea parties.¹⁶³ Yet they were not encouraged to speak or engage directly in polemical debate. This prejudice was very much evident at the 1840 London Anti-Slavery conference at which male delegates overwhelmingly voted to block the right of female American delegates to address the meeting as it went against British custom.¹⁶⁴ The temperance and Chartist movements also tended to assign its female supporters secondary roles. Indeed when women were visible in the Chartist and

¹⁵⁹ *BO*, 12 June 1845. However, as discussed in chapter three, the absence of women from the record may also reflect the proclivities of the newspaper reporting, Simon Morgan, 'Seen but not heard?' pp. 50-66.

¹⁶⁰ Chase, *Chartism*, p. 4. Thompson, *Chartists*, pp. 120-151.

¹⁶¹ Rogers, 'What Right Have Women to Interfere with Politics?' pp. 96-7. The absence of paid professional women speakers in Chartism contrasts with the Owenite experience.

¹⁶² Clark 'The Rhetoric of Chartist Domesticity', esp. p. 723.

¹⁶³ Morgan, 'A Sort of land debatable'.

¹⁶⁴ *BO*, 18 June 1840. For Thompson's role in this controversy see Gifford, 'George Thompson', pp. 210-212.

temperance press it was often for their beauty and the quality of their refreshments.¹⁶⁵ Partly the hostility towards women taking on the role of public speaker was based on the issues of interrogation, while women might offer a tokenistic presence on the platform it was less acceptable for the fairer sex to be heckled and questioned at a public meeting.¹⁶⁶ The feminist historian Janice Schroeder points to the ‘strong cultural injunction against “heated exchange” between men and women in public and semi-public forums’, which accounts for the hostility shown towards female Owenite lecturers who were willing to argue publicly with male clerical opponents.¹⁶⁷

Emma Martin was probably the first woman to make a living (albeit precarious) from itinerant political lecturing and writing. Born into a lower middle-class family in Bristol, she was devoutly religious in her youth and spent twelve years distributing tracts and zealously collecting for the Bible Society. Initially, she strongly opposed the Owenites, attending their meetings and challenging their lecturers in debate, yet as her own faith crumbled she became attracted to a progressive movement which tallied with her own views on women’s rights. In the winter of 1839 she ran away from her unhappy marriage, taking her three daughters with her, and became a freethinker. Her undoubted abilities as a polemical speaker and the novelty of her sex meant that within a year she was one of the movement’s best-known speakers.¹⁶⁸ Martin’s pioneering career presented not only a religious challenge but also a challenge to notions of femininity. A woman who entered into a public debate in support of Christianity might be permitted to temporarily leave her domestic sphere for the masculine public world of the platform (religiosity was after all to be encouraged in the fairer sex). But for a woman to speak in public, openly argue with ministers and present an infidel argument was deeply unrespectable, and to be paid for it was beyond the pale.

Women who did enter the political realm were caricatured and derided in the press. Significantly, hostile newspaper accounts dwelt upon their ‘ugly’ physical appearance. The Hull press described at length Emma Martin’s physical appearance when she spoke there in October 1844. Rather less time was given to the content of her speeches and the manner of her oratory, although the reporter was forced to admit that ‘it was quite evident

¹⁶⁵ *NS*, 5 October 1839.

¹⁶⁶ Rogers, ‘Any questions?’

¹⁶⁷ Laura Schwartz’s unpublished thesis, cited above, led towards this quotation. Janice Schroeder, *Speaking Volumes: Victorian Feminism and the Appeal of Public Discussion*, *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, Vol. 25, Issue 2, 17 (2003), p. 100.

¹⁶⁸ Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1983) especially pp. 130-155. Barbara Taylor, ‘Martin, Emma (1811/12–1851)’, *ODNB*, 2004

that the infidel, as a debater, was an overmatch for the Baptist'. According to the *Hull Packet*:

Mrs Martin [was] a very short woman, with remarkably round shoulders, and is between thirty and forty years old. Her face is spoilt with a low forehead; her small and piercing but deeply embedded eyes, gives the whole countenance a restless and sinister appearance.¹⁶⁹

This description is at odds with the available portraits of Emma Martin which show her to have been an attractive woman (see Fig. 7). George Jacob Holyoake, a personal friend of Emma Martin, in a posthumous defence stressed that while she 'had the wit and courage of several men' she also had an 'attractive expression with dark luminous eye' and was indeed 'a womanly woman'.¹⁷⁰ That Holyoake felt it necessary to emphasise her femininity is interesting, as if the very act of public debate might have unsexed her. The *Punch* cartoon of the female Chartist lecturer, Mary Ann Walker, provides another example of how female orators were satirised as mad and unwomanly (see Fig. 8).¹⁷¹

The tendency to reduce women orators to their physical appearance continued beyond the Chartist era. A report of a temperance lecture given by Jessie Craigen in Carlisle in 1860 discussed at great length Craigen's appearance, from her 'brown "bloomer" hat' to her 'black mittens', and expressed mock dismay that 'the "fair" lecturer was remarkably dark, short and stout'. Nowhere in the report is the content or style of her lecture discussed.¹⁷² The professional career of the itinerant lower-class temperance agent Jessie Craigen illustrates how ideals of feminine behaviour (dress, demeanour etc) were crucial for speakers hoping to win salaried posts. Craigen was born to a ship's captain and an Italian actress and, after the untimely death of her father, both Craigen and her mother worked in the theatre.¹⁷³ After acquiring religious scruples Craigen left the stage and turned her speaking skills towards temperance lecturing. During the early 1860s she lectured extensively upon temperance, mainly as a freelance orator who was paid per lecture. She was particularly popular with working-class audiences and admired for her quirky styles of speech. Yet her career as a temperance lecturer was marred by her

¹⁶⁹ *Hull Packet*, 11 October 1844.

¹⁷⁰ G. J. Holyoake, *The History of Cooperation* (London, 1906), p. 241.

¹⁷¹ Conversely reports in *The Times* and the *Northern Star*, eroticised Walker by dwelling upon her attractive body and demeanour, see Rogers, 'Any questions?' pp. 119-2.

¹⁷² *Preston Guardian*, 16 June 1860. It is interesting that the Bradford Temperance Society also refer to her as the 'fair lecturer', which suggests that her status as a woman speaker was a great novelty, *30th Annual Report of the Bradford Temperance Society*, (1860), p. 6.

¹⁷³ Sandra Stanley Holton, 'Craigen, Jessie Hannah (1834/5–1899)', *ODNB*, 2004. See also obituary in *English Woman's Review*, 15 January 1900.



Emma Martin 1812-51

Fig. 7: Engraving of the Owenite lecturer Emma Martin.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁴ Copied from the frontispiece of Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem* (London, 1983), the original source for this image is not cited. A similar portrait appeared in the *Reasoner*, 6 May 1855.



Fig. 8: Caricature of the Chartist lecturer Mary Ann Walker.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁵ *Punch*, Vol. 3, 1842, p. 192. There is no reason to believe that this was an accurate representation.

personality and 'her peculiar habits and manners', and she failed to find lasting employment with any of the leading temperance associations. Similar problems also troubled her relationship with the leadership of the Suffrage Movement, for whom she worked in the 1870s and 1880s.¹⁷⁶ Craigen was happiest making impromptu speeches and collecting her wages directly from an audience. As a paid agent she was unreliable, unpredictable and disorderly, apt to wander from the topic in hand to her other pet topics and prone to using her speaking engagements as commercial opportunities for selling her vegetable cordials.¹⁷⁷ Such behaviour outraged her middle class paymasters, who questioned whether Craigen was the best public face for their respectable organisations.

The final female lecturer in this trio, Clara Lucas Balfour, met with the greatest measure of success. Partly because she rose to prominence just as the general interest lecture was becoming popular and also because of her respectable manners and demeanour. Her status as a freelance lecturer, speaking on a range of topics, rather than a paid advocate, also probably assisted her reputation. Born in Hampshire in 1808 her childhood was marred by poverty. Balfour married very young and lived in extreme poverty aggravated by her husband's excessive drinking. After hearing a temperance lecture in 1837 they both signed the pledge and became part of the temperance movement. Balfour started out addressing drawing room assemblies of women before being encouraged to deliver her first public lecture in Greenwich in 1841.¹⁷⁸ The following year she was invited to address the Leeds Temperance Society.¹⁷⁹ Balfour's repertoire expanded to include topics such as the moral influence of women on society and the works of female poets and authors. She also lectured on behalf of the Early Closing Movement.¹⁸⁰ Balfour primarily lectured in Mechanic's Institutes and, unusually for the time, charged the same as male lecturers. Indeed, according to records from Leicester Mechanic's Institute, her popularity was such that she offered a similar level of profitability as George Dawson and even Ralph Waldo Emerson.¹⁸¹

The marital status of female lecturers was significant. Marriage offered some protection to women in the public sphere and conferred respectability. Balfour was a wife and mother and was modest in her appearance and demeanour, unlike Jessie Craigen who

¹⁷⁶ S. S. Holton, 'Silk dresses and lavender kid gloves: the wayward career of Jessie Craigen, working suffragist', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 5 (1996), pp. 141-3.

¹⁷⁷ Holton, 'Craigen', p. 142.

¹⁷⁸ Kristin G. Doern, 'Balfour, Clara Lucas (1808–1878)', *ODNB* (Oxford, 2004).

¹⁷⁹ Janet Cunliffe-Jones, 'A Rare Phenomenon: a woman's contribution to 19th-century Adult Education', *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, Vol. 24, Issue 1 (1992), 1-16.

¹⁸⁰ *Bristol Mercury*, 25 October 1851; *Leeds Mercury*, 28 January 1858; *Hull Packet*, 9 March 1860.

¹⁸¹ Cunliffe-Jones 'A Rare Phenomenon', p. 10.

was single, scruffy and unfeminine, or Emma Martin who had abandoned her husband and established a common-law union with another man. Balfour also met with approval because she was careful to speak upon topics that were relevant to her sex and her lectures were not overtly political (although there was a strong feminist sub-text). Balfour conformed to the ideals of womanly conduct. According to Caroline Fox, even in the perilous act of lecturing she ‘did not unsex herself’.¹⁸² Perhaps this was partly to do with how she delivered her addresses. The *Hull Packet*, for example, commended her decision to speak to her audience while seated as this was a ‘womanly mode of doing it’.¹⁸³ Lectures delivered in the context of a Mechanics Institute were unlikely to meet vocal challenges or violent disruption, nor was it routinely expected that lecturers would take questions from the audience at the end of their lecture, which made such work more appealing to women.¹⁸⁴ The absence of hecklers and thus the threat of being drawn into unseemly debate differentiated Balfour’s working conditions from those of fellow temperance lecturer Jessie Craigen or the notorious Emma Martin. Balfour was able to earn a living as a professional temperance and proto-feminist speaker on her own terms because she operated on a sanitised indoor platform, protected from unwelcome public interrogation and excessive displays of masculinity.¹⁸⁵

There is evidence that over the Chartist era, women were becoming more established on the lecture circuit if not the political platform.¹⁸⁶ For example, it became commonplace for women to address temperance meetings, particular female-only assemblies, or Band of Hope meetings convened for the benefit of children and juveniles. Respectable female middle-class musicians, professional dramatists and lecturers were found in increasing numbers at the town halls, theatres and meeting rooms of provincial towns and cities. The Shakespearian reader Mrs Fanny Kemble and the literary lecturer Miss Clara Seyton received a warm welcome from Bradford audiences in the mid 1850s.¹⁸⁷ Yet for female secularist lecturers, like Harriet Law, little had changed since the days when Emma Martin was doubly damned both for being an infidel and for being a woman unapologetically in the public sphere. Law, at a meeting in Newcastle 1869, upon rising to address the meeting, was treated to such scenes of noise and disorder that the chairman was

¹⁸² As cited by Cunliffe-Jones, ‘A Rare Phenomenon’, p. 11.

¹⁸³ *Hull Packet*, 2 March 1860.

¹⁸⁴ Cunliffe-Jones ‘A Rare Phenomenon’, p. 5.

¹⁸⁵ Helen Rogers comparison of the Chartist Mary Ann Walker and the social reformer Josephine Butler also illustrates how female oratory became more acceptable over this period, Rogers, ‘Any questions?’

¹⁸⁶ As the study of the *Bradford Observer* demonstrates, more women were appearing as respectable lecturers and entertainers by the 1850s and 1860s.

¹⁸⁷ Both ladies spoke at Bradford St George’s Hall, *BO*, 25 January 1855; 13 September 1855.

forced to intervene stating that ‘as an Englishman he was ashamed of the conduct of a meeting to a woman’.¹⁸⁸

Commercialisation of the lecture circuit: John Gough, Thomas Cooper and Henry Vincent

The final group of biographical studies situates the political lecturer within the popular entertainment culture of the mid-nineteenth century and considers the rising popularity of the lecture format. According to a recent historian of the platform, given the large numbers of people listening too and delivering orations during the mid-Victorian period, it is appropriate to consider the lecture as a truly mass leisure activity.¹⁸⁹ As the economic hardships of the 1840s gave way to a more prosperous mid-Victorian period, listening to lectures on political, historical, moral, literary or religious topics became an increasingly popular pastime. As a glance at any mid-nineteenth century local newspaper will confirm, the Victorians were avid consumers of lectures, readings and orations. Lectures chimed with an era which valued self-improvement, education and novelty.¹⁹⁰ While the thirst for knowledge was fed by the expanding market for newspapers, periodicals, novels, encyclopaedias and popular reference books like *Enquire Within*, printed media alone were not enough.¹⁹¹ Public lectures, set-piece discussions and meetings were also important. As communal events the lecture had a great advantage over books and newspapers, besides the *sociability* of being part of an audience, it was often more pleasurable to acquire knowledge by listening to a witty, entertaining speaker than by the tedium of personal reading.

In July 1855 John Gough (1817-1886), the famous American temperance orator, delighted Bradford audiences with two lively orations on the perils of alcohol consumption.¹⁹² Gough’s temperance propaganda, delivered from the platform of the splendid St George’s Hall, was a heady mix of religious piety and sensation. On both nights audiences were titillated by accounts of drunkards whose failure to renounce alcohol predictably led to an untimely and gruesome end. Gough also appealed to the familial bond, likening giving alcohol to the young to placing children in the same room as half-

¹⁸⁸ *National Reformer*, 4 April 1869, p. 218, cited in Schwartz, ‘Infidel Feminism’, p. 118.

¹⁸⁹ Hewitt ‘Aspects of Platform Culture’, p. 3.

¹⁹⁰ Alan Rauch, *Useful Knowledge: the Victorians, Morality and the March of the Intellect* (Durham and London, 2001).

¹⁹¹ *Enquire Within* was published by the former Chartist, Robert Kemp Philp, see Malcolm Chase entry for Robert Kemp Philp (1819-1882) in Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor (eds.), *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism In Great Britain and Ireland* (Gent and London, 2009), pp. 494-5.

¹⁹² *BO*, 16 July 1855.

frozen vipers, who would inevitably thaw and pose a grave threat to their safety; or foolishly dangling an infant over a waterfall only to lose grip unexpectedly. While Gough's appearance was linked to the annual conference of the British Temperance League, it was organised on distinctly commercial principles from the marketing and pricing of his lectures to the content and style of his delivery. According to an advertisement in the *Bradford Observer*, tickets ranged from two shillings for the best seats to three pence for unreserved seats in the gods.¹⁹³ The newly opened St George's Hall could comfortably seat three and a half thousand and, on both nights, all but the most expensive seats were filled. Not surprisingly Gough's lecture tours made him a very wealthy man.¹⁹⁴ Gough's phenomenal earning power was exceptional yet his story provides compelling evidence of how oratory had become commercialised.

Gough turned the humble temperance lecture into an entertainment sensation. During the early 1830s, teetotallers like the Lancashire advocates Harry Anderton and Thomas Whittaker were regarded with great suspicion, ridiculed by the middle-classes and shunned by much of the established church. Yet only three decades later Gough was able to take England by storm. In 1860 the National Temperance League (who sponsored Gough's visit) triumphantly reported that Gough had delivered 175 lectures in the provinces alone, addressing over 140,000 people of whom over 4,000 signed the pledge.¹⁹⁵ Gough's widespread success illustrates just how far both the temperance movement and the lecture had progressed from being on the fringes to becoming part of a lucrative mainstream culture. Gough also profited from the Victorian interest in celebrity. In 1859 his portrait was given out by the *Illustrated News of the World*, and his whereabouts and telling anecdotes were frequently found in the mainstream press.¹⁹⁶ Just as the appearance of the Swedish opera singer Jenny Lind attracted large crowds of adoring fans, and Spurgeon's tabernacle became a magnet for those desiring religious diversion, Gough too became public property – a contemporary wonder that everyone wished to hear.¹⁹⁷

Victorian audiences had a great appetite for the new and the novel as demonstrated by the Great Exhibition (1851) and the popularity of foreign-born itinerant speakers on the English lecture circuit. People flocked to hear the French socialist Louis Blanc who

¹⁹³ *BO*, 9 July 1855.

¹⁹⁴ In 1855 alone he was assessed for tax on £1500 of earnings, *BO*, 25 October 1855.

¹⁹⁵ *National Temperance League Annual Report* (1860), p. 1.

¹⁹⁶ See advert for engraving placed in *The Times*, 27 July, 1859; *Liverpool Mercury*, 21 September 1855; *Hull Packet*, 26 January 1855; *Ladies Cabinet*, 1 January 1855; *Preston Guardian*, 20 October 1860; *BO*, 29 November 1860.

¹⁹⁷ For hysteria surrounding Jenny Lind see *BO*, 29 August 1850; 26 September 1850.

lectured across Yorkshire and the North East in the 1860s, or Father Gavazzi, the Italian orator and patriot who alarmed audiences by predicting that Britain was hurtling towards Rome.¹⁹⁸ Resident orators, like the Rev. M. Milne of Bradford, also exploited the public's interest in the exotic by bringing home indigenous people to illustrate their travel lectures. During a series of lectures on China delivered in Bradford in 1845, Milne was accompanied by Mr Woo who sang and gave demonstrations of Chinese culture.¹⁹⁹ The presence of foreign orators itinerating the major British towns and cities was instrumental in making the lecture an increasingly popular form of entertainment.²⁰⁰ Many foreign lecturers hailed from America, a country that had been quick to exploit the commercial potential of the lecture format.²⁰¹ During the 1840s and 1850s the American temperance advocate John Gough, and the American essayist Emerson, both toured England attracting large audiences.²⁰² There was also great interest in escaped slaves such as Moses Roper and Frederick Douglass who toured the country outraging audiences with their personal stories of misery and degradation.²⁰³ Interest in the slave narrative surged after the publication of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). As the century progressed the arrival of the steam ship and cheaper, quicker passage increased the popularity of the transatlantic lecture circuit. A flood of British orators, including Henry Vincent, Charles Dickens, Joseph Barker, George Thompson and T. H. Huxley, embarked on speaking tours across the USA with varying degrees of success.²⁰⁴

Another endorsement of the lecture was its adoption by religious men. The previous chapter has shown how sermons delivered by the celebrity preachers, Charles Haddon Spurgeon and George Dawson borrowed heavily from the lecture format. By the

¹⁹⁸ For Gavazzi's Bradford lectures see *BO*, 25 October 1855; 1 November 1855. For Louis Blanc in Bradford and Leeds see *BO*, 12 April 1860; 8 November 1860; 23 August 1860. Georgios Varouxakis, 'Blanc (Jean Joseph) Louis (1811–1882)', *ODNB*, online edn. (Oxford, May 2005), <accessed 15 Sept 2009>.

¹⁹⁹ *BO*, 27 November 1845; 4 December 1845.

²⁰⁰ For transatlantic influences on platform culture see Hewitt, 'Aspects of Platform Culture' pp. 15-17.

²⁰¹ Donald M. Scott, 'The Popular Lecture and the Creation of a Public in Mid-nineteenth-Century America', *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 66, No. 4 (Mar., 1980), 791-809.

²⁰² John Gough toured England in 1853-5, 1857-60 and 1878, Clement, 'Gough', *ODNB*. Emerson toured in 1847-1848, Townsend Scudder III, 'Emerson's British Lecture Tour, 1847-1848, Part I, *American Literature*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Mar., 1935), pp. 15-36. See also Wach, 'Culture and the Middle Classes', p. 399.

²⁰³ Roper lectured in Bradford in spring 1840, *BO* 5 March 1840; 12 March 1840. Frederick Douglass toured England in 1846 and 1856, William S. McFeely, *Frederick Douglass* (New York, 1991), pp. 136-45 and 202-3. For female ex-slave lecturers see Teresa Zachodnik, 'The Politics of Embodiment and Appeal: The Female Slave and Sarah Parker Remond's 1859 Antislavery Lecture Tour' in Martin Hewitt (eds.), *Platform Pulpit Rhetoric: Leeds Centre for Victorian Studies working papers*, Vol. 3 (2000), 23-36.

²⁰⁴ The scientist, T. H. Huxley, was motivated by money, self promotion and the opportunity of seeing America and his sister. J. V. Jensen, 'Thomas Henry Huxley's Lecture Tour of the United States, 1876', *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (Jul., 1988), 181-195.

late 1850s the ‘Sunday lecturing movement’, under the guidance of clergymen like Arthur Mursell of Manchester and the Rev. J. P. Chown of Bradford, used the religious lecture as a way of increasing their flock.²⁰⁵ Sunday lectures were aimed at audiences who would not usually attend a sermon but might be tempted by a lecture which used humour and conversational language to explore religious truth. An advertisement placed by the Rev. J. P. Chown in the *Bradford Observer* in October 1855, stated that his series of Sunday afternoon lectures at Bradford Temperance Hall were directed at those ‘not accustomed to attend a place of worship on that day’.²⁰⁶ The demand for improving lectures was also stimulated by mutual improvement societies and the emerging adult education movement. Local clergymen were often enthusiastic lecturers on a whole range of edifying topics that might prove beneficial to the working classes.²⁰⁷

The lecture became both respectable and fashionable in the mid-Victorian period thanks to the participation of key figures such as Charles Dickens, John Ruskin, Samuel Smiles, George Dawson and W. J. Fox.²⁰⁸ Yet while speaking in public was no longer controversial, accepting payment remained taboo. Many well-heeled speakers were very careful to differentiate between themselves and a ‘professional paid lecturer’. John Ruskin, for example, was willing to defy his critics and address the people directly, but only after emphasising his gentlemanly credentials by stressing he did not ‘mean at any time to take up the trade of a lecturer’.²⁰⁹ If any one individual was responsible for making speaking for money an acceptable pursuit it was Charles Dickens. As early as 1846 Dickens first mooted the idea of public readings but his publisher, John Foster, persuaded him that it would be detrimental to his public character as lecturing was unrespectable and that the public reading of fiction was ‘dangerously close to a career in the theatre’.²¹⁰ It is a measure of how quickly perceptions were changing that only fourteen years later such considerations were of little consequence and Dickens began his very successful reading tours.²¹¹ Like Ruskin, Dickens was keen to distance his own speaking from that of a

²⁰⁵ Hewitt, ‘Popular Platform Religion’. Koditschek, *Class formation and urban-industrial society*, pp. 196; 265; 289.

²⁰⁶ *BO*, 18 October 1855.

²⁰⁷ Golby and Purdue, *The Civilization of the Crowd*, chapter four describes how many working people resented the condescension which all too often went hand-in-hand with middle-class patronage.

²⁰⁸ For vibrancy and range of the Victorian lecture platform see edited collection, Hewitt, *Platform Pulpit Rhetoric*.

²⁰⁹ Mathew Bevis, ‘Lecturing Ruskin’, in Hewitt, *Platform Pulpit Rhetoric*, p. 126.

²¹⁰ *Charles Dickens and His Performing Selves: Dickens and the Public Readings* (Oxford, 2006), p. 33. Collins, *Reading Aloud*, p. 7.

²¹¹ William Charles Mark Kent, *Charles Dickens as a Reader* (London 1872, republished 1971 with an introduction by Philip Collins).

lecturer. Despite charging admission, his projected image was that of a gentleman indulging in parlour dramatics rather than a businessman accumulating profit.²¹² Dickens's epic reading tours in the UK and America required a high level of organisation and management from acoustics and lighting to marketing. A retinue of staff accompanied Dickens ensuring a slick professional operation.²¹³

Without the expansion in large commercial premises Dickens's public readings would have been greatly curtailed. During the 1840s, 1850s and 1860s a remarkable range of meeting rooms, halls, chapels and lecture theatres sprang up enabling lecture circuits to extend into the smallest of towns and villages. There was also, during this period, a greater acceptability of holding religious lectures in secular buildings and vice versa. The columns of the *Bradford Observer* illustrate how the range and quantity of entertainment expanded between 1835 and 1860. By the 1860s the *Observer* found it necessary to print a day-by-day guide to lectures, public meetings, dramatic readings and other aural delights on offer. While local worthies such as John Rawson, the Rev. M. Milne and the Rev. J. P. Chown regularly gave improving lectures to their townfolk, it is striking just how many speakers and entertainers were professional itinerant speakers, many of whom had an international reputation.²¹⁴ At the start of 1860, for example, Bradfordians could have heard lectures by the American ex-slave, Frederick Douglass or the 'famous metropolitan orator', Mr T. Mason; attended Mr Taylor's phrenology lecture; or heard a lecture on Japanese culture. Mr Montgomery was also in town reading *Macbeth* while William Kidd, a working-man scientist, was offering amusing lectures on natural history. For those seeking a worthier pursuit the itinerant temperance agent, Mr Charles Carr, was lecturing on the Permissive Bill; or if engineering and great men appealed an illustrated lecture on the life of George Stephenson was to be had at the Wilsden Mechanics Institute.²¹⁵ The London-based lecturer Mrs Clara Balfour also visited that spring, as did George Dawson, and the anti-Secularist lecturers, the Rev. Brewin Grant and Dr John Brindley.²¹⁶

²¹² Dickens, for example, opened a performance of the Christmas carol in Bradford with the request that the audience 'imagine this a small social party assembled to hear a tale around the Christmas tree', *BO*, 4 January 1855. It has been calculated that Dickens made around £45,000 from his lecturing activities, Andrews, *Charles Dickens*, p. 45.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, esp. Chapter 4.

²¹⁴ For details of lectures delivered by the Rev. Chown see *BO*, 18 April 1850; 4 October 1855; 11 October 1855; 18 October 1855. John Rawson, one of the founders of the *Bradford Observer*, lectured on behalf of the early closing association, see *BO*, 20 December 1855.

²¹⁵ *BO*, 5 January 1860; 12 January 1860; 19 January 1860; 26 January 1860.

²¹⁶ *BO*, 9 February 1860; 22 March 1850; 29 March 1860; 5 April 1860.

The communicative power of the spoken word was utilized more broadly than edifying or commercial entertainment. Oratory was also a serious marketing and communication tool. The lecture format was exploited by a variety of organisations from emigration societies, insurance companies, the Vegetarian Society, freehold land societies to promoters of shorthand and businessmen.²¹⁷ Isaac Pitman after publishing his new shorthand system in 1837 ensured its popularity by extensive lecture tours. By 1845 Pitman was employing ten full-time travelling lecturers to promote his system. This surely represents an early application of the power of the lecture format as a commercial marketing tool. Not only did Pitman utilise the propaganda power of the lecture, he also established local branches of enthusiasts and printed his own newspaper, the *Phonographic Journal*, much the same way as other contemporary political and pressure groups furthered their cause.²¹⁸ Emigration societies too used paid agents and public lectures to convince the public of the benefits of emigration. In 1861-2, under the auspices of the New Brunswick Government, James Brown toured Britain and Ireland holding public meetings to encourage emigration to New Brunswick, Canada. While newspapers were important in disseminating the possibilities offered by emigration, print could not compete with ‘the personal, on-the-spot recommendation and assistance offered by ... lecturers and agents’²¹⁹

Emigration, insurance and shorthand agents were not too dissimilar from the itinerant political lecturers of the 1840s. All were paid to disseminate specific propaganda and to persuade and convince audiences by their lecturing prowess. Their job was to circulate information and gain new recruits. Indeed one could go further and suggest that the itinerant political lecturer not only popularised entertaining styles of speaking but was also largely responsible for popularising the lecture format itself. From the literary-cum-political lectures of John Thelwall at the turn of the century, through to William Cobbett to the flood of Chartist, temperance, free trade and slavery orators of the 1830s and 1840s, the lecture became a new art form. Above all lecturing was made interesting, controversial and cutting edge; it not only disseminated ideas but stimulated and stretched intellectual horizons. The efforts of bands of political lecturers during the political excitement of the Chartist years created a generation of lecture-goers. Prolonged listening was no longer

²¹⁷ Hewitt, ‘Emigration Lecturer;’ James Gregory, *Of Victorians and Vegetarians: The Vegetarian Movement in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London, 2007), pp. 34-5; Chase, ‘Out of Radicalism’. There were several itinerant life assurance agents lecturing in Bradford during the 1850s and 1860s, *BO*, 25 April 1850; 20 June 1850; 4 October 1855.

²¹⁸ Reed, *Biography of Isaac Pitman*, p. 53.

²¹⁹ Martin Hewitt, ‘The Itinerant Emigration lecturer: James Brown’s lecture tour of Britain and Ireland, 1861-2, *British Journal of Canadian Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 1, (1995), p. 103.

confined to the Sunday church service but was a common activity. Not only did paid professional lecturers create a demand for rousing oratory, some of the best political lecturers of the 1830s and 1840s exploited the commercial opportunities it offered. The post-Chartist trajectories of Thomas Cooper and Henry Vincent demonstrate that the transition from political lecturing to public lecturing could be straightforward and rewarding.

After his release from Stafford jail in 1845 for his part in 1842 ‘Plug Plot’, Thomas Cooper (1805-1892) publicly fell out with Feargus O’Connor, and fashioned himself as an independent Chartist. By the late 1840s and 1850s, in addition to working as a journalist and dabbling in literary pursuits, he was earning his living as a public lecturer on a range of historical and literary topics. Cooper had become increasingly sceptical towards religion, a tendency which hardened into agnosticism after he read George Eliot’s translation of Strauss’s *Life of Jesus*.²²⁰ Cooper played an integral role in disseminating awareness of Strauss’s work. Indeed it is Cooper rather than Eliot who deserves credit for popularising Strauss via his itinerant lectures, which were reported in George Jacob Holyoake’s *Reasoner* and reprinted at length in *Cooper’s Journal*.²²¹ In 1856, in an abrupt turnaround, Cooper renounced free thought and became a Baptist. He spent the next two decades on the road as an itinerant religious lecturer, attracting large audiences. Cooper was a well-known and admired figure on the lecture circuit and he estimated that by 1866 he had delivered more than 3,300 discourses.²²² It is easy to forget that in the nineteenth century entertainment was limited in scope and not available at the flick of a switch.²²³ Cooper thrived in an era when oratory was prized and lecture-going popular. Cooper not only gave lectures, he also attended them. In December 1860, for example, he made a point of listening to Spurgeon’s Christmas sermon. It seems plausible that Cooper’s interest was both spiritual and professional.²²⁴

The ease at which the former Chartist, Henry Vincent (1813-1878), moved from the radical platform to professional acclaim as popular orator also demonstrates how the

²²⁰ Cooper, *Life of Thomas Cooper*, p. 21. Timothy Larsen, ‘The Regaining of Faith: reconversions among popular radicals in Mid-Victorian England’ *Church History*, 70, 3 (September 2001), p.530.

²²¹ Malcolm Chase entry on Thomas Cooper in W. J. Mander and Alan P. F. Sell (eds.), *The Dictionary of Nineteenth-century British Philosophers*, (2 Vols., Bristol, 2002), Vol. 1, p. 279.

²²² Stephen Roberts, ‘Cooper, Thomas (1805-1892), Chartist and religious lecturer’, *ODNB* (Oxford, 2004)

²²³ James Walvin has stressed that lecturing was an important leisure pursuit which ‘entertained, entranced, often converted and excited’. Walvin, ‘The Propaganda of Anti-slavery’, p. 52.

²²⁴ ‘I mean to hear Spurgeon if he preaches anywhere in London on Xmas day’, Bishopsgate Library, Howell Papers, 17/1/1 f. 47, letter from Thomas Cooper to Thomas Chambers, undated letter [c. Dec 1860].

lecture became a mainstream form of entertainment.²²⁵ Like Cooper, Vincent's imprisonment tempered his radicalism and made him more inclined to favour an alliance with middle-class radicals. After his release from prison he combined journalism with lecturing. By 1848 he was lecturing for the Peace Society and throughout much of the 1850s and 1860s he was occupied as an independent itinerant public lecturer speaking on a range of social and political topics. In 1853, for example, he could be heard in Hartlepool talking upon the 'Liberal & Progressive tendencies of the present age'.²²⁶ Vincent supported the North in the American Civil War, which made him popular across the Atlantic and encouraged him to embark on several American speaking tours between 1866 and 1876. He was enthusiastically welcomed and these visits generated useful income to secure his family's long-term security.²²⁷ Both Cooper and Vincent were pioneers of popular lecturing and yet they are remembered first and foremost for their Chartism. Their long and influential careers as itinerant public lecturers warrant further investigation.²²⁸

Conclusion

Most professional orators who rose to prominence during the Chartist period were of humble origins and had acquired public recognition via hard work, discipline and self-improvement. They were indeed shining examples of the self-help doctrine. George Thompson, during his 1847 Tower Hamlet hustings speech, traded on his self-made credentials telling his listeners that he came before them as a parliamentary candidate, despite being born into poverty, because for twenty years he had 'energetically and uncompromisingly' pursued his goal.²²⁹ The discipline and decorum of propagandists like George Thompson or Henry Vincent was instrumental to the rehabilitation of the political platform and explains why it became increasingly acceptable for reform movements and pressure groups to employ paid agitators. It also supports the broader argument of this study that popular politics was not primarily rough, disorderly and unrespectable.

Yet while George Thompson was feted for his oratory and even James Acland, for all his rough edges, was admired for his wit and tenacity, both men lived an insecure

²²⁵ Vincent was a key figure in the evolution of the popular lecture, but sadly, as does not have strong connections with Yorkshire and the North-East, he falls outside the scope of this PhD.

²²⁶ See a handbill for two orations to be delivered in May 1853 by Henry Vincent on the 'Liberal & Progressive tendencies of the present age', Hartlepool Museums Services, Robert Wood Collection.

²²⁷ Albert Nicholson, rev. Eileen Groth Lyon, 'Vincent, Henry (1813-1878)', *ODNB* (Oxford, 2004).

²²⁸ Vincent awaits a modern biographer, at present only Henry Dowling's brief nineteenth-century account of his life exists. Cooper has received more attention from historians and yet his post 1856 career as a religious lecturer merits further investigation.

²²⁹ *The Times*, 31 July 1847. Vernon, *Politics and the People*, p. 268.

existence. They enjoyed the trapping of middle-class professional life, but their social position was insecure due to the difficulties of regularly mixing with the affluent while being wholly dependent on relatively modest wages.²³⁰ For those without an independent income the tension between salaried tenure and moral integrity remained troubling. Those who moved away from overtly political agitations towards the mainstream lecture platform and operated in a freelance capacity fared better in this respect. Henry Vincent and Thomas Cooper earned a living from the lecture circuit on their own terms, unsullied by accusations of being in the pay of propagandists. While radical women were less vocal on the political platform after the initial wave of Chartism, by the end of the Chartist period their middle-class sisters were making initial inroads as respectable freelance lecturers.

Without the political pressure groups of the 1830s and 1840s and the pioneering work of men like George Thompson and James Acland (who literally cleared a path for John Bright and Richard Cobden),²³¹ Gladstone's stumping of the country would have been unthinkable.²³² Traditionally, with the exception of election hustings, politicians did not make public political speeches outside Parliament. Indeed parliamentary etiquette forbade members to speak in other members' constituencies without prior permission from the sitting member. While Viscount Sherbrooke might denounce Gladstone's appearance on the platform in 1866 as 'a sort of ministerial agitation', it became clear that the public as a whole admired Gladstone's extra-parliamentary oratory.²³³ His Midlothian campaign (1879-1880) illustrates how, by the late nineteenth century, political speeches delivered in the provinces and reported at length in the local and national press were an important tactic for mainstream political parties. By the 1860s the popular political platform was no longer confined to the demagogues and the religious fanatics and the paid agent edged slowly towards respectability.²³⁴

²³⁰ R. S. Neale, *Class and Ideology in the nineteenth century* (London, 1972), pp. 22-3.

²³¹ According to Holyoake, Acland was used by the League as an outrider, whose mission was to gauge popular feeling in the localities and allow hostility to be expended before the arrival of the Cobden and Bright. *Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life*, Vol. I, pp. 226-7.

²³² Gladstone first adopted this mode of campaigning in Manchester in October 1853 and it culminated in the two great Midlothian campaigns in 1879 and 1880, Meisel, *Public Speech*, pp. 223-4; Hanham, *Elections and Party Management*, p. 202.

²³³ Hanham, *Elections and Party Management*, p. 202, fn. 1.

²³⁴ According to Sidney and Beatrice Webb, it was the 1870s before paid trade union agents were not automatically dismissed as 'pothouse agitators, unscrupulous men, leading a half idle life, fattening on the contributions of their dupes'. Cited by Paul Pickering, Pickering, 'Trade of Agitation', p. 31.

Chapter seven: Conclusion

This study, which is the first detailed analysis of popular political oratory in the provinces, extends our knowledge of the Victorian platform in several important ways. Earlier research in nineteenth century political oratory largely falls into three categories: consideration of the gentlemanly leader and the radical mass platform; the hustings and electioneering; and finally late nineteenth-century statesmen on the stump. These have obscured significant elements of popular political oratory. By concentrating on leading radicals such as Feargus O'Connor, Ernest Jones and John Bright the role of regional paid itinerant lecturers in political mobilisation has been neglected. Similarly, the focus upon elections diverts attention from the diverse range of public meetings which were not specifically aligned to parliamentary procedure. The great topics of the age: anti-slavery, free trade, secular education, the Crimean war, sanitation, church rates, Sabbatarianism and temperance were endlessly debated at local public meetings but have been rarely considered as part of the political platform.

Building upon work carried out by Humphrey Southall and Philip Howell on the geographical orbits of itinerant agitators, chapter two integrates geography with the mechanics of travel and also looks at the significance of the lecture circuit as both a proselytising mission and a fact finding exercise. Not only does this chapter consider the more prosaic aspects of life on the road, it provides a useful corrective to tendency of historians to over-estimate the initial impact of the railway. This study provides evidence that railways were utilised alongside older patterns of travel and suggests that there were more similarities between the 1840s and 1860s than might have been expected. It also places radical pedestrianism, from Thelwall through to the Chartist period, at the centre of the political mobilisation.

By focusing on elections, which had a long association with carnivalesque misrule and drink fuelled disorder, both James Vernon and Jon Lawrence's work on the hustings and political election meetings have overlooked the ways in which public meetings strove to be democratic. Rather than the Chartist years witnessing a narrowing of political participation, chapter three argues that genuine democratic participation was promoted by the rules and etiquette of indoor meetings. Ideas such as manly conduct and fair play were prevalent on the platform, curbing unruly behaviour and preserving the right of the

disenfranchised to participate in local politics. Far from being a middle-class imposition, restraint and respectability were always a dimension of plebeian radical politics. The commitment of public meetings to open and fair discussion and, above all, rules and regulations, continued into the twentieth century and beyond as evidenced by popular guides such as Walter Citrine's *ABC of Chairmanship* (1939).

The Chartist era produced a rich array of textual discourses, from newspapers and tracts to poems and novels, but this has resulted in a skewed historiography that privileges print over oral culture. My research asserts the continuing importance of oral communication. Although literacy rates began to rise around 1850 (several decades before the 1870 Education Act) many working people could not read fluently.¹ For such people the entertaining lecturer was more accessible than a closely printed tract. Some thirteen years after the publication of the *People's Charter*, Ernest Jones remained convinced that missionaries were essential for disseminating Chartism in the agricultural regions. For Jones the personal presence of the missionary was indispensable: 'he is necessary, as a pioneer, to prepare the machinery by which the reception of tracts and their distribution are rendered possible.'² Chapter four also raises important methodological issues on the dangers of using reported oratory uncritically and focuses attention on the mechanics of shorthand reporting, newspaper production and the craft of the mid-nineteenth century newspaper reporter. As more historical research draws upon digitised nineteenth-century local newspapers, such issues are pertinent.

Another key element of this study has been the performative aspect of public speaking. In keeping with work by Epstein, Pickering and Belchem this study demonstrates that speeches, even on potentially dry political topics, were far from dull. More work could be conducted on the links between popular oratory and the stage, for example the affinities between public speaking manuals with their detailed plates and discussion of how to present key emotions, and contemporary guides to the stage. Actors' manuals, such as that written by Lemman Thomas Rede, would make an excellent starting point for any such investigation.³ The surge of interest in public speaking, evident in mass-produced publications such as *Bell's Elocutionist*, is an area which warrants further attention from

¹ Reay, 'The context and meaning of popular literacy', p. 100.

² *NS*, 20 September 1851.

³ Lemman Thomas Rede, *The road to the stage, or, The performer's preceptor* (London, 1827) later extensively republished from 1858 onwards as the *Guide to the Stage* edited by Francis C. Wemyss, aimed at an American market.

both historians and literary critics. While Lynda Mugglestone has investigated the role of accent in public speaking there has been little work on the technical and stylistic aspects of nineteenth-century public speaking. Indeed the nineteenth-century British elocution movement, aside from a thesis written over sixty years ago by an American PhD student, has been virtually neglected.⁴

Chapter five, which charts the emergence of ‘democratic’ styles of speaking, is perhaps the most ambitious of the thesis and offers potential for further research. My hypothesis that speaking style changed between 1830 and 1860 requires more rigorous testing than possible in a three-year project. Ideally the speeches of two or three orators would be examined in great depth to look for evidence of change. For example, how did George Jacob Holyoake’s early speeches as an Owenite speaker compare with those made later as a secular lecturer in the 1850s and 1860s? Profound changes in oratorical style were acknowledged and commented on by contemporaries. Thomas Erskine May, writing in 1862, recognised that oratory had changed substantially in his lifetime. May claimed that contemporary orators failed to live-up to the standards of their predecessors not because they had less genius but because:

Their style has changed ... They address themselves more to the reason, and less to the imagination, the feelings and the passions of their audience, than orators of a former age. They confront, not only the members of their own body, but the whole people, - who are rather to be convinced by argument, than persuaded by the fascination of the orator. In their language, there is less of study and artistic finish, than in the oratory of an earlier period. Their perorations are not composed, after frequent recitals of Demosthenes: but give direct and forcible expressions to their own opinions and sentiments.⁵

The ability of oratory to reinvent itself in a form that was relevant to the age has been overlooked by historians. Instead there has been a tendency to see oral communication in the context of popular political politics as something that was traditional, illogical and backward looking and that, as the nineteenth century progressed, oratory was inevitably superseded by ‘rational’ print culture. While James Vernon’s work is ground breaking in placing language and speech at the centre of political culture and laudable in its use of ephemeral sources and visual media, he tends to equate oral communication with the traditional and old-fashioned. According to Vernon the ‘newly invented culture of

⁴ Haberman ‘The elocutionary movement in England’.

⁵ Thomas Erskine May, *The Constitutional History of England since the accession of George the Third* (2 Vols., London, 1863), Vol. I, p. 500. During this period homiletics also underwent a period of revival as evident in the abundance of articles on preaching styles found in the Wellesley Index for this period.

democracy' was characterised by a print-based rational discussion of facts and evidence. This new rational print culture 'undermined the melodramatic, emotive, and collective uses of customary oral and visual media'⁶ Yet, as my arguments on democratic speaking styles suggest, popular orators too were immersed in a new spirit of enquiry that relied heavily upon statistics and evidence. Arguably the political orators of the 1840s and 1850s were just as rational as the print culture of the period.

Chapter six, particularly the career trajectory of James Acland (and to a lesser extent that of George Thompson) supports James Vernon's thesis that as the nineteenth century progressed political agitation became increasingly professionalised and managed. Yet while Acland's use of statistical data and interest in the registration courts was indicative of newer styles of politicking, he was successful precisely because he was adept at working within the older corrupt political system. According to George Howell, Acland's motto, while working as a political agent, was 'to win the election never mind the expense'.⁷

The *Bradford Observer* study accords with work done by Helen Rogers and Simon Morgan on the gender of the platform and also indicates the considerable potential for further investigation into women and political oratory. The political platform was certainly a masculine place and there is evidence that it remained so throughout the Chartist period aside from inroads made by freelance middle-class lecturers on womanly and not overtly political topics. It was not until the creation of School Boards in 1870 that women were permitted to exercise their oratorical powers in an official capacity.⁸ In 309 issues of the *Bradford Observer* there was only one example of a woman addressing a public meeting.⁹ A study which took in a larger sample of local newspapers would shed more light on female participation in public meetings, answering such questions as: how often and in what circumstances did women speak? Was it socially permissible for them to heckle? etc.

Martin Hewitt's valuable work on the cultural and literary platform overlooks the role played by political oratory in creating a demand for lectures. Although Hewitt does briefly cite the ACLL he does not link the entertainment offered by such pressure group meetings

⁶ Vernon *Politics and the People*, p. 336.

⁷ Bishopsgate Institute, ref., Vol. C, pp. 29/30, f. 29-30, George Howell's handwritten autobiography. While employed by the League Acland treated his supporters, as evidenced by a letter written by Acland from Sheffield dated 19 Oct 1840, 'I have private apartments here - at a respectable Coffee house - to evade the heavy tax of presuming operatives, who, on my last visit here, saw me up a heavy score at the Angel. Here I can fill them at a shilling a head - respectably', ACLL letter book, f. 743.

⁸ Meisel, *Public Speech*, p. 239.

⁹ Bessy, a female operative, addressed a meeting of the Powerloom Weavers Protective Society in 1845, *BO*, 12 June 1845.

with the rising popularity of the lecture platform.¹⁰ Yet many of the rhetorical techniques, even inculcating the habit of attending lectures itself, were pioneered by the itinerant political lecturers of the 1840s and 1850s. The lecture format was taken up and refined by the rational recreation lobby but even so, early exposure to rousing oratory was often via the campaigns mounted by the key reform movements of the Chartist period. As we have seen many political lecturers later crossed over to the commercial popular platform. More work needs to be carried out on the blurring between the political and the educational lecture. For example, Henry Vincent's commercial lectures often covered politics and yet, as they were delivered in a generalised non-party fashion, politics in this context was no more controversial than philosophy or history.

At the start of the Chartist era extra-parliamentary pressure groups were attacked as unconstitutional and unnecessary. Yet by the 1850s 'pressure from without' was accepted as part of the political process, so much so that in 1853 the *Edinburgh Review* was able to claim that public meetings and newspapers increasingly competed with parliamentary functions and that 'Public opinion is formed out of doors; and is only revised, ratified and embodied within [Parliament]'.¹¹ Such a change was facilitated by the diverse reforming movements of the period which made public meetings and paid itinerant lecturers an increasingly slick medium for political mobilisation.

Review of Methodology and future directions

Chapter two draws upon the theoretical underpinnings of historical geography, yet it stops short of using GIS technology to plot lecture routes of Jonathan Bairstow and Septimus Davis for two reasons. Firstly the quality of the data was not sufficient to plot time and place with the degree of accuracy demanded by such technology. Secondly while approximate figures could have been used it was felt that the time invested in creating a GIS system would have been better spent elsewhere. GIS technology provides an excellent spatial mapping tool yet it still leaves many questions unanswered, such as route, motivation and the more prosaic aspects of life on the road. It tells us nothing about the content, style and delivery of political lecturing.

¹⁰ Hewitt, 'Aspects of Platform Culture', p. 8. Jon Lawrence, however, does acknowledge the entertainment value of the free political meeting. He gives an account of a London navvy at an election meeting in the 1930s whacking his tearful son before shouting, 'What's the matter with you? Isn't this better than a cinema?' Lawrence, *Electing Our Masters*, p. 5.

¹¹ Patricia Hollis, 'Pressure from Without: an introduction', in Hollis (ed.), *Pressure from Without*, pp. 25-6.

Much of the empirical data underpinning this thesis derives from a detailed study of the *Bradford Observer*. Besides generating empirical confirmation of the rise of local speechmaking and the growth in reported speech, it also furnishes rich evidence of the culture of lecturing and public meetings and the important role played by both resident and itinerant orators in local political debate. The *Bradford Observer* has not been digitised so my research followed the traditional pattern of working through the issues, page by page, in a consecutive order, a method which has particular merit as context and organisational aspects of layout are evident. Conversely, the advent of the online resource, British Library 19th-century Newspapers, has dramatically changed historical research making the microfilm reader increasingly redundant.¹² The ability to rapidly cross search large collections of digitised newspapers has enriched this study by making it possible to track the movements of more-obscure lecturers.¹³ However, for all its advantages there are drawbacks. Material gleaned from an online search is wrenched from its context and can be impressionistic. As digitised material can be search effortlessly from the comfort of the office there is a danger that resources not available digitally will be neglected and scholarship artificially skewed. Moreover, indexing of digitised copy is wholly dependent upon the suppositions of those who devised the digitisation programme, while optical character recognition and search engines capabilities are currently far from infallible.¹⁴ Were the same methodology applied to a digitised online version of the *Bradford Observer* there is a strong possibility that indexing anomalies would have obscured some of the findings. From a practical point of view it is also difficult to measure column inches on a small computer screen. Calculating column inches on a large microfilm-reader or better still using original hardcopy, will be more accurate.

Jon Lawrence's empirical study of election meetings ('Electing John Bull') held in eleven English constituencies between 1895-1935 provides a useful model for a large scale empirical study of political behaviour based upon local newspaper reports.¹⁵ Were a

¹² The full-text search and retrieve facilities of digitised newspapers, in particular, opens up exciting new research possibilities. For more information on the British Library 19th-century newspapers project see <http://newspapers.bl.uk/blcs/> [accessed 27 September 2009].

¹³ Without the ability to cross check large amounts of digitised newsprint the career trajectories of David Ross, Septimus Davis and Jonathan Bairstow would remain hidden.

¹⁴ For a discussion of these issues see Malcolm Chase, 'Digital Chartists: Online Resources for the Study of Chartism', and Mike Sanders, 'The Chartist text in an Age of Digital Reproduction', both in *Journal of Victorian Culture* 14/2, (2009), 294-306.

¹⁵ The methodology and findings of Jon Lawrence's, *Electing John Bull: the Changing Face of British Elections, 1895-1935* is available from the AHDS <http://ahds.ac.uk/catalogue/collection.htm?uri=hist-5078-1> [accessed 27 September 2009]

similar study undertaken of political meetings held during the Chartist decades (which included both hustings and also those inspired by pressure groups and wider political events, such as the Crimean War and Garibaldi's campaigns), much more could be learned about oratory and the culture of meetings and lecturing. Such a study could discover the high watermark of oratory in terms of the volume, if not quality of speech-making, and provide further empirical evidence in support of my argument that the Chartist period was the age when public speaking was truly popular in terms of both audience and aspirations.¹⁶

If an extended study of popular political oratory in the regions were to be undertaken it would be necessary also to pay attention to parliamentary debates. Arguably, a weakness of this current piece of research is the way in which interaction between public meetings in the localities and parliamentary debate has not been explored. For example, flurries of provincial public meetings were held to coincide with key free trade parliamentary debates or the presentation of major Chartist or UKA petitions. The most powerful extra-parliamentary platforms (such as free trade and the anti-slavery movement) also had a voice in Parliament.¹⁷ Moreover as Brian Harrison notes the strategies of several reform movements were 'profoundly influenced by parliamentary debates'.¹⁸

In summary - my thesis provides three major correctives to the current historiography on Victorian oratory. It counters the dominant perceptions of political meetings as being disorderly, unruly and violent – while some political lecturers were treated violently there was much emphasis placed on fair play as indignant press reports illustrate when meetings degenerated into riots. The second corrective is to locate the golden age of speech-making in the middle, not closing decades, of the nineteenth century. It was during the 1830s, 1840s and 1850s that public speaking and lecture-going became truly popular in terms of widespread participation. In many respects Gladstone symbolised the dying embers of the age of oratory and figures like George Thompson and Henry Vincent represent the peak of the charismatic popular orator. Finally, my work shows that oratory continued to be important to radicalism after the collapse of the mass radical platform in the late 1840s. Indeed the move indoors to smaller, more regulated meetings

¹⁶ Which accords with the view of Holyoake's biographer, Joseph McCabe, who claimed that English public life had 'ten times as many powerful speakers between 1830 and 1870 as in the next forty years', McCabe, *Life and Letters of George Jacob Holyoake*, Vol. II, p. 285.

¹⁷ Meisel, *Public Speech*, p. 238.

¹⁸ Brian Harrison, *Peaceable kingdom: stability and change in modern Britain* (Oxford, 1982), p. 384.

represented a democratic gain, not a loss for the politicised working man, in that the rules and regulations ensured him a voice: although ironically such meetings were less accessible to the women than the earlier, community-based political culture.

The vitality of the spoken word was assisted by technological advances such as the railway and the telegram while the great structural changes wrought by industrialisation and urbanisation gathered together ever larger audiences. The proliferation of public lecturing in this period was produced by the cultural shift between the older oral culture of story-telling and ballads and new rational print culture.¹⁹ The lecture had a foot in both camps. It was primarily oral, yet it easily translated to print; it was charismatic, visual and entertaining and yet increasingly factual and professional. During these transitional years the lecture bridged the gap between the old and the new. Throughout the Chartist period oral communication remained integral to the circulation of ideas whether political, scientific or religious; as James Secord persuasively argues, there is a need to ‘put conversation ... at the centre of our understanding of science in the nineteenth century’.²⁰ Certainly many Victorian ‘sensations’ were disseminated both orally and in print. In the scientific field, the book *Vestiges of a Natural History of Creation* (1844) was spread by word-of-mouth, aided by notices in the press, reviews and advertisements. It was ‘dissected at public scientific meetings [and] condemned from pulpits and lecture platforms’.²¹ Fifteen years later, Darwin’s *Origin of the Species* (1859) entered the public domain, not primarily by individual private reading of his book, but via newspaper reports (and satirical cartoons) of the highly controversial Huxley-Wilberforce debate (1860).²²

The historian Henry Jephson, writing in 1892, viewed the political platform as a mechanism by which ‘a liberty-loving people ... won their freedom without bloodshed or disorder’. Jephson was certainly correct that public meetings diffused political tension by providing a carefully controlled space for the political debate.²³ Yet the question whether the political platform directly led to the amelioration of social problems and political change is more problematic. Whether the platform actually was a mechanism for change

¹⁹ Williams, ‘The press and popular culture’, p. 42.

²⁰ James A. Secord, ‘How Scientific Conversation became Shop Talk’, in Eileen Fyfe and Bernard Lightman, (eds.), *Science in the Market Place: Nineteenth-Century Sites and Experiences* (Chicago & London, 2007), p. 24.

²¹ James A. Secord, *Victorian Sensation: The Extraordinary Publication, Reception and Secret Authorship of Vestiges of a Natural History of Creation* (Chicago, 2000), p. 37.

²² Adrian Desmond and James Moore, *Darwin* (London, 1991), pp. 492-498. J. Vernon Jensen, ‘Return to the Wilberforce – Huxley Debate’, *British Journal for the History of Science*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (June 1988), 161-179.

²³ Jephson, *The Platform*, Vol. II, p. 574.

was less important than the illusion of democratic progress. After the constitutional changes wrought by the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts (1828) Catholic Emancipation (1829), the Great Reform Act (1832) and the Slavery Abolition Act (1833) campaigners were aware that the mobilisation of public opinion could, and did, make change possible. Those participating in the drama and excitement of mass meetings genuinely believed they were making history. The perceived success of the ACLL movement demonstrates this sense of agency. In the closing months of 1845, sensing that repeal might be imminent, a flurry of high-profile town hall meetings was convened in the localities and reported at length in sympathetic newspapers.²⁴ The *Bradford Observer* in an editorial headed ‘The National Rising’, likened the wave of vast public meetings and the visible mobilisation of the people to a constitutional revolution and a ‘moral earthquake’. The *Observer* was delighted by the spectacle:

We like to see these public meetings, of which specimens are records in our columns. We like to hear the manly indignant language that is uttered at them, and the responsive “cheers” with which it is received is to us most delightful music. It is true that the speakers hurl hard words against the makers and supporters of our Corn Laws. It is true that the hardest words send back the largest echo, in the form of “tremendous cheers” ... we like the hardest of words and the loudest of cheers.²⁵

Significantly, the *Observer* singled out not the role of the press but the spirited oratory and tremendous cheers of the town hall meeting. During the Chartist era it was via the drama of the spoken word (whether experienced personally or accessed via the lengthy reports of the local and national press) that political mobilisation happened. As the veteran campaigner and poet Ebenezer Elliott put it: ‘The Lecture-Power is the Power of Powers.’²⁶

²⁴ These gatherings were surely noted at Westminster. For detailed reports of meetings held in Leeds, Huddersfield and Bradford see respectively *BO*, 4 December 1845; 4 December 1845; 18 December 1845.

²⁵ *BO*, 4 December 1845.

²⁶ ACLL letter book, f. 287, letter from Ebenezer Elliott to Sidney Smith, 11 Nov 1839.

Appendix I: The lecture tours of Jonathan Bairstow and Septimus Davis.

WEST RIDING.—Mr. Bairstow, lecturer for the West Riding of Yorkshire, will deliver lectures at the following places, in the rotation undermentioned, commencing on November 2nd:—on Monday at Barnsley; Tuesday at Wakefield; Wednesday at Gawthorpe; Thursday at Dewsbury; Friday at Dawgreen; and Saturday at Mirfield. On Monday, November 9th, at Huddersfield; Tuesday at Lepton; Wednesday at Halifax; Thursday at Bradford, Friday at Bingley; and Saturday at Idle. Mr. Bairstow's services will be demanded at Loughborough and Leicester for the week, commencing November 16th; after his return he will lecture on Monday, the 23rd of November, at York; Tuesday at Selby; Wednesday at Hunslet; Thursday at Woodhouse; Friday at Upper Wortley; Saturday at Holbeck. Week commencing November the 30th:—Monday at Armley; Tuesday at Leeds, or in the vicinity; Wednesday at Pudsey; Thursday at Birstal; and Friday at Keighley. Each of the lectures will begin at eight o'clock in the evening, and at the close discussion will be invited, and opposition challenged. Mr. Bairstow is peculiarly anxious that publicity should be extensively given in the respective localities, as he will submit to each meeting a new and effectual plan for the release and return of Frost, Williams, and Jones, during the coming session of Parliament.

Fig. 9: Jonathan Bairstow's Chartist missionary tour itinerary, *Northern Star*, 31 Oct 1840.

Extract 1: Septimus Davis's temperance tour November 1858.¹

Morpeth

Oct. 18 – In consequence of a long walk from Cambo, and the wetness of the day, I did not visit from house to house, consequently, the meeting which was held in a school room, was not so large as expected.” – S.D.²

Walker Iron Works

Nov. 1 - We had a large gathering of people; all seemed pleased, and two persons joined the League. The Society has since joined. – S. D.

Sheriff Hill

Nov. 2- At first the meeting was very thin, but by and by a number of adults and a good many children came in. The Society has decided to join the League.

Southwick

Nov. 3- Meeting was held in a chapel, which was full. Scores could not get in, and people crowded each other very much.

Swalwell

Nov. 5 – It was pay night, and unfavourable for a large meeting. Still a good many came. They were very attentive.

Redcar

Nov. 8 Meeting not large but attentive. Baptist minister in the Chair.

Marsh

Nov. 9 – Meeting small, owing to the coldness of the place of meeting which I hope the friends will alter.

Skelton

Nov. 10 – Sung through the place³ and had a large gathering. Three signed the pledge.

Guisboro'

Nov. 11 – The fife band turned out and played down to the friends meeting house, where we had a large meeting. Several joined the League and some took the pledge.

Hutton Mines

Nov. 12 – This was but a small meeting, owing to the limited publicity previously given. The society, however, decided to join the League.

Newton Roseberry

Nov. 13 – A good meeting and a well conducted audience. The agent gave great satisfaction by the pleasing manner in which he illustrated his subject. – *Isaac Hall*.

Ayton

Nov. 15 – A good meeting. John Richardson, Esq., one of the vice-presidents of the League, occupied the chair. He, in his opening address, explained the principles of the League, and

¹ Extract from Agent's report published in the *North of England Temperance League Register and Almanck for 1859* (Newcastle, 1859).

² 'S.D.' denotes extracts from a report submitted by Septimus Davis to his employers.

³ Presumably this means Davis paraded the streets singing temperance ditties to raise an audience - a standard technique for itinerant temperance agents.

exhorted all to support it. The temperance brass band was in attendance, and performed several airs at the close, so that the meeting went off with good effect. – S.D.

St. Peters Quay

Nov. 16 - This was the largest meeting we have had here this year. We had a very instructive address from the agent Mr Davis. Several signed the pledge, and there was a good impression made on many that did not sign

Hazlerigg

Nov. 17 – The Wesleyan Chapel was full in every part, and there was a good feeling all the time. Four signed the pledge. – S.D.

Newcastle

Nov. 18 – There were other speakers in attendance at this meeting. A good meeting but not numerously attended. – J.D.

Wreckington

Nov. 19 – There was a tolerably fair gathering at this meeting, considering that so many of the workmen had to be at work so early the following morning. I explained the principles, and stated the objects of the League and I hope good was done.

Shotley Bridge

Nov. 22 – This meeting was not large, but a respectable and attentive auditory. E. O Tregillas, Esq., occupied the chair, and the Rev. Mr. Whitehead enforced the claims of the League by a few earnest and judicious observations, after I had finished my address. We got one member to the League. – S.D.

Leadgate

Nov. 23 – We had a very large meeting, and a most interesting audience. I am happy to say that the cause in this place is doing well. A few signed the pledge, and five joined the League. – S.D.

Blackhill

Nov. 24 – This meeting passed off very cheerfully. There was a good feeling and all seemed well pleased with the proceedings. They intend to join the League as a society. – S.D.

Newlands

Nov. 25 – There was a tea party held at this place; but owing to the rain that day the attendance was but small, though the meeting at night was considerably better. We got five names to the pledge. There is no society and this was the first meeting. – S.D.

Berryedge

Nov. 26 – The cause appears to require reviving in this village; but I hope good was done by my visit, and there are the elements for good among them. After the close of my address, they joined the society to the League. Two signatures were got to the pledge, and two subscribers to the League. – S.D.

St Peter's

Nov. 30 – Paid a second visit. Mr Jacob Weir was also a speaker at this meeting, and gave them a very interesting and effective address. – S.D.

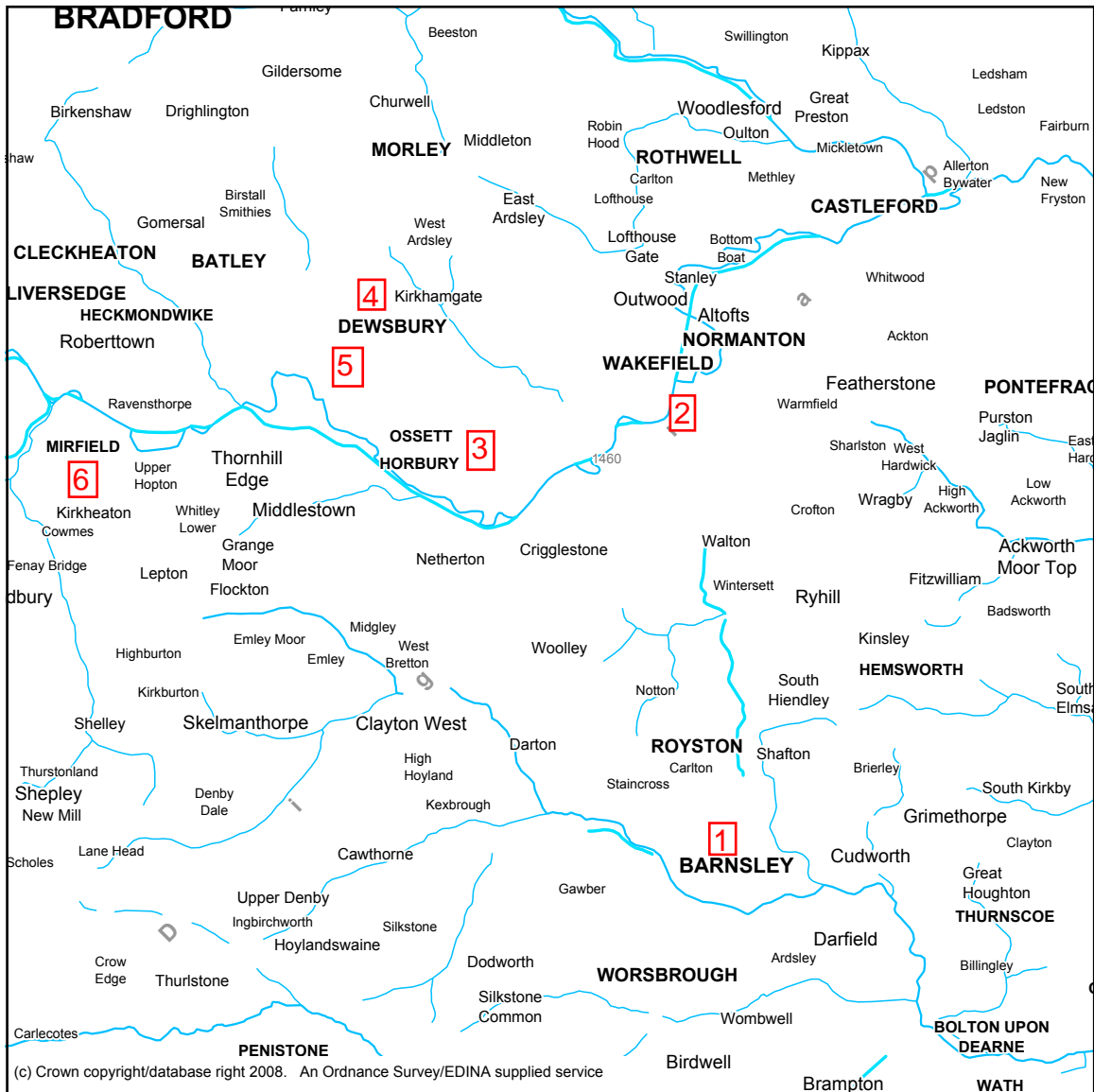
Dec 1, - I went by train to Tynemouth, and visited Cullercoats, and from thence to Seaton Sluice. I made inquiries at these places among the temperance friends, and succeeded in making arrangements for a meeting on the Friday evening at Seaton Sluice.

Methodology: plotting routes and creating maps

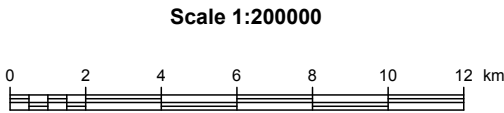
The primary source material used for the analysis of Davis's tour is unusual in its detail. Unfortunately comparable data could not be collected for Bairstow's tour. Ideally mapping a completed tour for Bairstow from information gathered after the event would have been more satisfactory. But it was not possible to compile such data as Bairstow did not routinely publish his day-to-day movements in the Chartist press and certainly not retrospectively. Similarly local groups addressed by Bairstow did not always report such meetings and when reports were published, the dates are often too vague, e.g. 'Thursday last' to compile post-event itineraries with any confidence. Bairstow's tour therefore represents what was deemed to be a feasible lecture circuit at the start of the 1840s.

Maps were drawn using the digital mapping facilities provided by EDINA Digimap <http://edina.ac.uk/digimap/>. Itineraries were plotted on the PDF maps created using Digimap with Adobe Acrobat 9 Professional which allows the modification of PDF files. Routes have been plotted in weekly groups, number 1 represents Monday, 2 Tuesday, 3 Wednesday and so forth. If a number is missing from a weekly map it is because no lecture was given (or, in Bairstow's case, scheduled). Marked locations are approximate only. Digimap is not a historical mapping tool – therefore I removed all features except settlement names and rivers and canals (it was not possible to leave railway routes on a line-by-line basis or roads – therefore I had no choice but to remove all these features). The ordnance survey map data, on which Digimap operates, records modern settlements and place names. It therefore includes places which were obviously not in existence in the mid-nineteenth century. Where these were glaringly apparent, (e.g. Leeds/Bradford airport) I removed them with an editing tool. Not all locations in Davis and Bairstow's itineraries appear on Digimap. Where settlement names were absent I searched GENUKI Gazetteer <http://www.genuki.org.uk/big/Gazetteer/> and used the most likely candidate.

Fig. 10, Bairstow week 1



1 = Mon 4 = Thurs
 2 = Tues 5 = Fri
 3 = Wed 6 = Sat



This map is drawn on the GB National Grid

Heights (if given) are in metres above Newlyn datum. The representation of a road, track or path is no evidence of a right of way. The alignment of tunnels is approximate.

Reproduced using significant survey information from Ordnance Survey basic and derived scales digital data with the permission of the controller of Her Majesty's Stationary Office.

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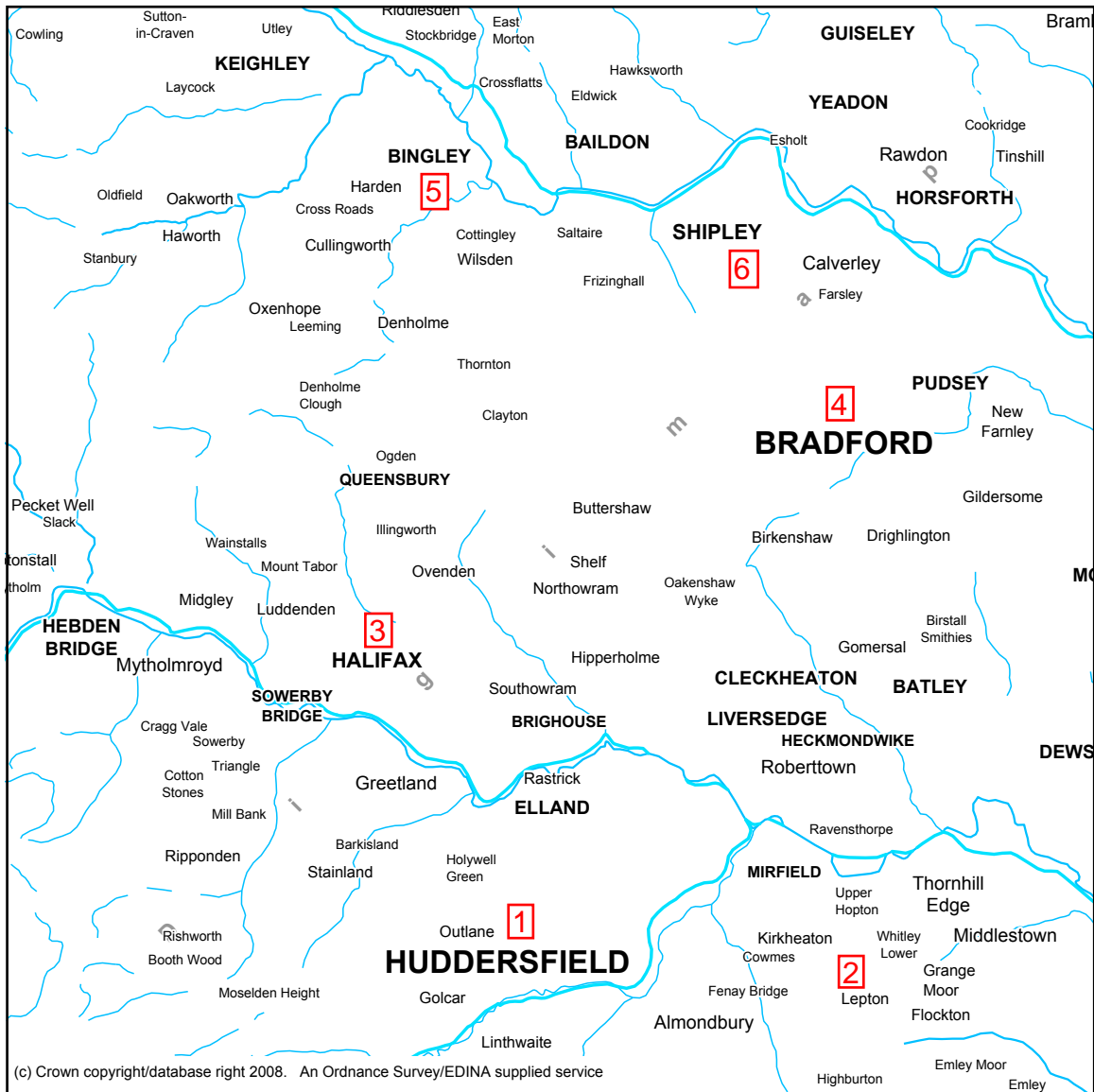
Produced for :Janette Martin
 Leeds
 Leeds

Produced by :EDINA Digimap
 Data Library
 University of Edinburgh
 Causewayside House
 160 Causewayside
 Edinburgh EH9 1PR

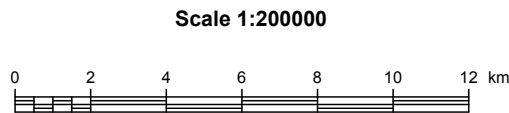


Original in colour

Fig. 11, Bairstow week 2



1 = Mon 4 = Thurs
 2 = Tues 5 = Fri
 3 = Wed 6 = Sat



This map is drawn on the GB National Grid

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Heights (if given) are in metres above Newlyn datum. The representation of a road, track or path is no evidence of a right of way. The alignment of tunnels is approximate.

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 Leeds
 Leeds

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Fig. 12, Bairstow week 3

1 - York



2 - Selby

1 = Mon 4 = Thurs
2 = Tues 5 = Fri
3 = Wed 6 = Sat

Scale 1:20000



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Heights (if given) are in metres above Newlyn datum. The representation of a road, track or path is no evidence of a right of way. The alignment of tunnels is approximate.

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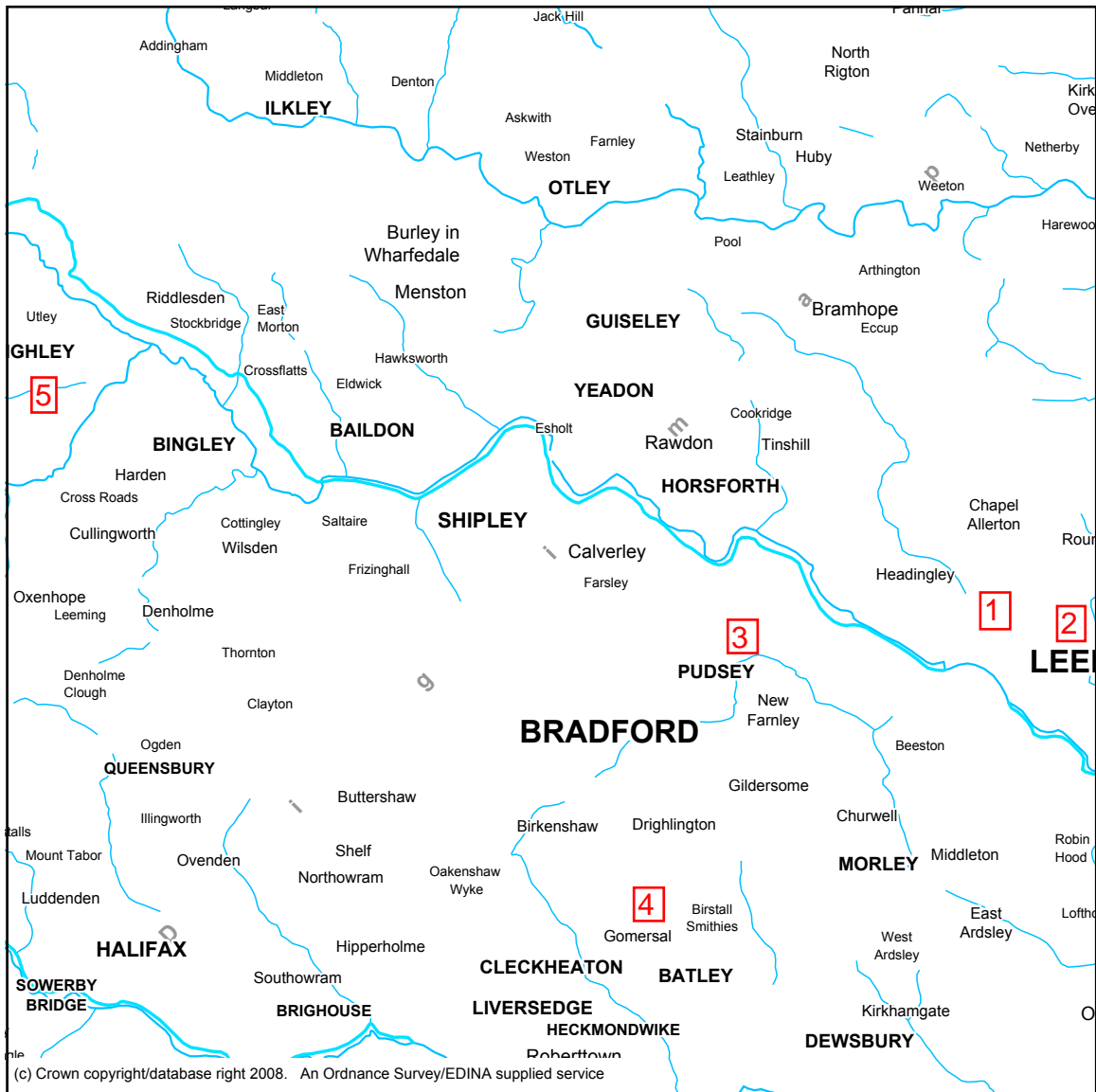
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Fig. 13, Bairstow week 4



1 = Mon 4 = Thurs
 2 = Tues 5 = Fri
 3 = Wed 6 = Sat



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Produced on :Dec 5, 2008 2:20:12 PM

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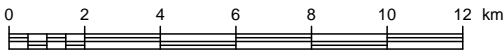
Original in colour

Fig 14, Davis week 1



1 = Mon 4 = Thurs
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Scale 1:20000



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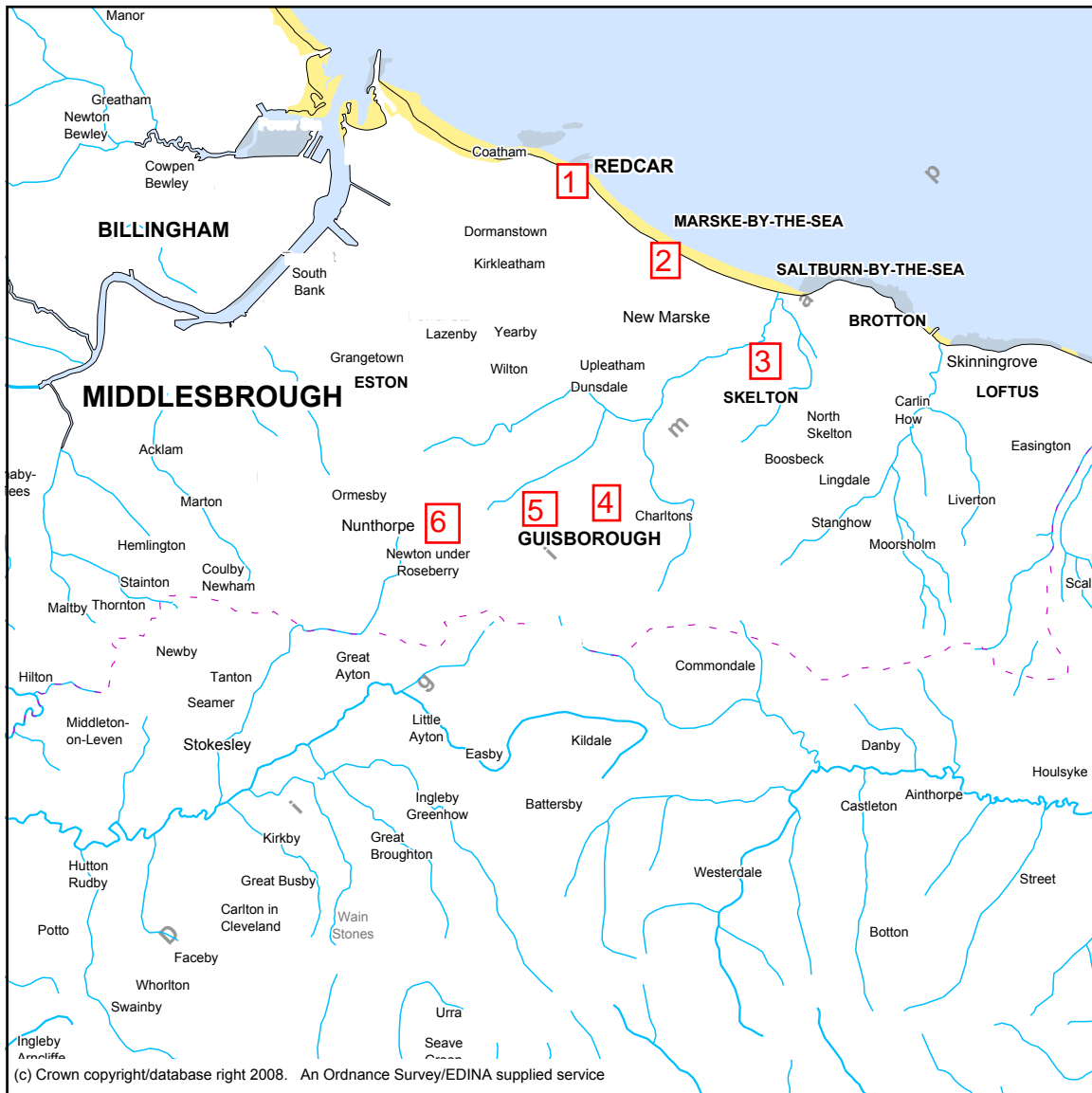
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Fig. 15, Davis week 2



1 = Mon 4 = Thurs
 2 = Tues 5 = Fri
 3 = Wed 6 = Sat

Scale 1:200000



This map is drawn on the GB National Grid

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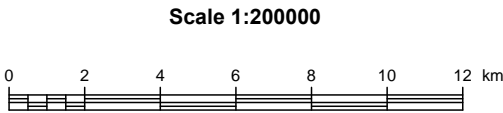


Original in colour

Fig. 16, Davis week 3



1 = Mon 4 = Thurs
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This map is drawn on the GB National Grid

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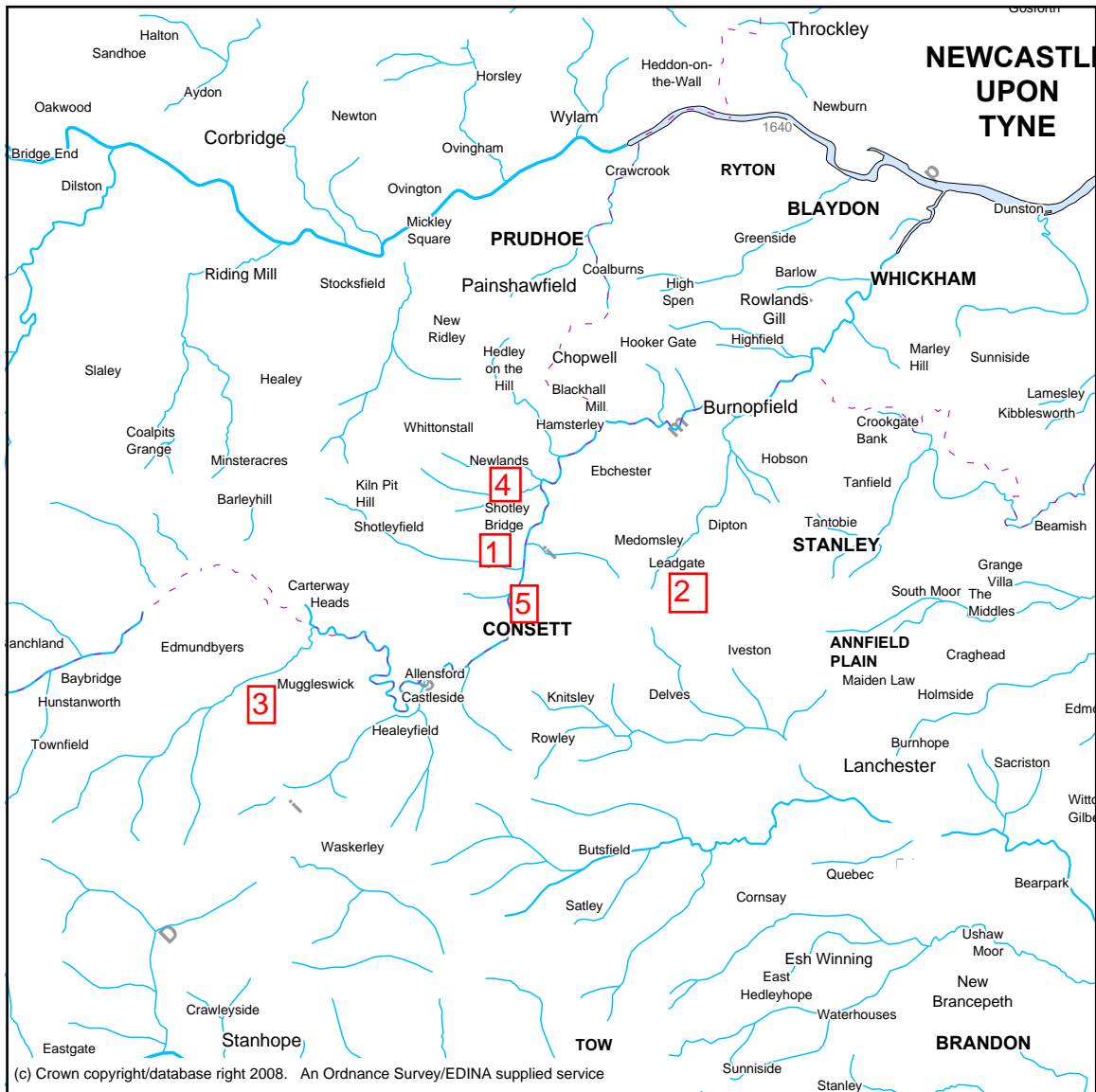
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Original in colour

Fig. 17, Davis week 4



1 = Mon 4 = Thurs
 2 = Tues 5 = Fri
 3 = Wed 6 = Sat

Scale 1:20000



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Appendix II: Bradford Observer empirical study

Bradford in the Chartist Period

Bradford is located in the southern foothills of the Pennines, approximately nine miles west of Leeds and thirteen miles north-west of Wakefield. Like Manchester on the other side of the Pennines, Bradford was one of the shock towns of industrialising Britain. Bradford's population at the time of the Great Reform Act (1832) stood at 43,527, by the 1851 census it had more than doubled to 103,778.¹ Such rapid expansion led to great squalor. Bradford had an unenviable reputation for the filthiness of its street and its unhealthy living conditions. Located in a natural basin, the town suffered from smog as the smoke which poured from the hundreds of factory chimneys lingered while the stagnant Bradford canal (which suffered from an inadequate water supply) was a breeding ground for cholera and other diseases. In 1845 it was calculated that life expectancy within woolcombers' families was sixteen while even those from the professional classes could only expect to reach the age of thirty-nine. This statistic was so shocking that, for a time at least, working men and middle-class reformers were united in their campaigns for sanitary reform.² Bradford's sanitation campaign provided a useful focus for Bradford's radical reformers when Chartism was in the doldrums.³

Bradford's rapid growth was based on the wool textile industry. With plentiful supplies of soft water and strategic canal links, Bradford soon became the wool capital of the world. The shift from hand produced cloth in the home to a system of factory production caused much distress and upheaval. It is significant that several local Chartist leaders had links with the declining trades of woolcombing and handloom weaving.⁴ Besides producing worsted cloth, Bradford was home to the Bowling Iron Foundry, which operated an extensive works on the periphery of the town. There were also many mineral industries and collieries in the vicinity of Bradford.⁵ The town was relatively slow to connect to the railway network, largely because its leading merchants

¹ Charles R. Dod, *Electoral facts from 1832-1853: impartially stated, constituting a complete political gazetteer*, edited by H. J. Hanham with an introduction and bibliographical guide to electoral sources 1832-1885 (Brighton, 1972), p. 31.

² For an editorial on life expectancy in Bradford see *BO*, 25 September 1845. See also the report of a large sanitation meeting held in summer 1845 attended by Revd Scoresby, Vicar of Bradford and George White, *BO*, 5 June 1845. Koditschek, *Class formation and Urban Industrial Society*, p 387.

³ The Chartist David Ross, for example, turned his energies to lecturing on sanitation in this period, *BO*, 18 September 1845; 25 September 1845.

⁴ George White, for example, was an Irish born woolcomber, Chase, *Chartism*, p. 31. Wright, D. G., *The Chartist Risings in Bradford* (Bradford, 1987), pp. 4-6; 27.

⁵ Firth, *Bradford and the Industrial Revolution*, esp. chapter five.

and industrialists squabbled to such an extent that it took fourteen attempts for Bradford to secure a railway bill. It was not until 1846 that its first station opened.⁶

Bradford acquired two MPs after the passage of the Great Reform Act (1832) and it became a municipal borough in 1847. As with the other great industrial towns of the north, Bradford witnessed the rise of an urban, entrepreneurial elite which came into prominence during the 1830s and 1840s. Rather than seeking assimilation, this new manufacturing elite gloried in their status as self-made men.⁷ Bradford's traditional Anglican Tory oligarchy was challenged by this newly assertive class and power struggles were played out in the arenas of municipal government and parliamentary representation.⁸ Early nineteenth century Bradford was also home to a strong radical tradition initially under the leadership of Peter Bussey and, after he left for America in 1840, by George White and David Lightowler. Bradford played a key role in the campaign against the Poor Law Amendment Act (1834) and the factory movement.⁹ It also acquired a reputation for physical force Chartism, evident in the failed rising of January 1840 and further disturbances in 1848.¹⁰ In Bradford's religious affairs the Anglican Church vied with a strong Nonconformist tradition and the Roman Catholicism of Irish migrant workers.¹¹ The strength of Nonconformity was apparent in the types of pressure groups operating in mid-nineteenth century Bradford. The first British temperance society was founded in Bradford in 1830, Sabbatarianism, and the Anti-State Church and Anti-Church Rates Campaigns in Bradford were similarly staunchly supported. Finally Bradford had long connections with the anti-slavery movement and an enduring interest in international affairs; evident in Bradford's support for Garibaldi in 1860.¹²

The Bradford Observer

The *Bradford Observer* was founded in 1834 by a group of prominent Bradford Liberals and industrialists, primarily to counter the vested interests of Bradford's ruling

⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 93-4. For an example of a railway squabble see *BO*, 13 February 1845.

⁷ Koditschek, *Class formation and Urban Industrial Society*, pp.165-181.

⁸ The Tories controlled the Magistracy, Vestry and the Improvement Commission, the Liberals sought to control the Board of Guardians and parliamentary representation of the town, Firth, *Bradford and the Industrial Revolution*, p. 206.

⁹ *Ibid*, pp 6-11. J. T. Ward, 'The Factory Movement', in J. T. Ward (ed.), *Popular Movements c. 1830-1850* (Basingstoke, 1970), 54-77.

¹⁰ Wright, *Chartist Risings in Bradford*, p. 2.

¹¹ Tony Jowitt, 'The Pattern of Religion in Victorian Bradford', in D. G. Wright and J. A. Jowitt (eds.), *Victorian Bradford: essays in honour of Jack Reynolds* (Bradford, 1982), 37-62.

¹² *BO*, 14 June 1860; 28 June 1860.

Tory oligarchy and to champion free trade, nonconformity and Liberalism.¹³ Since its foundation the Byles family was strongly associated with the *Bradford Observer* and William Byles, a former editor of the *Athenaeum* journal, was appointed as first editor.¹⁴ Initially the *Bradford Observer* sold at 7d before the reduction in stamp duty in 1836 brought the price down to 4 ½ d. It was a weekly eight-paged publication issued on Thursdays. Aside from the short-lived *Bradford Herald* (1842) and the *Bradford Advertiser* (1855-1890), during much of the Chartist period the *Bradford Observer* was without a local rival, although Tory and Liberal newspapers in Leeds, Huddersfield and Halifax typically covered Bradford news too.¹⁵ Most newspapers circulating in the Bradford area such as the *Bradford Daily Telegraph* (1868) were founded in the latter half of the nineteenth century after the abolition of stamp duty.¹⁶

It is misleading to see nineteenth century provincial newspapers as parochial in outlook or intrinsically less important than the London newspapers as the typical local newspaper devoted considerable column inches to national and international news and, when the provincial press is taken as a whole, it outsold the combined London press.¹⁷ The *Bradford Observer* reported on a wide range of political issues from international politics, parliamentary debates and national reform campaigns, to local meetings of friendly societies, trade unions and temperance groups and lectures delivered by itinerant speakers. The *Bradford Observer* also faithfully reported municipal and public meetings held in the town and its immediate vicinity. Byles himself was appointed an Improvement Commissioner in 1843 where he energetically promoted local government reform and supported the case for incorporation with powerful articles in the *Observer*.¹⁸ Byles, as Secretary of the Bradford branch of the ACLL, played an active role in the campaign to repeal the Corn Laws.¹⁹

¹³ Dr Godwin, Robert Milligan and J. Garnett were among those who formed a syndicate to raise capital, Butler Wood, *The Bradford Newspaper Press* (read before the [Bradford Antiquarian] Society, February 16 1906), Sheppard pamphlets, Leeds University Brotherton Library Special Collections, p. 53.

¹⁴ David James, 'William Byles and the Bradford Observer', in Wright and Jowitt, *Victorian Bradford*, 115-136.

¹⁵ See Appendix 3 in James, 'William Byles', p. 134.

¹⁶ Wood, 'Bradford Newspaper Press', p. 67.

¹⁷ Andrew Hobbs, When the Provincial Press was the National Press, c.1836-c.1900, *International Journal of Regional and Local Studies*, Series 2, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Spring 2009), p. 40.

¹⁸ Derek Fraser, 'The Editor as Activist: Editors and Urban Politics in Early Victorian England' in Joel H. Wiener (ed.), *Innovators and Preachers: The Role of the Editor in Victorian England* (Westport, Conn., 1985), pp. 136-7. James, 'William Byles', p. 125.

¹⁹ James, 'William Byles', p. 126.

Methodology

The *Bradford Observer* empirical study is based upon an analysis of every issue of the *Bradford Observer* published in a given sample year. Sampling was spaced at five yearly intervals between 1835 and 1860, giving a total of six snapshot years and a total of 309 issues.²⁰ Five yearly intervals were selected as an appropriate interval to provide a level of detail sufficient to discern key trends yet still be manageable in scope.²¹ For each issue the number of political meetings that were reported was counted alongside information upon the date, location and nature of the meeting. All reported oratory over one column inch in length was measured, recorded and categorised as local (West Riding of Yorkshire) or national. These figures were amalgamated monthly to provide statistical evidence of the extent and type (national or local) of oratory reported in the *Bradford Observer*. From the calculated column inches of reported speech, it was possible to demonstrate that the proportion of reported speech changed over the period of the study and that by 1845 there were more local speeches than parliamentary speeches reported in the *Bradford Observer* (see Fig. 18). While this might suggest that the *Bradford Observer* was becoming more parochial in outlook, it is clear that much 'local' oratory comprised reports of public meetings and speeches made by itinerant lecturers discussing national political issues, such as franchise reform, free trade and temperance, alongside verbatim reports of public and town council meetings. The column inch data collated over the thirty year period demonstrates that oratory (or at least reported oratory) peaked in 1850 (see Fig. 19).

There are some anomalies in the data. Where issues were missing I took the average for that year and inserted this 'dummy' data to prevent, as far as possible, skewing the results. For a period of five weeks in 1855 (in the wake of the repeal of newspaper stamp duty) the *Bradford Observer* was published twice weekly on Mondays and Thursdays as a four-page publication.²² For these issues I have treated the two four-page editions as one issue. Another more pressing technical problem when comparing column inches across a thirty year span was that the width of columns and font size varied over time. Clearly the actual number of words-per-column-inch was far

²⁰ Three issues were unavailable.

²¹ While devising the methodology for this research other comparable studies were evaluated, notably a project led by Jon Lawrence called *Electing John Bull: The changing face of British Elections 1895-1935* <http://ahds.ac.uk/catalogue/collection.htm?uri=hist-5078-1>

²² The bi-weekly experiment started on 2 July 1855 and by 2 August 1855 production returned to a weekly print run.

from constant.²³ While Fig. 19 is based upon the raw data of column inches a further graph, Fig. 20 was drawn in which the data was converted from column inches into approximate number of words.²⁴ The basic trend of a steady expansion of reported oratory which peaked in 1850 is evident in both the raw and the adjusted data. The Crimean War had a significant impact on the levels of reported oratory. During 1855 the *Bradford Observer* devoted page seven (traditionally the page devoted to reporting Bradford meetings and lectures) to publishing lengthy reports from the Crimean front line. This practice of war reporting explains the dip in reported oratory apparent in Fig. 19. Quite early into my research it became evident that political oratory and itinerant lecturing operated in a similar manner in both industrial Yorkshire and the industrial North East. As the case studies in chapter two illustrate, there were many similarities in both regions for how itinerant tours were conducted - indeed often the same lecturers itinerated both areas.²⁵ For these reasons coupled with the significant investment of time demanded by a detailed empirical newspaper survey, a comparable study of a North East newspaper was not undertaken. I do not anticipate that a similar study of a paper such as the *Newcastle Courant* would generate substantially different results.

²³ For example, the average number of words per column inch in 1835 was 103 words; 1840, 75 words; 1845, 89 words; 1850, 89 words; 1855, 87 words and 1860, 86 words.

²⁴ This was accomplished by multiplying the respective column inch totals with the average number of words-per-column inch given in the footnote above.

²⁵ For example, G. J. Harney and Septimus Davis served as regional agents in both Yorkshire and the North East.

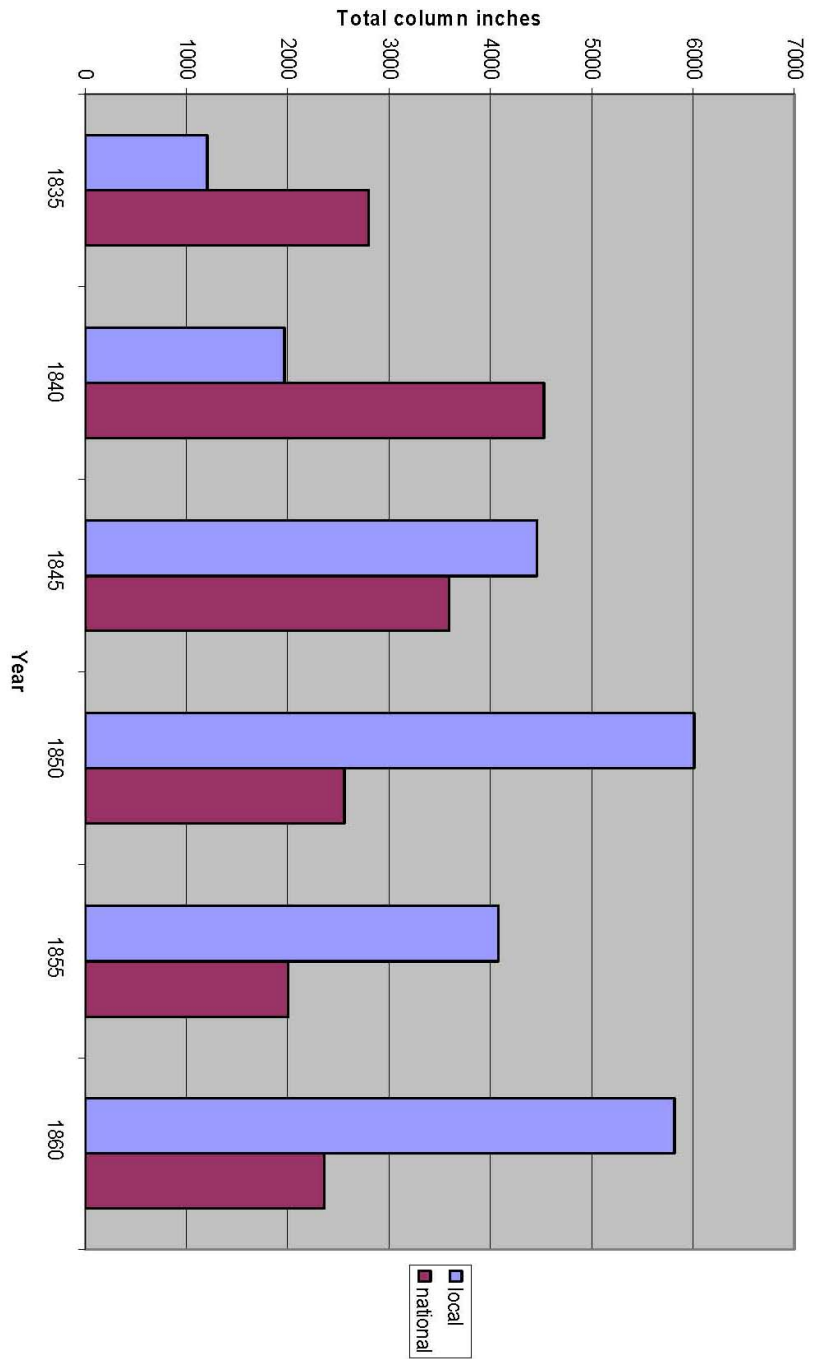


Fig. 18 National and local oratory reported in the Bradford Observer, 1835-1860

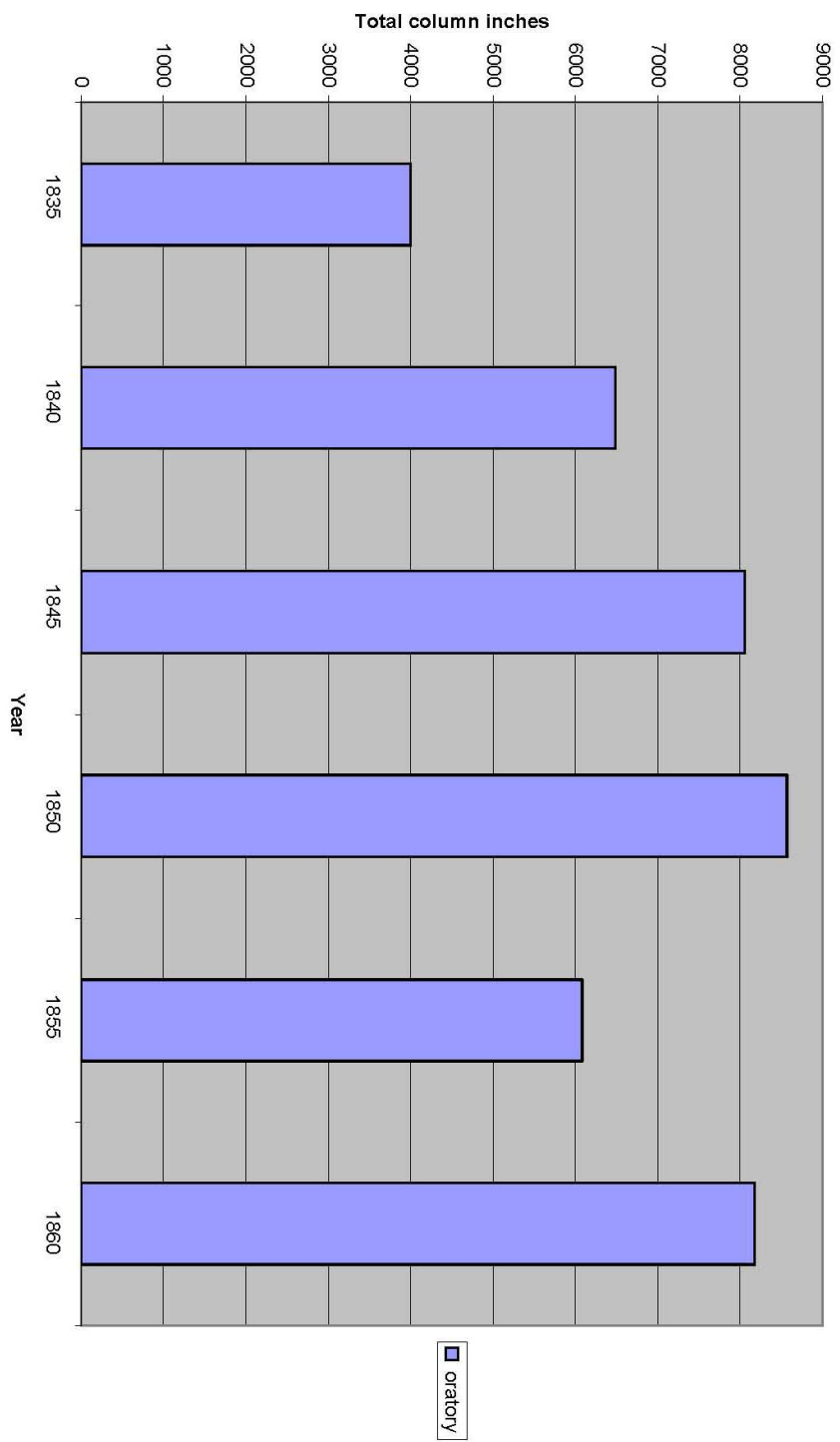


Fig. 19 Growth of reported oratory in the Bradford Observer, 1835-1860 (column inches)

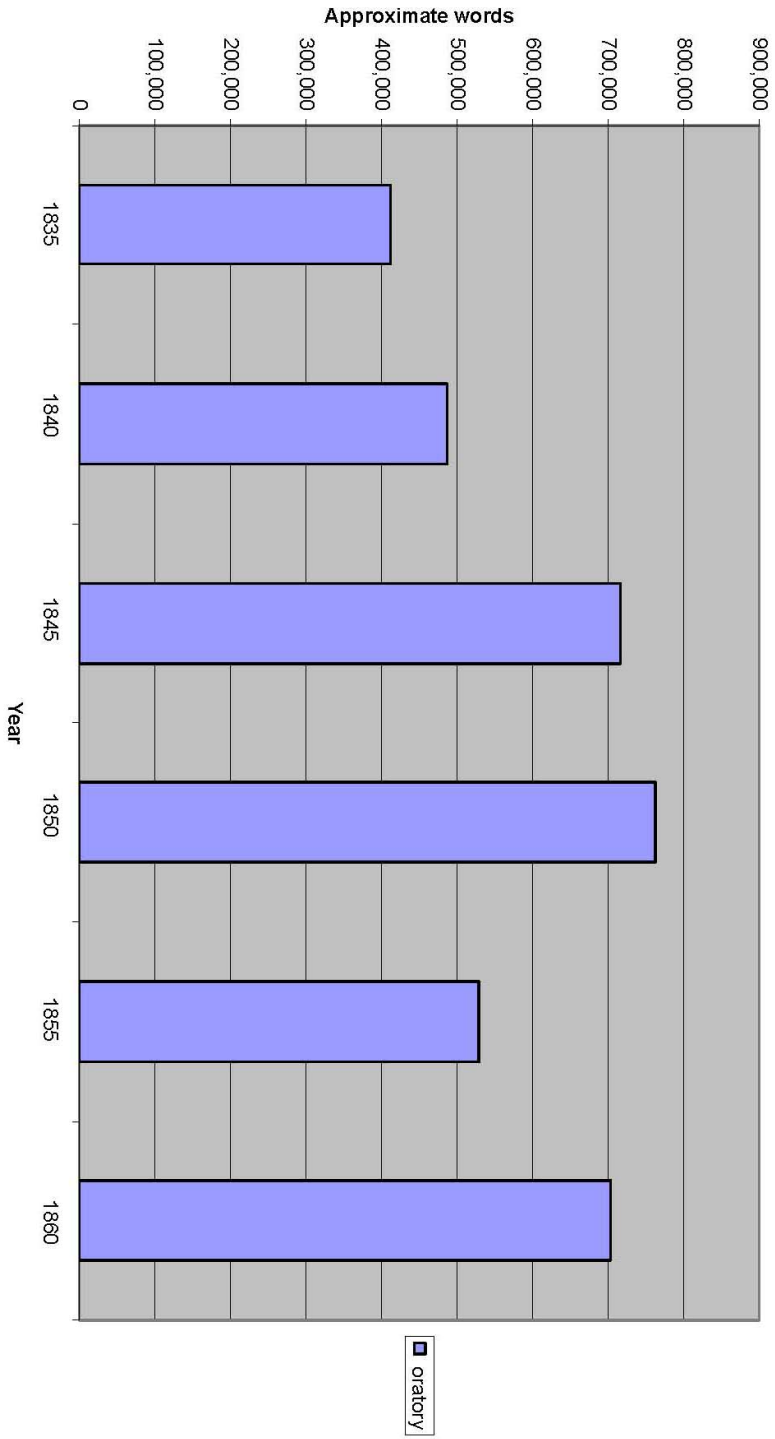


Fig. 20 Growth of reported oratory in the Bradford Observer, 1835-1860 (approximate words)

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Ladies Cabinet.
Leeds Intelligencer.
Leeds Mercury.
Liverpool Mercury.
Livesey's Moral Reformer
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Manchester Times.
Manchester Examiner.
Morning Chronicle.
National Reformer.
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